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Field of Omens
A Study in Inductive Divination

Geoffrey Cornelius

Corrected draft

A dissertation submitted to the University of Kent in accordance with the requirements of the
degree of Ph.D. in the Faculty of Humanities.
October 2009

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Author's Declaration

I declare that the work in this dissertation was carried out in accordance with the regulations of the University of Kent. The work is original, except where indicated by special reference in the text, and no part of the dissertation has been submitted for any other academic award. Any views expressed in the dissertation are those of the author.

SIGNED: 

DATE: 7th Oct 2009

Abstract

Despite its ubiquitous character and its significance, divination has received scant attention, especially in its 'inductive' form where inferences are drawn from omens, contingencies, and randomly-arranged objects. In contrast to a universal religious sentiment, divination's epistemological claim to truth founded in such inconsequential methods is almost impossible for modern educated opinion to countenance. This dilemma is addressed through Kant, in whose philosophy the divide between the archaic possibility and the modern impossibility of divination is revealed.

This thesis interprets anthropological insights into the participatory consciousness of 'primitive mentality', posited by Lévy-Bruhl. This suggests a *divinatory analytic* - definitions of typical experiences within divination, facilitating a description of its various acts and interpretations. Some elements are unfamiliar, especially the *chicane*, defined as an intentional sleight inducing changes in physical, social and spiritual well-being. This characterises shamans and witch-doctors worldwide, and is suggested to be determinative for divination. Extending the analysis to classical Greece we identify the double-consciousness of divinatory intelligence in the hermeneutic poles of *theōros*, pilgrim and enquirer, and *hermeios*, priest and diviner.

Reports across cultures, together with theories of participants and critics, develop the model, while Socratic divination reveals a teleological dimension placing prophecy and divination in a common spectrum. The theological challenge from Judeo-Christianity precipitates a crisis of ultimacy, the final outcome of which is far from decided; yet in parallel, medieval scholasticism offers hermeneutic analyses that illuminate essential features within ordinary divinatory experience. The resulting analytic is applied to judicial astrology, the leading divinatory form in Western culture. Astrology's sophisticated divinatory allegoric is indicated, together with issues raised by its Stoic legacy as a science of fate.

The study concludes with the post-Kantian dilemma of psychological and parapsychological interpretations, and poses – but does not answer – the question of whether these may carry divination into post-modernity.

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Colleagues, practitioners and scholars and both combined, have contributed extensively to my studies. I should mention my friends at the Company of Astrologers, London; in particular, Graeme Tobyn for his assistance both in traditional astrology and in obscure details from Latin; likewise Vernon Wells, who apart from his gifts of symbolism, has given valuable insight into the concept of the *daimon*. For his experience and perception in the spirit-like nature of divination, I thank Chris Odle. For his breadth of research and unstinting scholarly encouragement I thank Kirk Little, who has long recognised the significance for astrology of the questions raised here.

I acknowledge the support given by two bodies to the cause of the academic study of astrology. The work of the Sophia Trust and its generous benefactress has been crucial for studies in this area at the University of Kent, and has therefore directly facilitated this present thesis. In addition, the support of the Urania Trust has been a vital component in the further development of this work, as it now grows beyond its incarnation at Kent. A special mention should be made of the vision of Lindsay Radermacher in helping to further these initiatives.

Many others, not mentioned above, have helped me with their insight and intellectual generosity. I conclude by thanking my partner and long-term colleague in these studies, Maggie Hyde, for sharing with me her ideas and her deep symbolic insight. Her criticisms have saved me from many errors, and her help has been unstinting.

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Introduction

Introduction

The Impossibility of Certain Studies

It is appropriate to open this study with an admission of *necessary ignorance*. That is not to suggest there is nothing to be said, and in the pages that follow I have a good many things to say on the topic of inductive divination. Rather, the admission is an indication that there is an essential component of the matter under discussion that of its nature remains obscure, and probably unknowable.

I return to this question below, but first we need to be clear about the subject matter under consideration. By divination is meant communication with a spirit-like intelligence of reality, unnamed or named, whether as God or gods, spirit or spirits, or the ancestors; an intelligence known as other to our here-and-now ordinary perception. *Inductive divination* refers to the communication of this spirit-like intelligence through the human art of interpretation.¹ This includes inference by the interpreting of signs and omens, and is necessarily an art of metaphoric interpretation. In this category are such diverse techniques as *extispicy* (entrails-divination), augury, omen-reading, *sortes* (the casting of lots), astrology, reading tea-leaves, and laying out Tarot cards. I therefore adopt as a first approximation to the material the classical distinction of 'artificial divination' as distinguished from 'natural divination'; this latter covers all forms that imply direct unmediated

¹ In this study I employ the single word 'divination' to refer to 'inductive divination' unless the context makes it obvious otherwise. The concept of inductive divination is not without obscurity; some authorities use the inverse term 'deductive' to mean the very same thing - e.g. Bottéro (1992). The concept is not favoured in modern philosophical usage; it indicates an interpretation from concrete particulars (e.g. the marks on a liver) back to an abstract principle (e.g. the will of a god), where deduction, characteristic of science, is supposed to run from the abstract principle to infer or predict the worldly example. The term has become well-established in discussions about divination, so it is appropriate to use it provided it is not understood to refer to a strictly defined logical operation.

communication with spirit-agency or the exercise of a supernatural faculty, as in direct vision, whether awake or in dream, spirit-possession, and manifestations of clairvoyance where these do not involve symbolic interpretation.

As will be seen in this study, natural divination overlaps with artificial forms at one end of a spectrum of inductive practices, so that a hard-and-fast distinction becomes misleading. An example of overlap is in prophecy on the Old Testament model which is often thought of as purely 'natural' and without human art, yet as J. R. Porter has shown, both modes are commonly involved, and I have relied on his work at this point.² Although the principal concern in this current study is inductive divination, its phenomena continually overlap with the 'inspired' mode, which I will argue is actually integral with it. Nevertheless, despite all ambiguities, this ancient demarcation remains useful as a starting point and does point to recognisable and distinct features of practice.

The Inexplicability of the Unknowable

I have already announced a necessary ignorance and declared part of the matter to be unknowable. Whatever it is, however, is experienced and talked about, so it is not wholly unknown. Wherever it is experienced it is given an explanation, but many of these explanations seem inconsistent or vague, certainly when subjected to any degree of critical thinking, but perhaps they are not meant to be 'explanations' at all, but means of allowing the experience to be. However not-explained, the unknowable appears under many guises, ontologically prior and given for various objects and concepts, yet quite identifiable and distinct across cultures, primitive or sophisticated. Introducing terminology that will be more obvious as the study proceeds, one way of theorising these many guises - but only one way - is their relation to what Lévy-Bruhl termed the 'affective category of the supernatural.'³

² See Chapter 8.

³ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) p.169. This concerns 'an experience that has at the same time its own

Chinese philosophical thought, which on its Confucian side discourages speculation about the supernatural, recognises that the operation of the *I Ching* oracle, its major tradition of inductive divination, is *shên*, spirit-like.⁴ This is not an obscurity about facts and information, but is recognised as a matter of ontological priority. Moving across different cultures, this unknowability belongs to what I believe (but cannot know) must have been the Mysteries for the ancient Greeks; and in quite different vein, it bears upon what the medieval scholastics understood as Revelation. John Duns Scotus, who features further in this study, speaks for a long tradition of Patristic and scholastic interpretation when he refutes the view of the philosophers, that is, the Aristotelians, that 'there is nothing that we cannot know by means of our natural powers.'⁵ There are certain things that elude those powers, and these are given to us in prophecy and revelation. Duns Scotus discusses the distinction between two possibilities of supernatural revealing. In the first category this may show us certain things which should also be affirmed through our natural reason; this includes truths of Christian doctrine as well as scientific knowledge. In the second category we may be supernaturally shown supernatural knowledge, such as the mystery of the Trinity. This properly is called 'revelation';⁶ men imperfectly express this in doctrine. Duns Scotus does not make the observation, but we readily see that

characteristics, of which the most essential is the feeling of contact with the world of invisible beings, of the supernatural: a contact that is always accompanied by an emotion which primitive men do not mistake.'

⁴ *Shên* (spirit, spirit-like, numinous) is difficult to translate and carries ambiguous connotations, perhaps from archaic thought, of spirit-beings or daimons. For the later philosophical tradition and the classic text itself (*Ta Chuan* 'Commentary on the Appended Phrases' I X.4) the word appears to indicate an impersonal mysterious working that is 'numinous' (see discussion in *I Ching*, Lynn transl. esp. p.18). A probable comparison of this numinosity with Lévy-Bruhl's 'affective category of the supernatural' comes into view. In the relevant subcommentary text of Han Kangbo (Lynn transl. p.53) there is an exact expression of the *ontological priority* of the spirit-like function of both *shên* and *i* (change) showing their unknowability: 'The numinous as such is something not to be plumbed in terms of yin and yang, and change as such is something that one can only keep up with in terms of change, and neither can be clarified by reference to particular places or to particular substances.' Nevertheless this numinosity allows yin, yang and Tao itself to be known through its workings, which allows us to investigate and understand things.

⁵ Cross (1999) p.11.

⁶ Micklem (1953) pp.39-40. This is the first question in the Prologue to Scotus' *Opus Oxoniense*.

most practical divination is conceived in the first of these categories.⁷ As to its mode, Duns Scotus admits to doubt as to whether the original revelation of Christian truth was given by inner voice, audible voice or by 'signs' for those who had eyes to see.⁸

These greatly different expressions of unknowability should not be reduced to any single theme, for there are important ways in which they differ, and each needs to be approached in its own register. However, taken together they expose the same root-question raised by divination in its various forms, which is its engagement with an ontologically prior source that is inexplicable but experienced by us. This I hope clarifies my opening remark about 'necessary ignorance', and sets the scene for Kant's discussion on the limits of our thinking in this and related areas.

Insistence on necessary ignorance and a definition of divination that depends on the ontological otherness of the spiritual, the spirit-like, or the divine, brings up clearly the *impossibility* of a study of this nature in terms of modern scholarship. Until the European Enlightenment, the knowing of divination depended upon a defining ontological relation of human-being, along the lines already described. The thought of the enlightenment removed the *a priori* ontological necessity of that relation, and with it the ground of divination. Survivals of divination within contemporary culture are a thinking-against the prevailing tendency of modern thought, which is why the study of divination 'in-and-for-itself' remains unthinkable within the academy.

The subject of divination is of course found in learned works, and its beliefs and practices come into discussion in various of the humanities. What is entailed in

⁷ From my experience of divination and diviners, I believe that there is a natural movement between these categories, so that divination is drawn towards revelation, and revelation expresses itself in worldly divination. This underlies the use of the Four Senses hermeneutic as a hermeneutic of divination, suggested in Chapter 9.

⁸ Micklem (1953) pp.71-2.

my assertion concerning unthinkability is that divination, like magic and occultism, is never academically studied 'in-and-for-itself'. For-itself suggests identifying with similar concerns and goals to those of believers and practitioners. This is an impassable barrier for unacceptable disciplines, where the academic culture of its day exercises its discretion to exclude the study for-itself of whatever is perceived to be degraded, uncritically dogmatic, or simply wrong.

Practitioners of divination consider that their practices are truthful; that is, they have validity and efficacy. On such questions, the academy must demur. It demurs in similar questions of a spiritual nature, although where the requirement of academic objectivity is observed then fruitful accommodations are made, as in the study of religion. In the case of divination, and for a mixture of historical and cultural reasons, the academy has for long reacted strongly, to the point of making compromise difficult.

Primary Scholarship

There is a fine distinction between a study 'in-and-for-itself' and a study 'in its own right'. An unacceptable discipline, such as alchemy or magic, may still be studied 'in its own right' provided the final question of its validity is put to one side or at best left open. That is a compromise that believers and practitioners have to make. It also means not seeking to reduce the discipline to being something else, which would make it a subset of some other study; that is a compromise the academy has to make. Culturally acceptable practices that fall short of scientific and rationalistic credibility, such as Theology and much of psychotherapy, will be granted this status; this allows them to be the subject of *primary scholarship*.⁹ Primary scholarship means getting right inside a subject and understanding its nature from within, much as would be expected for someone to study a culture. This

⁹ Cornelius (2004): an initial and only partially successful attempt to define primary scholarship in astrology.

involves some capacity for the suspension of outsider prejudice, together with a genuine common feeling or participation in the culture and practices concerned; this attitude has been favoured in recent decades by some sociologists and anthropologists, in the name of ethnomethodology. This is a dangerous exercise, since it is only a short step from getting inside a subject to validating it, equivalent to the anthropologist's 'going native'. The academy may be expected to react unfavourably whenever primary scholarship crosses this line.¹⁰ However, the development of academic studies in Western esotericism shows the possibility of maintaining an emic-etic (insider-outsider) dialectic in an area of close relevance to divination.¹¹ Similarly, the work that has been done in recent times to bring astrology into the academic fold shows that even in this disreputable territory a compromise is feasible.¹²

It is a purpose of this thesis to advance the study of divination, and further to indicate a pathway into this terrain that has not to the best of my knowledge been explored. Divination has been embedded so deeply in the exclusion zone that until quite recently it has only rarely been given primary status and studied in its own right. This at first seems difficult to explain; divination is a culturally significant

¹⁰ An eminent academic who, although not a practitioner of divination, has knowledge of and an empathy with divination in non-Western cultures, informs me of established anthropologists in the U.S. who seriously practice divination for themselves; but despite ethnomethodology, there is not one who would feel free to bring their *own* positive divinatory field-experience directly into play in their published academic studies. They therefore maintain the boundary demarcating 'for-itself' scholarship; their 'in-its-own-right' approach is still capable of being primary scholarship. Where the researcher's personal experience of divination is directly introduced it is allowable if treated from the standpoint of the sceptic, as with Evans-Pritchard (Chapter 2).

¹¹ Hanegraaf (1999) pp.42-3 calls for '(self-) critical dialectics of emic material and etic interpretation... for an empirical study of esotericism which wishes to go beyond mere description'.

¹² Amongst several contemporary or recent initiatives are the MA programme in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology started at Bath Spa University College and now continued at Lampeter; and the MA programme in The Cultural Study of Cosmology and Divination briefly but successfully run at the University of Kent. In the US, Kepler College (WA) has managed to give the serious study of astrology an academic location. Alison Bird (2006) ch.10 gives a comprehensive discussion of studies in astrology at university level.

pursuit on several counts. It is *ubiquitous*: there never has been a culture without it.¹³ It is *not trivial* since it has always been taken seriously by its adherents, on occasion having a profound influence on actors and events; and it *lays claim to knowledge*. As with many human pursuits there are problems of definition at its boundaries, but the core of its practice is *recognisable and distinct*,¹⁴ with *sustained and identifiable traditions* of practice.¹⁵ It is of *contemporary relevance* since it is widespread in modern culture, in both trivial and non-trivial forms, and its practice is found amongst the uneducated and educated alike.¹⁶ Yet within the academy the usual line on divination is not to study it but simply to declare it invalid.¹⁷ Even where it sits up and begs for attention, as in ethnography and cultural-historical studies, its invalidity is generally taken for granted as self-evident, requiring no further debate.¹⁸

The absence of primacy shows in a number of different ways. It seems fair to say that there is *no* established academic philosopher who seriously raises as a primary epistemological question the possibility of truth-telling through practical inductive divination - astrology, Tarot cards, tea leaves and the like. The word 'divination' occasionally emerges as a vague intuitive faculty, but never in a way that would relate it to inductive divination. It is simply not a concern, and divination is

¹³ Vernant (1991) p.303.

¹⁴ Johnston (2008) p.28 describes divination as 'an ontologically unified category (however blurry some of its exterior borders may be)'.

¹⁵ This is especially apparent with both Western and Indian astrology with a consistent core of philosophy and practice sustained for two millennia (Chapter 10).

¹⁶ Johnston (2008) p.1; see also Shumaker (1972) p.xv.

¹⁷ Lienhardt (1961) is typical of an earlier generation of anthropologists in his explicit denial of validity to divination; see for e.g. p.69 on humiliating a Dinka diviner: 'When he divined for me I deliberately misled him...'

¹⁸ The implicit invalidation is just as inhibiting to scholarship as open rejection; Guinan (2002) is a sympathetic commentator on Mesopotamian omen-reading and offers a thoughtful 'excursus on divinatory thinking', but does not see beyond the philosophical limitation in her presuppositions, thereby narrowing not just the issue of validation but more significantly the scope of her interpretation. See for e.g. p.19 'One would expect the inevitable accumulation of false predictions to undermine the process'.

not seen to impinge on philosophy. Its study in any primary sense is almost completely non-existent.¹⁹

Just as revealing is the absence of interest in religious studies, a field that in principle ought to have much to gain from, and offer to, the study of divination. Preliminary research in 2003 into academic interest in divination yielded the remarkable result that amongst 680 UK religious studies academics working in 49 departments of Religious Studies or Theology in Higher Education, *none* had research interests in the area of divination, apart from the obvious attention to Old Testament prophecy. In addition to the expected concentration on Christianity and comparative studies in the major world religions the academics concern themselves with a considerable range of specific topics in the wider field of religious studies, from Tantra, transpersonal psychology, goddess traditions, medical ethics, magic, exorcism, death and dying, parapsychology, and so on. Despite this treasure-trove, amongst our 680 academics there is not a single mention of, or approximation to, 'divination'.²⁰

The reduction of divination as a subset of magic has been, and still is, common; Philip Peek notes that 'European and American scholarship has granted divination only marginal status in human affairs and presumed it to be magical in nature'.²¹ Sarah Iles Johnston details the modern history of divination studies and suggests that for a new generation of post-colonial researchers who sought to revolutionise anthropology from the 1960's on, the study of magic and its theories

¹⁹ Guinan (2002) p.18 observes that '...divination is difficult to deal with theoretically. The few isolated studies that have pursued broad theoretical approaches to divination never gave birth to the same kind of ongoing scholarly discourse which has developed over the course of the last century to make the study of cultural categories such as religion, magic, myth so rich and constructive'.

²⁰ Research undertaken from Smith (2003) *AUDTRS Handbook 2003*: this gives 'the research and teaching interests' declared by the academics. Private communication from Maureen Ritchie (2003).

²¹ Peek (1991) p.5.

was more compelling than the study of divination. Theories of divination remained secondary to descriptions of the 'specifics of particular peoples' systems' of divination.²² Johnston's argument may be extended by the observation that although divination and magic may be seen to share a common foundation,²³ the conscious articulation of desire in a self-possessed act of magical willing, perhaps involving ritual, makes it distinctly out of the ordinary. It is something that 'other people' do, strange folk in different cultures, or weird sects in our own culture. It is inherently less common, more morally questionable, and more aberrant both in modern and in some traditional cultures than is the spontaneous reading of an omen or the glance at a horoscope forecast. Magic carries a different mood to the receptive quality of divination, and the numbers of people admitting that they 'do magic' is likely to be a fraction of those who may heed an omen, a symbolism, or a meaningful coincidence. Magic is therefore a dramatic and well-defined manifestation of an alternative reality that has survived the enlightenment and European colonisation. Divination by contrast seems diffused and multi-faceted, a 'tasteless cup';²⁴ and by virtue of its pervasive manifestation in our own popular culture, inconsequential and banal.

There was amongst 19th and early 20th century scholars a prevalent attitude that divination belongs to a primitive cultural stage, which appearing in a modern setting is a sign of regression and feeble intellect. This view was reinforced by the initial approach adopted by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, the single most significant influence on the anthropological dimension of divination scholarship and still a primary source of insight. He talked of 'primitive mentality' and initially located the primitive's

²² Johnston (2008) p.26; history of modern studies pp. 17-27. See also the Introduction to Johnston and Struck eds.(2005).

²³ Guinan (2002) p.18. 'Magic and divination operate from the same semantic foundation... What divination reveals, magic can resolve.' I regard this formula as oversimplifying the relationship of the domains of magic, ritual and divination. Magic and ritual are more implicated in divination than this suggests, and divination in its tropological dimension *resolves*. The sharing by magic and divination of a common metaphysical and semantic foundation is not in doubt, however.

²⁴ Morrison (1981) p.87, on Graeco-Roman divination.

participation mystique, of which divination is an expression, as indicative of a pre-logical state of mind. This characterisation needs to be remodelled in order to trace *participation* in Greece and Rome, where divination was just as rife as amongst the primitives. However, this was not the assumption of classical scholarship in the first half of the 20th century. It was not until the publication of E. R. Dodds' influential *The Greeks and the Irrational* in 1951 that the ideal of Greek culture as impeccably rational was seriously shaken. Although Dodds touches only briefly on inductive divination, he succeeds in bringing to the foreground the irrational 'unknowable' which, I suggest, is a necessary precondition for there to be divination at all. It is therefore not surprising that a further step in re-evaluating divination should come from classical scholarship rather than anthropology.

Vernant on Divinatory Intelligence

A new direction in divinatory studies was embodied in the work of Jean-Pierre Vernant and his collaborators, in *Divination et Rationalité* (1974).²⁵ Vernant's most important contribution develops from an eminently simple pair of questions:

what, on the one hand, can be implied about the nature of the intellectual operations that take place during the stages of an oracular consultation; what defines the logic of the system that is activated by the seer in order to decipher the unseen and answer its consultants' requests?...On the other hand, what position and function does a particular society assign to oracular knowledge?²⁶

The second question posed by Vernant is essential in that social norms are not finally separate from the intellectual act of any diviner. Vernant however

²⁵ Struck (2005) p.8 regards this work as making 'the most important advances' in the study of divination after the time of Dodds' *The Greeks and the Irrational* (1951).

²⁶ Vernant (1991) p.303.

acknowledges that functionalist anthropology is not able to offer a full account without recognising the significance of the first question, bearing on what he calls 'the divinatory intelligence'. This is an approach that had been largely neglected, and in reading an older generation of scholars one gains the impression that such an inquiry had been scarcely thinkable. By bringing divinatory intelligence into the equation Vernant sounds the note that liberates scholarship, and especially anthropology, from its traditional structural-functionalist concerns.²⁷

The first of Vernant's questions is primary in importance, and without it no secure conclusions concerning divination within a social context are likely to be reached. This is an important corrective to structural-functionalist interpretations of divination that have been prevalent in anthropology; it represents a treatment of the question of divination in its own right, relatively independently (although taking account) of a consideration of the social representations and forms in which it is modulated, negotiated and expressed.²⁸

The duality of approach that attends the attempt to describe divination, expressed by Vernant, is rooted in the nature of divination itself. Its most obvious manifestation is the separation of divinatory thinking from dialectical and discursive reasoning. Vernant observes that although the oracles are consulted for important communal matters, the final decision depends on the matter being argued to a conclusion in the public arena:

Decision making thus relies on verbal procedures of discussion that derive from a rationality that could be called rhetorical or dialectical;

²⁷ Vernant (1991) p.304. Johnston (2008) p.27 states that scholars have continued to respond to his call to study the cultural function of oracles in the light of the 'divinatory intelligence'.

²⁸ Despite the injunction of the 'two fundamental questions' posed at the start, Vernant appears more comfortable with a sociological focus: 'the fundamental question that emerges from an investigation, like ours, into divinatory practice is finally one of the relations between Knowledges and Powers in "traditional" ancient or archaic societies'. Vernant (1991) p.308.

it is based on a logic of persuasive argument, wholly alien in its principles and spirit to the divinatory mentality.²⁹

Vernant stresses the progressive ascendancy of democratic and discursive reasoning over divinatory authority. While agreeing on the distinction of the two modes of reasoning, I see them as *reciprocal* in divination, with discursive reasoning as a function of *theōros*, the one seeking from the oracle. In terms of the analysis advanced here, Vernant's description of divination is focused on the intellectual operation of *hermeios*, the divinatory interpreter, rather than allowing that divinatory intelligence operates in a double-consciousness crossing between both modes of reasoning. The dialogical pairing of *theōros-hermeios* is discussed in Chapter 4. The related concepts of double-consciousness, the chicane, and the *theōros-hermeios*, are central to the analytical model of divination developed here, and represent a significant development with respect to previous thinking on divination.

The Scope of the Study

Divination takes on the forms of the culture in which it is found, and has a distinctive appearance in each culture. On the other hand, there are clear consistencies between divinatory forms across cultures, and the phenomena of divination raise similar problems of interpretation wherever they appear. It is these similarities that I seek to exemplify. The strength of this approach is that, if successful, it may establish distinctive features of a significant facet of human being. I cannot claim originality in such a goal; others have already seen the potential in divination to yield fundamental insight into human nature.³⁰ The potential weakness of the approach I have adopted, like all syncretic endeavours, is that it risks not

²⁹ Vernant (1991) p.306.

³⁰ Jean Bottéro (1992) sees in Mesopotamian divination the earliest moves to an ordering principle and the origins of science (p.5.); Peter Struck (2005 p.7) suggests that divination 'raises, with unique efficiency, consideration of what might be called certain "core operations" of human intellect.'

adequately exploring the historical context of the reports of divination, and of their related divinatory theories.

Having studied in some detail the reports both of historical and contemporary divination, and being an astrologer and diviner, I long ago concluded that significant aspects of divination, of diviners, and of enquirers, are inadequately interpreted where there is little insider experience of the practices involved. Specialists in each of the several areas I move across and leave behind will have to judge for themselves what service this approach, and the comparisons it suggests, might offer to their own studies.

Employing my own insider experience as a guide, the focus of this study may therefore be termed the 'praxis' of divination - that is, its *practice* in so far as it is moderated by and illuminated by *theories of that practice* offered by practitioners and by reliable observers. For reasons already briefly outlined, and made clearer in the study, elements of 'natural' divination are also fully at work in all inductive ('artificial') divination, hence theories of oracular inspiration are equally relevant for all divinatory practice, and are part of the subject matter of this study. The starting point is necessarily practice, but in agreement with Vernant, I have no wish to offer a catalogue of practices, nor do I offer views of divination that are far distant from its practice. The important exception is provided by two counter-hermeneutics of divination, the explicit attack by Cicero, and the implicit and more radical deconstruction by Kant. I treat these opponents of divination in some depth precisely because their critiques reveal the foundations of the theories and the practices that they question.

The pursuing in tandem of theory and practice has dictated both the course of my studies and the result in this text, since I have chosen as my starting-point

anthropological insights from Lévy-Bruhl and Evans-Pritchard to the Tedlocks and Peek. This pathway of thought provides one of the cardinal points of entry to the whole field. Their insights in turn depend on the divinations and the vision of native practitioners such as the sangoma Sikhumbana, whose understanding is a model of praxis.³¹ Beyond this starting-point there is a vast range of material to consider, well beyond the scope of what has been attempted here; in particular, the classical Chinese tradition of inductive divination in the *I Ching* represents the union of divination and philosophy, and is arguably the highest cultural achievement of divination ever attained. Limits of my own scholarship preclude me from taking on this subject matter here, but it certainly demands future treatment in this field of studies.

I must also make a similar admission of omission with respect to major figures in our own western tradition. Most important of all in the later Platonic tradition is Iamblichus, who offers an ontological foundation for all divination. The study of Iamblichus goes somewhat beyond my current remit, however, to the extent that his concern is with theurgic ritual rather than with the uses of divination that he would regard as inferior, which would generally include the inductive forms.³²

The question arises as to why it is worth pursuing a 'hermeneutic' of divination, as distinct from any other general philosophical inquiry. At many points in the discussion, it would be a fine point to distinguish between a hermeneutic approach and a *phenomenology* of divination - the adequate description of the phenomena actually encountered in its practice. Likewise, there is a considerable overlap with a possible *epistemology*, where we ask about the field of knowledge claimed or hoped for in the practice of divination - does it have objects of

³¹ Chapter 2: section 'The Cognitive Continuum'.

³² The reader is alerted to the thesis of Crystal Addey, completed 2009: 'Oracles of the Gods: the Role of Theurgy and Divination in the Philosophy of Porphyry and Iamblichus' (University of Bristol).

knowledge, and how are those objects structured? If the analysis attempted here bears fruit, then its terms are likely to lend themselves to further inquiry under the banners of both epistemology and phenomenology. At the further reaches of the current project, we uncover significant presuppositions that challenge the conception of reality itself and therefore belong in the remit of *theology* and *metaphysics*, and these concerns have historically never been far from the surface of the relatively limited discourse that has taken place in our subject area.

There are two good arguments in favour of the hermeneutic approach. The first is that despite the overlapping nature of modes of philosophic method, we return again and again in the study of divination to the central question of *interpretation*. Although, as always with attempts at categorisation, there are significant instances that do not fall readily within a chosen category, nevertheless when we consider 'divination' as a general class of event, it is characterised by instances of interpretation. This interpretation generally appears to be, or is understood to be, of a quite particular type, involving what even at first glance appears to be a distinctive intellectual process. It is in this distinctive process that meaning - or at the least 'meaningfulness' - is declared. This is why Vernant's original question is such an apt starting point for contemporary scholarship. 'Divinatory intelligence' places us firmly in the concern of modes or orientations of divinatory interpretation. In my view it is scarcely feasible to open up the presuppositions involved, and the further epistemological and metaphysical problematics that then come into view, without first clarifying the question of divination as interpretation. From a hermeneutic standpoint, rather than trying to weigh and balance competing philosophic claims about divination from the outside, we can reverse the process to interrogate the divinatory intelligence in the light of the theories diviners, and their critics and commentators, put forward in explanation of those practices. As already mentioned, the theories most practitioners put forward as metaphysical or epistemological justification for their practice rarely in fact adequately match their practice, which is a point I hope to establish in the course of the study; on the other hand those theories are part of the forestructure (the *presentiment*) of the act itself, both justifying and

shaping the course within which interpretation must flow. The clash of theories also shows up the points of most pressure for divinatory interpretation.

The second argument in favour of hermeneutic analysis is both theoretical and practical. As I hope to show, there is a marked teleological dimension in divination. Whether this is properly to be stated of all divination is problematic, but in terms of its cultural impact, the *telos* of divination is prominent in all sophisticated premodern cultures. That goal is in the last analysis a communion with the source of the divination, or a taking up into the divine. This is certainly the thrust of the main theories of divination that come from antiquity and into our European tradition, whether Platonic, neo-Platonic or Stoic, and it is implicit in the Aristotelian cosmology underpinning astrology. There is a model that springs from the same spiritual soil as divination, with the same ontological foundation, in the medieval *Four Senses of Interpretation*. This was originally a Christian hermeneutic for the interpretation of scripture, developed to its perfection by around 1200, but drawing on the inspiration of the Church Fathers and earlier still the Judaic tradition of Biblical interpretation.

The Overall Structure of the Work

It remains to give an overview of the way the text is organised, and the development of its major themes. The change in understanding brought by the European enlightenment has profoundly transformed our attitude to questions of the spiritual; yet in my view divination can only be properly understood from a pre-enlightenment perspective. Its insider-consciousness is still rooted in earlier spirit-philosophy, which is why it is quite difficult for a modern to 'think' divination without immediately coming into tension with our modern rationalistic and loosely scientific mode. This is less of an explicit problem for a non-intellectual, but the result is that there is very little thinking in modern divination beyond the simple and seemingly irrational requirements of its practice. Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*

reveals with clarity the rejection by modern European philosophy of all 'occult' and spirit-based philosophy. In this is exposed the deconstruction of the basis on which divination is possible, making obvious why divination is 'impossible' after Kant. Any scholar of divination working from inside the material - as a practitioner - will in my view never successfully convey the in-itself nature of divination unless this impasse is negotiated.

From the definition of the 'impossibility' major areas of divinatory experience are explored for the insights they might yield in a study of divination. The starting point is the provocative insight of Lévy-Bruhl on 'primitive mentality' and the *participation mystique*. The 'unique case' and divinatory 'address' are shown to be fundamental to the definition of inductive divination; by this is understood the one-off nature of the divinatory event, which is taken up by someone as meaningful *to them*. There is no general theory of the production of omens, only the single significant case, each and every time it occurs. Lévy-Bruhl's theory is not wholly satisfactory in describing many ordinary instances of divination, however, and especially simple binary oracles with a yes-no answer. This requires a further decisive step in theory, describing the *cognitive continuum* developed by Barbara Tedlock and exemplified in the wise analysis of a Zulu *sangoma*. Inductive divination is shown to move across a spectrum (spirits-head-bones) from extreme intuitive forms of trance possession, overlapping with natural divination but usually requiring interpretation, through mental associations without any technical manipulation, to systems of divination that manipulate objects and infer an answer from their arrangements. This is related to two modes of interpretation, *realised* and *speculative*, developed originally in the analysis of astrological interpretation.

There follows the analysis of a key interpretive principle of inductive divination in the *chicane*, quite literally the 'trick' that is played in primitive healing and divination, but also, it is argued, a dimension of the projective and teleological function of all divination. The *chicane* requires a mode of 'double-consciousness';

this argument is developed alongside an interpretation of Evans-Pritchard's classic study of Azande witchcraft and divination. Double-consciousness is the necessary understanding to bridge the divide created by Lévy-Bruhl and by Vernant in sharply polarising 'ordinary' and 'divinatory' realities, for sophisticated as well as primitive divination.

It now becomes possible to enter the material of divination from the distinct perspective of the classical imagination, allowing the exploration of a fundamental term of *theōros-hermeios*, usually personified in enquirer-diviner, yet also operative in the intellectual process of every diviner. Here is a classical expression of the same chicane double-consciousness already investigated in the anthropological discussions. The divinatory analysis so far developed is now applied to the supreme philosophical representative of divination in classical culture, Socrates.

Socrates gives clear evidence of the teleological nature of omens, and the exalted status of his divinations has an ubiquitous influence on Greek thinking about the subject. There are competing theories about divination, however, and the Stoic and neo-Platonic approaches are explored in two chapters in Part Three. The Stoic material is structured around Cicero's critique of divination, which is in turn criticised here. The neo-Platonism of Plutarch introduces us fully to the daimonic interpretation of divination, yet at the same time exalting the teleological function of both the daimon and great oracles. Divination-theory reaches a high degree of sophistication here, and it is suggested that discussions in Plutarch are directly revealing for divination universally.

There follows a true crisis for divinatory practice and theory as understood in classical antiquity in the prophetic tradition of Judaism, and its passage into early Christianity. The early binary form of *Urim* and *Thummim* divination is discussed, with comparisons made to African divination; the theme of prophecy is taken up in so far as this directly bears on inductive divination. At the heart of this part of the

analysis is Duns Scotus' description of *intuitive* and *abstractive* cognition, which I suggest provides a further development for the *realised-speculative* pair in the cognitive continuum. Duns Scotus also allows us to develop the 'unique case of interpretation' through 'this-ness', often experienced by the diviner. Duns Scotus' thinking has had reverberations throughout European culture, and his metaphysics has influenced Heidegger.

The material is further developed through the medieval Christian *Four Senses* hermeneutic which, it is suggested, forms an ideal hermeneutic model for the study of divination. Of special importance is the distinction of a tropological or moral as well as an allegoric level; it is suggested that effective inductive divination operates tropologically as well as allegorically. The teleological end goal of divination lies with the anagoge, the 'mystical sense' in scripture, poetics and divination.

An outstanding question that remains to be addressed concerns the status of the most significant of all forms of divination in the west, namely astrology. This has a complex history which in major respects disguises the divinatory nature of this art. The astrology of judgments - 'judicial astrology' - is shown to be completely divinatory, despite its apparent objectivity, and the analysis of *realised* and *speculative* interpretation is applied.

The development of a hermeneutic of inductive divination now has to come back to the breaking-point of the scientific enlightenment, and the theories of depth psychology that have developed after it. Of great importance for divination is the work of the early psychical researchers, including Myers, and the depth psychologists, especially Flournoy and Jung; a consistent thread can be traced throughout their theories, up to the evolution of Jung's seminal but ambiguous concept of synchronicity. This concept has sprung from divination and is integral with divination.

We return to the question of the *telos* of divination post-enlightenment, and its *possibility*. Can it work with the model provided by the depth psychologists, or does it require to face the address from its earlier ontological root? Our answer to this depends on how, finally, we interpret divination.

Part One

The Ghost of Metaphysics

Chapter One

Kant, Spirit and Divination

The possibility of divination in our era is far removed from its possibility in culture prior to the European scientific enlightenment. The historical and cultural question of how this has come to be is not the concern of this chapter; our efforts are directed to showing *in what way* divination has been removed from us, for that determines our interpretation of divination.

In response to this discussion of possibilities and impossibilities it might be objected that divination remains as it always was. Fortune-tellers say much the same things; forms of divination come and go but the essence of its practice seems to go on unchanged. People were using a variety of devices to divine the unknown in ancient Athens and they still do in Tokyo and San Francisco. Something, however, has transformed almost beyond recognition, namely the *intellectual and spiritual terrain* in which acts of divination might be discussed, justified, or scorned. It is sometimes a matter of incomprehension or embarrassment for modern intellectuals that intelligent minds of an earlier age might take divination seriously.¹ This equally implies that the basis from which a modern practitioner understands his or her experience, the context in which this is interpreted, has changed.

The change for divination is just one stream in a powerful tide that leached the vitality from an earlier way of imagination, discrediting magic, alchemy and

¹ This more often emerges in the tone of discussion, rather than in an explicit observation. See however John North (1994) pp.195-6 on Abu Ma'sar's 'besetting sin' and Antony Grafton (1999) p.89 on Cardano's 'methodological incoherence.' See my Chapter 11 for these references. Socrates' acceptance of oracles causes commentators much difficulty, leading to contorted interpretations (noted by Reeve, 1989, p.23).

astrology, but also beginning to erode the authority of organised religion. The undermining of any possibility of a sympathetic interpretation of divination in-and-for-itself is therefore an aspect of the understanding of the European enlightenment of the 17th and 18th centuries. The new stance has moulded the educated attitude of our own age, negating by disregard any notion that divination might be worthy of primary study.

A variety of social, economic and political determinants may be traced in explanation of the change, but in sum the negation appears to depend less on formal proof or disproof than on a transformation of attitude to the supernatural and the spiritual. God may still be in the scheme of things, but has been removed from day-to-day involvement in his creation. There is a turning away from magical explanations for phenomena, and an increasing confidence in mankind's own rational powers of invention, encouraged by 'the triumph of the mechanical philosophy.'² Underpinning the development of the new attitude is a reorientation in the validation of thought itself, so that an objectivist mode that is at once empirical and analytic is given pride of place. This reorientation may be seen in the context of a renaissance debate that can be traced back to antiquity, but it becomes a defining component of the scientific revolution of the enlightenment. One of its primary tasks is to overthrow the authority and meaningfulness of symbols, relegating them to

² Keith Thomas (1978) p.769; but see also Tambiah (1990). This observation is pertinent to Kant's philosophy, which is to a significant degree moulded by his admiration for the scientific method of his day, epitomised in Newtonian physics. His attitude reflects a wider intellectual and spiritual movement. Discussing the decline of magic and divination in England, Thomas (pp.791-2) observes that 'the change which occurred in the seventeenth century was thus not so much technological as mental.' It involved 'the emergence of a new faith in the potentialities of human initiative.' Tambiah (pp.18-24) gives a useful summary of criticisms of the Kuhnian 'paradigm shift' interpretation proposed by Thomas; the fact remains that something quite remarkable and unprecedented happened in European culture such that, in terms of educated opinion, the *possibility* of a divinatory mode of symbolic interpretation becomes open to widespread derision by the time of Kant where it would be open to consideration at the time of Ficino. Astrology is an indicator of the changing intellectual climate; the social and political dimension of the decline of educated astrology in England in the latter part of the 17th century is extensively discussed in Curry (1989).

subjectivity and an epistemologically secondary status. Such relegation has a fundamental consequence for inductive divination which depends on the interpretation of symbolism by correspondences and analogy.³

Philosophy of the 17th and 18th centuries charts this cultural tide. Against the prevailing decline of supernatural revelation into irrelevance, especially outside Christianity, and with the undermining of the status of symbol, a mode of thought in which divination is feasible fades from view. Philosophers will have little interest in addressing popular superstitions and a left-over tradition of spirit-philosophy. Astrology, as always, is in a category all of its own, since it was not necessarily regarded as 'divination' on a par with lots, palmistry or similar practices. It is therefore not surprising that although astrology undoubtedly declined in status towards the end of the 17th century, the possibility of allowing both a divine and a natural causal dimension to the cosmos continued to exercise scientific and philosophical opinion. Unlike more explicitly magical practices, astrology could at the same time imbibe the new scientific and experimental attitude into its own understanding. Scientific reform within astrology was a viable option in this period,⁴ just as it still sometimes sought today.⁵

With the rising tide of mathematics and experimental science it is not surprising that amongst the new breed of scientists and university philosophers there

³ Brian Vickers observes that 'the occult discourse is essentially symbolic [...where] nature is significant not in itself but as a system of signs'.(Vickers ed. 1984 p.107) The rejection of this discourse, and therefore of argument by symbol, metaphor, and analogy, is a principal theme for philosophers of the enlightenment such as Locke (for discussion on Locke pp.110-115).

⁴ Curry (1999) p.57ff. The reformers were inspired by Francis Bacon's scientific empiricism and a scepticism with regard to universal generalisations: 'Bacon's explicit hope for an *astrologia sana*, a sane astrology, gave heart to the reformers... it also supplied them with a methodology.'(p.60).

⁵ Patrick Curry in Willis and Curry (2004) chapter 8 'Science and Astrology', noting the 'objectivist assumptions' - characteristic of scientific method but questionable for divination - that are smuggled into the discussions in modern astrology.(p.97) Phillipson (2000) gives extensive and fair-minded coverage of the scientific debate in astrology.

is a disregard of spirit- and occult- philosophies.⁶ An important exception to this disregard is a monograph by Kant, prompted by the extraordinary reputation of the Swedish visionary, Swedenborg. This led Kant to tackle the problem of occult philosophy and spirit-knowledge head-on. His 1766 *Dreams of a spirit-seer, elucidated by dreams of metaphysics* (usually shortened to *Dreams*) is a landmark for our purposes, and forms the subject of this chapter. Kant's text brings into sharp relief the intellectual revolution bound up with the rise of scientific method, and through an extensive philosophical analysis it deconstructs and disavows both spirit-philosophy and an initiatory occult philosophy founded upon it. This is considered to be one of Kant's lesser works, predating by a few years the formative period of the famous *Critiques*.⁷ It is however seminal, authoritatively delimiting the scope of rationalism with respect to both revelation and occultism; these are rendered unambiguously extrinsic to the concerns of science and philosophy.⁸ While *Dreams* is not concerned with the mode of inductive divination, the interpretation of omen-signs, its analysis of symbolic thinking takes it directly into the foundation of such a possibility. He raises the question of occult philosophy and deconstructs its various elaborations of spirit and spirit-beings in an argument that is layered, recursive, and

⁶ Occult philosophy: the word *occult* originally referred to non-sensible and non-manifest power, which might be considered 'natural' as with the virtues of herbs or the attractive force of a magnet, as well as with supernatural knowledge. Since around 1600 it has come to refer to unintelligibility rather than to non-sensibility, and in modern usage to magical and supernatural powers associated with *spirits*, rather than to generalised Spirit - see Hutchison (1982).

⁷ *Träume eines Geistersehers, erläutert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (1766) translated and edited by Walford, D. & Meerbote, R. in *Immanuel Kant - Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.301-359. The pagination of the Academy Edition ('AK') has been followed from Volumes I and II of *Immanuel Kants gesammelte Schriften* published by the *Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*; p.AK 2:315-2:373.

⁸ Commentators generally divide Kant's philosophical corpus into two periods, pre- and post-1770 and his *Inaugural Dissertation* in that year, on attaining the Chair in Logic and Metaphysics at Königsberg. This division reflects the development of Kant's thought and is consistent with his instruction to the editors of his minor writings to exclude all works prior to 1770. His 'Copernican Revolution' of philosophy, establishing the categories of time and space as categories of mind, belongs to the period from 1770.(Palmquist, 2000, pp.18-19; 1993, p.321) Palmquist considers as misleading the use of the terms 'pre-critical' and 'critical' for the two phases, since the distinct method recognised as critical philosophy may be discerned much earlier, and is fully evident in *Dreams*.

devastating.

Whether Kant achieves what he intends is a difficult matter to consider, since the elements of the argument are held together under tension and show awkward contradictions. Kant's spiritual position is a work-in-progress, and despite the intellectual brilliance of *Dreams* there is a sense of a lack of genuine resolution. This is also a complex text, so it is not surprising that readers starting on it with different presuppositions are likely to finish it with different conclusions as to what Kant wished to convey. That this represents an intense struggle in his thinking is obvious for many of his commentators, but whatever it was for Kant, it is what this struggle and its resolution means for the modern diviner and the modern study of divination that is the principal concern here. To the extent that divination and a more general occult philosophy are in close kinship, then the limits of debate demarcated by Kant represent a turning point for the possibility - or impossibility - of theorising divination and astrology in contemporary culture. The epistemological and metaphysical impasse in which divination finds itself is therefore clearly exposed. In my view the modern debate related to astrology and divination has not even registered the order of the problem, much less found the philosophical resource to take on and answer the implications of Kant's critical analysis. The astrologers and diviners have not yet caught up with the enlightenment; however, by indicating a possible hermeneutic analysis of divination, this current thesis may be seen as a modest attempt to move round the road block set up by Kant.

The discussion that follows offers only a sparse and selective outline of *Dreams*. In order to avoid extensive quotation while allowing some reference to the context in which Kant employs his arguments, I have given in Appendix One a fuller (though far from comprehensive) summary of Part One of *Dreams*, which presents the core philosophical argument. There is duplication of significant passages from this current chapter, but the reader will be enabled to discern the dialectical framework of Kant's thesis.

The development of Kant's argument is subtle, and as the reader proceeds it is far from obvious where the journey will lead; at several important junctures we are left with ambiguity. Although Kant brings himself to a settled and philosophically powerful conclusion, consistent with major themes of the Critiques that appeared fifteen years later, the path he takes to get there is thorny and uncomfortable both for the author and for some of his exegetes.⁹ This perhaps explains why this is not one of his more influential works, since it falls into the shadow of his later achievements. It has been bypassed by most of his heirs in the mainstream of academic philosophy. This bypassing has something to teach us - not least that much of modern philosophy would be only too pleased for the problems raised to quietly go away. By corollary, the work brings into the open questions that spirit-seekers and diviners must put both to themselves and to the programme of enlightenment thought for which Kant is spokesman as well as critic.

Inductive divination is not a topic for Kant in his *Dreams of a Spirit-seer*; therefore it may be asked why I give it such status in the current discussion. The principal reason for taking up Kant's text is the assumption that an occult- or spirit-philosophy provides the ultimate rationale and court of appeal for divination. Viewed from Kant's perspective, we may infer that the assent that an intelligent mind might give to divination depends on a combination of doubtful sensory data and obscure intuition riding on the back of a prevailing philosophical and religious tradition in favour of immaterial reality. This prevailing tradition requires little elaboration to include ordinary divinatory phenomena within spirit-nature, or as a function of the soul. This suggests that the defence of astrology and divination is likely to be founded in the positing of an immaterial soul- and spirit-nature. The irrational joining of these concepts with obscure experiences and intuitions amongst

⁹ Guyer (2006) p.8 calls the work 'peculiar'. Ward (1972) p.34 declares it is 'the strangest and most tortured of Kant's writings'.

practitioners identifies theories of divination as a part of occult philosophy. Our principal concern in this study is inductive divination rather than the clairvoyance and spirit-seeing of Swedenborg; however, I do not doubt that Kant would recognise the spirit-philosophy underlying both as similar, if not identical. We know from the *Critique of Practical Reason* how scathing he is about astrology; it is the complement of religious superstition and the ultimate thoughtless degradation of natural wonder at the 'starry heavens above.'¹⁰

We find a discussion of divination from much later in Kant's thought, in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, published in 1798. He first defines the term:

On the gift of divination (*Facultas divinatrix*)

Predicting, fortune-telling, and prophesying are distinguished as follows: the *first* is foresight according to the laws of experience (therefore natural); the *second* is contrary to the familiar laws of experience (contrary to nature); but the third is, or is considered to be, inspiration from a cause that is distinct from nature (supernatural). Because this third capacity seems to result from the influence of a god, it is also properly called the *faculty of divination* (since every shrewd guess about the future is also improperly called divination).¹¹

He dismisses the 'specious soothsayer' and the gypsy palmist, 'but the Pythia in Greek antiquity, and in our own time the ragged Siberian Shaman, tower over them all', by virtue of their submission to the will of the gods. He gives a somewhat conventional and unsatisfactory rebuttal of 'prophesies that foretell an inevitable fate

¹⁰ Kant's dismissal of astrology in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is discussed in Chapter 10.

¹¹ 7:188. (Kant, 2007).

of a people, for which they themselves are still responsible', which he considers contradictory and absurd, and in addition *useless* on the assumption that they cannot escape their fate.¹² This whole passage suggests that Kant never loosens the grip of a rationalistic interpretation that in the end fails to address the phenomena that concern us. Disappointing though this might seem to be for a philosopher of Kant's range and depth, it should not detract from the powerful dialectic process that forces itself into view in *Dreams*. Here we see philosophy as a living thing, not as a polished conclusion but as the struggle of thinking.

Dreams of a Spirit-Seer as a Counter-Hermeneutic

The purpose of this discussion is not to resolve the metaphysical questions taken up by Kant - which would require a different order of discussion - but rather to show their relevance for divinatory interpretation and practice. Kant employs a masterly step-by-step approach to unravel interpretations of the spiritual realm, and interpretations of nature and human-being derived from them. The treatment of these questions has a direct hermeneutic relevance for divination to the extent that it is just such a spiritual interpretation; I therefore approach his work as a *counter-hermeneutic* to divination, destroying its possibility by deconstructing the theory in which its interpretive project is rendered plausible. In terms that I clarify later, Kant cancels divinatory *theōros*, which is why divination becomes 'impossible'. There is no evidence in his writings or from the general tenor of his thinking that he would demur from this specialised application of his approach. Of course, it is not Kant alone who has done these things and undermined occult philosophy. This thought belongs especially but not exclusively to the scientific enlightenment and to many thinkers of his age; but in the subjects that concern us Kant has given the new thought a clear voice.

¹² 7:188-9.

From the viewpoint of divination Cicero's *De Divinatione* is a forerunner to Kant's exercise in *Dreams*, presaging certain of its themes. Kant is more subtle, and Cicero's critique is by definition limited in range, but it is singularly effective in challenging divinatory theory. Kant fills out the metaphysical and metapsychological ground in which a Ciceronian critique can flourish. The two taken together establish the greater part of the philosophical (although not the theological) critique of divination. The following summary presents the case from Kant's position, reordering his argument to make clear the themes that are most relevant to divination; at the same time I indicate the bearing of these on several topics that are taken up later in the current study.

For Kant, whether or not there are spirits (*geister*), spirit-philosophy readily falls prey to *dreams of reason*, and more dangerously to *dreams of sense*. The latter are more damaging, since individuals directly experiencing the spirit-realm, for instance by clairvoyant perception, know it as truly as they know material and sensible objects in the world. Since 'the impression of the senses itself precedes all judgement'¹³ counter-arguments from reason will be ineffective. Many individuals in the lunatic asylum have such delusions, since they are likely to result in derangement.¹⁴ Kant does not mention the example, but Socrates' daimonion, his 'warning voice', would be considered by a sceptic to be in this category. In the scale of divinatory experience discussed further in the current study the delusion of sense might apply where there is strong emotional affect, as in powerful moments of *realised interpretation*.¹⁵

¹³ 2:343.

¹⁴ 2:348.

¹⁵ *Realised interpretation* - in the context of divination, I define this as as inspired and non-inferential non-discursive 'knowing' of omens and oracles, often attended by a distinctive emotional affect. See Chapter 4.

A dream of reason depends on false or illogical thinking built on incorrect premises; this may be quite independent of any delusion of sense, but it may misinterpret sensory experience. To the extent that divinatory interpretation employs rational or pseudo-rational methods, which is the case with the logic of metaphor and symbol in all inductive divination, then it may be open to persuasion and reasoning. This realm of rational debate belongs with theories of divination, and by extension the possibility of delusory reasoning raises a question against *speculative interpretation* within the meaning-forming process of divination.¹⁶

False reasoning is likely to create false abstractions. Kant describes the formation of the *surreptitious concept*, a process by which we build up a seemingly well-defined, determinate and communicable concept for something that is wholly obscure, such as 'soul' or 'spirit'. The concept of spirit-nature has not been directly derived by abstraction from experience, and there is doubt as to whether and in what mode it exists. Because it is immaterial we cannot indicate its characteristics directly by an appeal to the senses; it follows that we have no identifiable mark by which to distinguish it from material things. Yet despite this *we believe we are describing something definite* and proceed as if positive knowledge of the matter is attainable. So how has the obscure concept taken root? Kant suggests:

There are many concepts which are the product of covert and obscure inferences made in the course of experience; these concepts then proceed to propagate themselves by attaching themselves to other concepts, without there being any awareness of the experience itself... Such concepts may be called *surreptitious concepts*... linguistic usage and the association of an expression with various stories which always contain the same essential characteristic, furnish that

¹⁶ *Speculative interpretation* - in the context of divination, I define this as rational inference drawn from omens and oracles. See Chapter 4.

expression with a determinate meaning.¹⁷

Because a concept is surreptitious it does not necessarily follow that it is untrue; however 'delusions of the imagination' are likely to hide in this form. Further, these concepts encourage us to arrive at 'precipitate judgements... which most easily insinuate themselves into the deepest and darkest questions.'¹⁸ Extending Kant's analysis to interpretations found in astrology, the use of analogy allows us to create likenesses which we then imagine are really experienced, as in 'Leo' or 'Mars', even though their empirical reality is surreptitious and imagined. Symbolists tell stories to each other that reaffirm the analogies until they become determinate and communicable. That leads us to imagine that we have experienced more than we actually have, and that we know more than we actually do.

Kant's text details his analysis of the system of his contemporary, Immanuel Swedenborg, who had achieved fame both for his feats of clairvoyance and for his spirit-philosophy.¹⁹ To go beyond crude denial and scepticism and fully unpack Swedenborg's impressive appeal requires several steps of analysis, which Kant undertakes with great care. The task is rendered all the more complex because Kant defends the innate plausibility and even the human necessity for an immaterial spiritual dimension. The failure of metaphysics lies not here but in the illusory nature of its constructs and its method of critical analysis of those constructs.²⁰ Kant's

¹⁷ fn. 2:320.

¹⁸ 2:322.

¹⁹ Swedenborg's philosophy may be characterised as a theosophic pneumatology empirically derived from spirit-experiences and imbibing the hermetic axiom of macrocosm-microcosm. In *Dreams* Kant sets out 'to combat *Schwärmerei*, define the limits of human knowledge and provide a secure basis for natural science' (Bishop, 2000, p.223 - *schwärmerei* is an irrational exuberance in the mystical). He first has to take on the implications of metaphysics as a whole with respect to shadowy notions such as *Geist/geister*.

²⁰ In the German universities of the early 18th century a late-medieval weak Aristotelianism

argument is therefore structured around a central observation, namely that the 'dreams of the spirit-seer', suffering delusions of sense, are authenticated by a more general and fundamental spirit-philosophy that has passed down to us from antiquity and through the metaphysics of the medieval scholastics. The result is a fantasy-castle of thought built upon an earlier foundation that is theoretically plausible yet beyond ordinary experience and the bounds of proof or disproof. This explains the name of the work, *Dreams of a spirit-seer elucidated by dreams of metaphysics*.

Kant reserves special scorn for a transcendent subset of metaphysical speculation that he denotes as 'cabbala'. This feeds the hounds of *schwärmerei*. He probably has in mind a popular excitement with occult philosophy, rather than the learned Jewish mystical tradition from which the name is drawn. Whether popular or learned, its hallmark is experience and knowledge that belongs to initiates and is not publicly available and open to ordinary faculties of sense-perception. Cabbala and its secret doctrine stands against the enlightenment ideal of democratic scientific knowledge derived from universal self-evidence in the world around us. These dreamers dream alone, cut off from the world we all share.

This observation is immediately relevant to most practices of divination, both inductive and inspired. With inspired divination or possession, as in the traditional literary depiction of the Pythia at Delphi, an altered state of consciousness is definitive, which hardly belongs to self-evident natural knowledge (or it would be 'the same' instead of being 'altered'). Further, the hermeneutic approach in this current study suggests that most forms of inductive divination also involve an

had finally given way to the rationalistic and universalist doctrine derived by Wolff from Leibniz. Wolff's metaphysical system 'was modelled on the Cartesian mathematical method... applied without distinction to the realms of the ideal and the real.' This was strongly contended by the empiricists influenced by the new sciences and Isaac Newton's *Principia* (see Vleeschauer, 1962, chapter 1 'The Preparation of the Critical Synthesis'). Kant's mature work, *The Critique of Pure Reason* (1781), finally established a method of 'critical philosophy' that overthrows the hegemonic claims of earlier metaphysics.

'altered state' element (part of the function of *hermeios*). The very definition of divination denies the necessity of prior self-evidence, since divination makes evident that which might otherwise remain hidden.

It would be mistaken to imagine that a Kantian approach is not relevant to the scientific study of 'altered states' and divination; what would be questionable would be the attempt to give epistemological truth-status to knowledge and experience apparently gained within the altered or divinatory state. This means that its truth-status lies outside the order of recognised knowledge, falling within the realm of *opinion and belief*, and not in the realm of *knowledge*.²¹ Kant is particularly critical of taking obscure and intimate private knowings, which we all have in various ways, and confecting them together with more reliable and plausible facts and theories. Such rationalisations of obscure experience are equivalent at the level of theory to the surreptitious concept.

This quite reasonable argument from 'critical philosophy' remains definitive in contemporary scientific and academic thought. Its effect is pervasive because, working below the surface of ordinary intentions, it challenges (and in a favourite concept of Kant's, cancels) the metaphysical implication and claim of various human endeavours, including the religious and the divinatory. This is why divinatory *theōros* has been undermined. One does not seek an oracle for an opinion, but for knowledge.

Ambivalence in Kant

What is difficult for some of Kant's followers to accept is that he does not deny the genuine possibility of a spirit-world suggested by Swedenborg. It must be admitted that at several crucial points the careful reader will be left in some

²¹ 2:351.

perplexity as to what Kant intends to convey, as if he is fighting his own scepticism. In some parts of his discussion he strikes a harsh and even violent note of sarcasm.²² Yet he gives a powerful argument for the plausibility of the ancient idea of the soul, as that part of spirit-nature which occupies or enlivens the corporeal body. He makes explicit that he has an inclination to accept the old view that whatever thinks and has self-knowing and intentionality is 'soul', which is simple and indivisible. Nothing short of 'strict refutation' would allow him to '[be] persuaded to dismiss as absurd what used to be said in the schools: *My soul is wholly in my whole body, and wholly in each of its parts.*'²³ If by 'strict' he means 'logically strict' or 'strict in terms of critical philosophy' then, as he elsewhere makes clear, in such a topic neither 'strict affirmation' nor 'strict refutation' are logically possible.²⁴ This cannot be put down to skilful dialectics in the presentation of an opposing argument - we are bound to infer either that Kant has muddled his logic between two different parts of the same text, or more interestingly that he will *never* be persuaded to give up this belief of the medieval scholastics.

This brings us to the theoretical question of how spirit-nature is revealed to us, and here Kant offers a further far-reaching observation quite against the apparently sceptical grain of the whole piece. The following discussion is relegated to the defensive obscurity of a footnote. It concerns *analogous reasoning as an expression of truthful inner sentiment*. Discussing the attitude of spirit-philosophy to the prospect of life after death, Kant adds a note on the symbolism of the butterfly, representing the soul (psyche = butterfly) for both the ancient Egyptians and the Greeks:

²² 2:348 is an example: '...we bear in mind that, far from being a heavenly inspiration, their windy metaphysics is nothing more than a f***.' He is referring to Butler's *Hudibras* on farting.

²³ 2:325.

²⁴ See section below on 'pneumatology' for the theory of necessary ignorance.

It is easy to see that the hope, which makes of death nothing but a transformation, has generated this idea and its symbols. But this does nothing to destroy our confidence that the concepts which have sprung from this source are correct. Our inner sentiment and the judgements which are made by *what is analogous to reason*, and which are based on that inner sentiment, lead, provided they are neither of them corrupted, precisely where reason would lead, if it were more enlightened and more extensive.²⁵

(italics in the original)

Kant therefore allows that when thought is pure, an analogue or symbolic image will be produced to project it, even where our reason has not yet learned to go. This is a far-reaching step towards the recognition of a truth-value in symbolism. Kant's views here leave a door open to the possibility of truth in symbol and therefore, I would argue, in inductive divination as a whole. On the other hand Kant raises fundamental doubts about the status of knowledge inferred through symbol, which must bear on any discussion of our theme.

Symbol and Spirit-Communication

Kant develops a theory of *symbol* by which we might account for an interchange of recognition between the spirit-world and our own world. We may in our mortal life become indirectly aware of 'influences which emanate from the spirit-world'; these on occasion enter personal consciousness, and 'in accordance with the law of association of ideas, excite those images which are related to them, and awaken representations which bear an analogy to our senses.'²⁶ These representations

²⁵ fn.2:351.

²⁶ 2:338-9.

'are not ...the spirit-concept itself, but they are symbols of it.' Through the symbol a spirit-representation and a material representation or derived concept become linked, so that spirit-concepts take on 'a corporeal cloak in order to present themselves in a clear light.'

ideas which are communicated by means of spirit-influence would clothe themselves in the signs of that *language*, which the human being normally uses: the sensed presence of a spirit would be clothed in the image of a *human figure*; the order and beauty of the immaterial world would be clothed in the images of our imagination which normally delight our senses in life, and so forth.²⁷

This leads to a consideration of the uncommon sensitivity that would be required to recognise indirect spirit-induced promptings.²⁸ Sensitive individuals 'would, at certain moments, be assailed by the vision of certain objects as external to them, which they would take for the presence of spirit-natures presenting themselves.' The vision is 'an illusion of the imagination', even though the cause of the illusion is indeed a genuine spirit-influence. The penalty of this gift is that delusion and truth are mingled together, threatening to render it useless, since 'it cannot be possible to distinguish the element of truth in such an experience from the crude illusions which surround it.' Further, so alien are these representations to ordinary experience, that 'it would not be at all surprising if the spirit-seer were at the same time a fantastical visionary, at least in respect of the images accompanying these apparitions of his.'²⁹

²⁷ 2:339.

²⁸ 2:340.

²⁹ 2:340.

Kant's mode of argument here remains ambivalent rather than simply dialectical, because we form the strong impression that he wishes to affirm the reality of the spirit-world. Even so, his approach gives a clear warning to the reader of symbols, omens and divinations, to the extent that our reason is unable to sift out the illusory trappings of our own imagination from the genuine spiritual prompting.

The discussion of symbols brings us to an important feature of Swedenborg's acquisition of spirit-knowledge, which is that for the most part his method is *figurative and symbolic*. Swedenborg describes this in terms of a universal and absolute 'correspondence' between the things of spirit and the world of our existence. The figurative means by which correspondences have been revealed to him is described throughout his writings:

Everything spirits and angels say is said by means of figures. Using marvellous variations of light and shade, they present what they are thinking; and using shifts that suit their affectional states, they give them persuasiveness.³⁰

Swedenborg perceives that above the spirit-realm there is the angelic, and the communication is once again figurative:

When angels' concepts and their resulting conversations descend to spirits, they are presented in various pictorial ways... unless, then, they were given form and presented pictorially, and so offered visually through images, a spirit would hardly understand them at all.³¹

³⁰ Dole (1984) p.51: *The Universal Human* 3342.

³¹ Dole (1984) p.43. *The Universal Human* 3213.

Swedenborg's reliance on figure and symbolism is not brought into prominence in Kant's text, even though it would considerably strengthen the rhetorical case against the seer, because of the justifiable doubts that can be raised about claims of positive knowledge acquired through symbol. I suggest that the reason Kant does not make more of this is that he has from the beginning been drawn into a philosophical struggle by the apparently non-symbolic and clairvoyant circumstance of Swedenborg's vision of the Fire of Stockholm. It is doubtful whether on its own Swedenborg's voluminous spirit-philosophy would have gathered a multitude of followers or demanded attention from Kant. The objective 'proof' provided by this vision, taken with the other well-recorded instances where the spirits gave Swedenborg information that he could not otherwise have known, draws everyone, including Kant, to pay attention to everything else he says, including his far-reaching claims about spiritual reality. Several of Swedenborg's spirit-prompted feats are remarkable and attracted much attention; however, such 'ghost stories' are open to too many doubts and non-spiritual explanations. The distinct and undeniable nature of the vision of the fire means that this cannot be clouded by doubts and pushed to one side. If Kant as a scientist and philosopher is to engage with the question of Swedenborg, then it is here that he must start, with the empirical evidence.

This surmise helps to explain the deep paradox within *Dreams*. It also illuminates the otherwise obscure form and development of the whole, since we more clearly recognise that Kant approaches his inquiry by isolating three logically distinct elements. The first element is the historical fact of a rare and inexplicable event. The second element is Swedenborg's spirit-philosophy which may or may not have a genuine relationship with that historical occurrence, but is popularly accorded much credibility by virtue of it. The third element is the tradition of metaphysics, an acceptance of which would also lend credence to the second element, Swedenborg's spirit-philosophy. As a philosopher intent on the total recasting of metaphysics, even

though he has been spurred on by the clairvoyant event, it is to the second and especially the third of these elements that Kant turns his searching gaze. In taking on the third element, traditional metaphysics, Kant is already sharpening the weapons of the critical philosophy to come, as several commentators have observed. By isolating the three elements, Kant can allow the clairvoyant vision to stand, if necessary unexplained; yet he can show that the metaphysical constructions are illusory, sever them from the unexplained historical fact of the vision, and cancel Swedenborg's spirit-philosophy with its disgraceful *schwärmerei*. The unique historical fact of Swedenborg's vision cannot however be explained or overcome.

Pneumatology as a theory of necessary ignorance

Goaded by Swedenborg and his vision, Kant is determined to push his argument through to clarity about the proper scope of philosophy. On the basis of his critique of metaphysics, he reaches his goal with the argument of *necessary ignorance*, a radical negative epistemology. This is quite different to scientific ignorance; it is in the nature of our scientific knowledge that it is always relatively incomplete, a fraction of what we might eventually understand. Our incapacity to have knowledge of spirit-nature is however of a different order, since 'the spirit-nature which we do not know but only suppose, can never be positively thought, for, in the entire range of our sensations, there are no *data* for such positive thought.'³² In the absence of positive data available to the senses, we are left only with negations, suppositions of what the spirit-nature is *not*. Yet even these negations are based neither on experience nor on logical inference; it follows that reason, 'stripped of all assistance', seeks its refuge in *fiction*:

On this basis, the pneumatology of man can be called a theory of his necessary ignorance in respect of a type of being which is supposed to

³² 2:351-2.

exist; as such it is quite adequate to its task.³³

This conclusion allows Kant to put the whole debate, involving 'an extensive branch of metaphysics', to one side, being of no further philosophical concern. He is in effect treating the debate as a parade of imaginary opinions. At a stroke the philosopher is absolved from deciding one way or the other and should abandon a realm of futile inquiries beyond his scope. Facts such as Swedenborg's vision must be put to one side. 'In this, as in other cases, prudence demands that one cut the coat of one's projects to the cloth of one's powers.'³⁴

This practical and reasonable suggestion concludes the first part of Kant's study. Had it been left at this point, even allowing for the inconsistencies already noted, it would have readily been applauded as showing the proper limit of science in the face of mysteries, as well as providing an effective critique of spirit-philosophy and symbolic interpretation, separating their concerns from science and philosophy. Kant does not, however, leave the issue there. An apparently puzzling dimension of the project now becomes manifest, although it should not prove so puzzling if the suggestions made above, concerning the genesis of the whole work, are taken into account. For whatever reason, far from settling the issue as he could have done with the theory of necessary ignorance, Kant moves to the second part of his study, the 'historical'.

Swedenborg and the Fire of Stockholm

The second part of *Dreams* is declared 'historical' in that it deals with a report that is before Kant and before us, concerning a vision of Swedenborg. Kant takes up the philosophy elaborated by Swedenborg (in Part Two chapter two), but only on the

³³ 2:352.

³⁴ 2:352.

basis that he has 'cancelled' the theoretical discussion of spirits in traditional metaphysics in Part One. The third and final chapter in Part Two is a 'practical conclusion' to the whole treatise, closely modelled on the lines of the closing discussion in Part One. For the purposes of this current study, I concentrate on his treatment of the clairvoyant perception of the fire in Stockholm.

The first chapter of Part Two opens with a continuation of the concluding theme of Part One, concerning the impossibility of philosophy in the face of certain paranormal accounts. The impasse arises wherever it appears unwarranted to simply *doubt* one of these accounts and dismiss it out of hand. Yet if there is a hint of credulity then there is the risk of a humiliating response from supposed intellectual peers:

Those who know how to create the impression of cleverness at no great expense pour their scornful laughter on anything which, because it is unintelligible both to the ignorant and the wise, reduces them both to more or less the same level.³⁵

Kant must know that, however judiciously argued, his thesis is likely to suffer this penalty, since he dares to give space to concepts that enlightened opinion regards as absurd. Despite the dangers he has alluded to, he goes on to present several accounts of the clairvoyant abilities of Swedenborg. The first two involved the help of spirits, to reveal a secret communication, and to locate an important receipt that had been hidden by a man now deceased.³⁶ These were striking incidents, much reported at the time, but not capable of reliable verification.

The third incident, the vision of the Fire of Stockholm, is wholly remarkable

³⁵ 2:353.

³⁶ 2:354-5.

by virtue of its public nature, and has entered into the realm of legend. As Kant affirms, the circumstances of the case are 'such that it must be possible to furnish a complete proof of its truth or falsity.'³⁷ On the evening of July 29th 1759 Swedenborg was having dinner with a group of people in Gothenburg; after some time he became agitated, and reported to the gathering that 'at that very moment a dreadful conflagration was raging in Stockholm in the *Södermalm*.' He remained perturbed, but after several hours he informed the company that the fire was under control, and gave details about how far it had spread; the incident was broadcast all round Gothenburg. Two days later news arrived from Stockholm, 405 km distant, with a report of the fire coinciding exactly in time and place with Swedenborg's vision.

Kant's attitude to the report that he himself gives is oddly ambiguous. He gives it in convincing detail, yet distances himself, as with the phrase 'it must be possible...' mentioned above. The report from Stockholm 'coincided completely, it was said...'.³⁸ Yet we know from his private correspondence that his own judgment was more definite, as he had taken considerable trouble with his research and had consulted reliable witnesses. In one letter he states 'what doubt could be cast on the credibility of this event?' and talks in detail of its 'evidential force' which 'really does deprive every doubt of any justification.'³⁹

Most striking is the defensive statement in *Dreams* immediately following the account, written as if taking himself to task for some uncharacteristic lapse:

³⁷ 2:355-6.

³⁸ 2:356.

³⁹ Letter to Charlotte von Knobloch 10 August 1763 - Kant (1992) n46 p.453. The editors tartly remark that 'it is not at all clear what can have induced Kant so radically to have revised his estimate of the reliability of the reports he cites.'

The reader will probably ask what on earth could have induced me to engage in such a despicable business as that of spreading fairy-tales abroad, which every rational being would hesitate to listen to with patience - and, indeed, not merely disseminating them but actually making them the subject of philosophical investigations. However, since the philosophy, with which we have prefaced the work, was no less a fairy-story from the *cloud-cuckoo-land* of metaphysics, I can see nothing improper about having them make their appearance on the stage together.⁴⁰

The philosophy with which Kant has prefaced his work is either traditional metaphysics, or more probably its development into cabbala, that is, occult philosophy. Both are cancelled in Part One of *Dreams*. Swedenborg's construction of a spirit-reality has been laid to waste by Kant's critique, so may be held to deserve the harsh description as 'cloud-cuckoo-land'. But what of the vision of the Fire of Stockholm? This is by Kant's own account an undeniable historical reality - and this he now tries to cancel by letting it appear on the stage together with Swedenborg's speculative philosophy. The careful isolation of logically distinct elements carried through in *Dreams*, the separation demanded by a negative epistemology and a theory of 'necessary ignorance', is suddenly and illogically abandoned without further ado. It is an illicit cancellation and an uncomfortable performance.

Lest this seems to be too severe a judgment, it should be observed that Kant is fully aware of the impasse into which he has been led. Its genesis is announced in an honest admission in the opening paragraphs of the work, the 'Preamble, which promises very little for the execution of the project'. He describes the problem a philosopher faces in dealing with the widespread popular acceptance of 'old wives'

⁴⁰ 2:356.

tales and monastery miracles'; these are all too often only weakly challenged, and sometimes even the philosopher falls into foolishness. Yet he faces a dilemma:

Is he to admit the probability of even only one of these stories? How important such an admission would be! And what astonishing implications would open up before one, if only *one* such occurrence could be supposed to be proven!⁴¹

This of course is the very dilemma that Kant has started with, namely the unique historical case of Swedenborg's vision of the Fire of Stockholm.

Kant ends his whole discussion with two further pieces which I will not summarise. The first is a precis of Swedenborg's spirit-metaphysics, which closely matches Kant's own theoretical construction of Part One; by now the construction has already been torn down. A final concluding chapter to the whole work closely parallels the discussion on negative epistemology in the concluding chapter of Part One. Kant recommends that we should wait for the end of our life to determine the truth or not of spirit-philosophy, and in this life not waste our few energies on 'futile scholastic disputes' that will never be decided.⁴²

Some Conclusions for Divination

Kant leaves us in an impasse, and with a sense of disappointment. It is all the more disappointing in the light of some remarkable hints of a more symbolic understanding, as in the 'butterfly' metaphor. However, to take up arms against Kant and the philosophers of the enlightenment on account of their inability to cope with paranormal and spiritual phenomena, or various other notions that we might delight

⁴¹ 2:318.

⁴² 2:373.

in, would be to miss something that *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer* has exposed, as well as genuine arguments that will help to clarify the question of divination. What has been exposed comes up over and over again in the history of thought, so we find the same problem for divination when we read Cicero. It is the impossibility of the unique circumstance, especially when it is identifiably 'not-normal', as a subject for science in the sense in which we usually employ this term.

With respect to the current study, the dilemma raised by Kant's approach bears directly and negatively on what I term the *unique case of interpretation*. This is the participatory, context-determined and non-replicable instance of divination. Like all 'historical' events, or like any event of human and personal meaning, such as speaking or an action of an individual, it is *singular* and cannot be described from any other vantage point than its own. Abstraction and quantification, lumping it together with other unique cases, risks obliterating it. The unique case stands as exactly the type of phenomenon that, in Kant's view, not only cannot be brought within the consideration of science, which is perhaps understandable, but more significantly *cannot be rendered as a subject for secure philosophical analysis*. For Kant we may presume that all talk of such singular instances remains forever tied to rumour and anecdote; speculative abstraction developed on this chaotic foundation is little more than dressed-up personal opinion, and this is exactly the weak point in systems of speculation such as that of Swedenborg. It may be beautiful imagination, it may be a compelling anecdote, but it has no status as knowledge.

The sceptical move that cancels the unique case remains constitutive of mainstream academic and philosophical opinion, especially when it comes to paranormal phenomena and the experiences of diviners. Every report of this sort is dismissed as 'anecdote', and few philosophers go any further than Kant. Much as we may wish to criticise him and the philosophy of the scientific enlightenment, its method is productive for the manipulation of the type of knowledge out of which it has arisen and on which we now depend - a type of knowledge that certainly does

not include spirit-philosophy and divination in its remit. Other than this, it is far from clear that the diviners and astrologers have any philosophy to put in its place, other than a pale remembrance of a former metaphysic that no longer holds its own. This is why, however widespread the modern popular practice of divination might be, the 'thought' that grants it meaning and authority has weakened and changed.

There is something in the spiritual subject-matter we are concerned with, and there is something in divination, that resists *positive knowledge*, and the force of Kant's analysis illuminates this fact. Yet where there is not positive knowledge, the correctness of propositions, there is still something to learn from other ways of thought almost unknown in our culture, and it is to these that we now turn.

Part Two

Interpreting Primitive Divination

Chapter Two

Participation and the Cognitive Continuum

In this chapter I establish a first orientation to a positive statement of theory, beginning with the suggestion that divination may involve a distinctive mental pattern or cognitive faculty. The intention is to first retrace, and then to develop further, the pioneering work undertaken by the French philosopher, sociologist and anthropologist Lucien Lévy-Bruhl. A theoretical approach that suggests a distinct or non-ordinary pattern to mystical, religious and magical phenomena is self-evidently plausible and suggests itself without us needing to take account of Lévy-Bruhl's particular formulation, but it is fair to say that he remains the outstanding and original modern theorist to have offered a sustained interpretation along these lines, with the result that any comprehensive discussion of divination is bound to acknowledge the impact of the larger questions he has raised. This significant impact is not only historical, in the contentious debate it stirred in twentieth-century anthropology, and in the wider influence of his ideas on the cultural milieu; it is also of immediate and contemporary significance in that the implications of his theory are far from having been settled and remain a stimulus to specific questions concerning divination.

The first part of the chapter is devoted to Lévy-Bruhl's controversial description of 'primitive mentality'. His descriptions are fruitful for the analysis of divination in contemporary as well as in primitive culture; on the other hand there are limitations to the theory as it has come down to us, exposed by several of his critics, and especially E.E. Evans-Pritchard, whose observations are considered in this chapter and the next. On the subject of traditional African divination he appears at first sight to contradict Lévy-Bruhl's theories, but I suggest that his views come closer to the ideas of Lévy-Bruhl than either he and some other critics appear to

realise. In any case criticisms allow us to test Lévy-Bruhl's original thesis. The apparent contradictions that emerge are, I suggest, resolved in the concept of the 'cognitive continuum', described at the end of this chapter.

Arguably the starting point for modern divination scholarship resides in Lévy-Bruhl's ground-breaking analysis of primitive mentality.¹ His method was nominally sociological but his background lay in philosophy, and this dimension makes some of his arguments especially effective; we see this in his discussion of the non-syllogistic nature of primitive thought, which does not fit the Aristotelian model of logic long adopted as definitive. His conclusions provide a framework for the suggestion that divination involves a mode other than our ordinary everyday thinking, and does not proceed according to our accepted notions of common sense.

Despite a wide dissemination of his ideas, within anthropology itself Lévy-Bruhl's relevance was overshadowed for much of the twentieth century. His gentlemanly armchair theorising appeared old-fashioned in the light of the increasing insistence on hands-on fieldwork conducted by professionals. It seemed over-focused on the 'mystical' and limited in explanatory power compared with more comprehensive ethnological theories, particularly those of the structuralists and Lévi-Strauss. Further, the original description of primitive mentality attracted serious criticisms. Principal amongst these is the definition of the 'primitive', limiting the scope of our observations to aboriginal and native tribal cultures, as if the pattern of thought he describes has nothing to do with us.² This goes together with his

¹ The discussion in this chapter on Lévy-Bruhl and the 'cognitive continuum' has been published in amended form in Cornelius (2007). Lévy-Bruhl's most influential works are *Les Fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (1912, translated as *How Natives Think*, 1926); and *La Mentalité primitive* (1922, translated as *Primitive Mentality*, 1923). His revisions, the fruit of a lifetime of reflection, are recorded in a series of late notebooks, posthumously published as *Carnets* (1949), and translated as *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality* (1975). The scope and vitality of his thought is best approached from the notebooks, which can be used to monitor and revise his earlier conclusions. This is the approach I have adopted

² For early criticisms and a review of the influence of Lévy-Bruhl in anthropology, see Scott Littleton's introduction to Lévy-Bruhl (1985). Sensitivity about ethnocentrism and criticisms of a simple evolutionary model of culture have challenged previously taken-for-granted anthropological

description of the primitive mode as *pre-logical*, attracting an unwarranted if understandable charge of ethnocentrism, as if primitives somehow cannot think, whereas we can. There is a corollary to ethnocentrism, falling under the spell of modern positivism and social-evolutionary theory: this is the *regressivist imputation*, the suggestion that mystical or participatory thinking emerging in an 'evolved' culture is a reprehensible throw-back to a defunct earlier behaviour or pattern of thinking.³ This negative view is corrosive in the study of divination, and it remains, regrettably, *de rigueur* for many scholars where contemporary practice is concerned. Lévy-Bruhl himself was sensitive to these criticisms, and by the end of his life he rethought his definitions, abandoning the idea of the pre-logical. This has enhanced rather than lessened his theory, and his seminal contribution is at last receiving the attention it deserves.

Lévy-Bruhl distances his approach from cognitive psychology and from philosophy; however, it is in these quite different discourses that his ideas may bear fruit. However cautiously formulated, their implications are wide-ranging and controversial, since they challenge the hegemony of our conventional conception of rationality. Equally provocative is the suggestion that the modern theorist, by the very mode in which conceptual theory is constituted, is incapable of comprehending the thinking of the primitive, which remains 'refractory to analysis'.⁴ Opponents of this view argue that we all think in much the same way, although often defectively;

concepts, but I do not think we should be coy about the practical usefulness of the naming of 'primitive', provided we are aware of pejorative (or romanticised) connotations. The term is relatively unproblematic, and best matches Lévy-Bruhl's usage, when it refers to preliterate tribal cultures with ritualised codes of interrelationship, and with limited technological capacity.

³ The regressivist imputation, together with its correlates, often slips by under the guise of modern liberal scholarship and it is plain in Vickers (1984) pp.95-6. It is also common in interpretations borrowed from psychoanalysis, where individuals who manifest behaviours such as a belief in divination are felt to be immature or otherwise stunted in intellectual development. (Freud, 1973, p.70) However, my remarks are not intended to suggest that every interpretation of regression is *ipso facto* necessarily faulty.

⁴ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) pp.62,68.

the variety of beliefs and behaviours in primitive cultures is quite understandable by us once we examine their premises; these can be explained by social-cultural formations, power and status relationships, by misperceptions, logical errors, emotional confusions, and limited or erroneous factual information. However, even some critics who consider that Lévy-Bruhl exaggerates the dominance of the 'mystical' in primitive culture acknowledge that he has observed a fundamental and problematic difference in modes of thought.⁵ This debate is unresolved, but Lévy-Bruhl's basic thesis has become widely accepted, especially in studies of altered states of consciousness.⁶

Participation Mystique

I will first outline major tenets of Lévy-Bruhl's theory, before bringing them to bear on the specific question of omens and divination. The most important of his concepts is that of *participation mystique*.⁷ This covers a multiplicity of behaviours and beliefs that never failed to exasperate and confound the European missionaries and administrators visited upon the reciprocally perplexed natives. It is a foundation of reality, forming an autonomous socially conditioned backdrop for every act of cognition, and therefore hardly capable of being distinctly abstracted and discriminated by the primitive mind, which can know no different; it is the anthropologist who abstracts it and names it as participation, and the category is therefore as much about the anthropologist as it is about the native. It is known to us in some measure from our own cultural history in the principle of sympathetic magic

⁵ Evans-Pritchard (1981) p.131.

⁶ See the discussion by Roy Willis in Willis and Curry (2004) pp.142-4.

⁷ The word 'participation' is used by Lévy-Bruhl as an abbreviation for *participation mystique*; I use it in the current study with this meaning. Participation mystique implies something more intimately compounded and 'consubstantial' than a simple idea of separate things (or people) being mutually interactive. There is some ambiguity in Lévy-Bruhl as to whether participation is in our terms supernatural (and therefore 'mystical'). Ambiguity goes with the territory and may not be wholly capable of resolution.

where, for example, the hair from someone's head can be used to influence or harm its original owner. So for some primitives, a man's shadow is also the man and striking a footprint strikes the man. Participation is likely to be observed between a single representative of a species and the species; if one wrongly treats the carcass of one caribou, then all caribou may be offended and refuse to let themselves be hunted. On the other hand resemblance and commonality of species do not in themselves account for participation; of two bushes one may be seen as having a special significance for a spirit, a person or the tribe, while another apparently identical bush is given no special significance, or an unrelated significance.⁸ The participatory significance of any given entity may change or even be reversed as circumstances change.⁹ Different tribes also vary in their codes of signification, so that natural phenomena or human attributes are given participatory meanings specific to a particular culture.

It may seem simple for us to envisage participation as a strong emotional association. Who does not have such an experience? We can readily extrapolate from this experience to folk superstition and sympathetic magic believed in even today by superstitious people. There is an abundant literature from the classical period to illustrate this thinking. Through these intermediaries we might hope to project our imagination into the mind set of the few surviving genuine aboriginals, or to our native ancestors far back before the dawn of our own civilisation. For Lévy-Bruhl, however, such a supposition is in error, and it has to be undone before primitive mentality can be understood. The error arises when we fail to recognise that for the primitive there are not already two logically distinct objects linked by affective

⁸ See for example Lévy-Bruhl (1923) p.117.

⁹ Lévi-Strauss (1972) pp.51-2, gives an example from eagle-hunting by the American Hidatsa Indians, where the ritual meaning of menstrual blood, treated in many cultures as polluting, reverses to mean abundance depending on circumstance. Here we find a typical example of the semiological potential of structuralism in the interpretation by Lévi-Strauss of the *meaning* of the symbolic equation. This, he suggests, expresses the polarity 'distance-closeness' of hunter and prey for two different stages of the hunt.

association. Participation is *the way in which* there are objects for seeing, and there is no entity apart from its participations.

In the eyes of his critics Lévy-Bruhl has confused aesthetic and affective association for a different mode of thinking.¹⁰ However, the ramifications and implications of the theory appear to be illuminating. Participation is related to the observation that *primitive mentality does not privilege abstraction*; or, to the extent that it does abstract, this is not in the form in which we know it. In taking up an entity as an entity we see it already in relation to its predicates, which constitute a set of logical conditions defining the entity. The highly developed way in which we construe these logical conditions, going back to Aristotle, is 'natural' for us. Yet it is exactly because of this habit of our own thinking that we are misled when we think about participation. Lévy-Bruhl demonstrates this by showing how the scholar will commonly apply a conventional understanding of the *pars pro toto*, taken to be the principle of sympathetic magic, and project its logic onto the primitive. Of course, we think, a part is a part of a whole, and this is the basis of the logic of the primitive's understanding of a relationship whereby the part stands for the whole. Believing we have grasped the founding logic of this conception, we imagine that the primitive's error of thinking lies not in the logical relation (with which we agree, for the part is indeed necessarily a part of a greater whole), but in the magical efficacy granted to the logical relation. For Lévy-Bruhl, however, the primitive does not even construe the part-whole logical relation as we do. Strictly speaking, for the primitive there is not as such a 'relation', because that would imply two things standing apart but brought together. They are not 'apart' in the way that they are for us.¹¹

¹⁰ Radin (1957) p.246 describes the subjective impression on the primitive of the 'blaze of reality', so difficult for us to appreciate: 'An aura envelops every object in the external world due to the projection of this inward thrill upon it.' For Radin, in disagreement with Lévy-Bruhl, this does not entail a different perception of the object *qua* object.

¹¹ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) pp.84-6.

The non-abstractive nature of primitive mentality manifests in the treatment of number, which is seen concretely in the objects numerated and is not abstracted into a universal and immaterial category. Counting therefore does not proceed as enumeration in the manner we take for granted, since 'one is not a number like the other numbers'.¹² Lévy-Bruhl relates this to the visual character of non-abstractive counting. The not-numberness of one is because we have turtle, not 'one' turtle. A pair of turtles is concretely a definite and particular situation, and the difference is something other than the logical predication of the abstracted number two to turtleness. Singleness is a not-pair and a not-many, and is something other than the first unit of counting as in 'one, two, three...'. This underscores the theme that *divination does not belong to a count of instances*, but takes root in a non-enumerated 'unique case' of its own instantiation. The unique case is a not-pair, not-many, a singleton that is simply itself. At this point we arrive at fundamental concept in any hermeneutics of divination, derived here from Lévy-Bruhl's definition of participation: each omen is the unique case, and each divination is its own unique case of interpretation.

Meant-ness and Address in the Unique Case

Omen-reading and divination emerge as amongst the most important of all manifestations of the *participation mystique*. They will also be, for us, amongst the least understood:

Even the most complete description possible of the divining process does not disclose all its meaning... Where we find symbolic relations... [primitive mentality] feels a close participation. This cannot be expressed in our thought, nor even in our languages, which

¹² Lévy-Bruhl (1975) p.144.

are much more conceptual than those of primitives. The term which would express it best in this connection would be the 'momentary identity of substance.'¹³

'Identity of substance' emerges as a consistent theme for Lévy-Bruhl, and is another facet of participation; it means something more than linking two distinct things together in a correspondence of 'symbolic relations' akin to the *pars pro toto*; it suggests instead our notion of identity. Elsewhere he expresses the same theme as bi-presence, dual-units, and consubstantiality.¹⁴ An important consequence for any theory of divination is that the conceptual distinction we make between signs and causes may be quite foreign to the primitive. The omen and the spirit-agency intending it become identified, or 'consubstantial'. Further, the omen is seen as fully implicated in the event that it portends; indeed, it is *also* the event it portends. It follows that in averting the omen, the event it signifies is averted.¹⁵ Equally, the making of divination is a making of the event being divined.¹⁶

It is therefore possible to secure an understanding of the unique case in divination, at least within the context of primitive mentality. This relates to the singularity and particularity of the circumstances of an omen, or any situation or event taken to have an ominous implication. Any striking event, circumstance, or showing is understood as concrete, particular, and non-abstracted:

Participation has reality only in so far as it is felt by an individual

¹³ Lévy-Bruhl (1923) p.197. Brackets show my insert.

¹⁴ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) pp.69-71, where he describes 'a concrete consubstantiality which our languages lack a word to express.'

¹⁵ Lévy-Bruhl (1923) pp.143-8.

¹⁶ Lévy-Bruhl (1923) pp.197-8.

(even if similar participations occur at the same moment amongst various members of the group who have, for example, a single mystical experience). It is thus an event which occurs *hic et nunc*, localised in space and time, or better said which has its own space and time.¹⁷

This is why every omen is the unique case; 'it is indeed revealing, but revealing only of itself'. The meaningfulness of such an ominous situation is therefore not understood as a logical generality indifferently affecting anyone and everyone in the vicinity. Rather, it is directed to some particular individual or group of individuals: 'the omen affects those to whom it is pointed'.¹⁸ Since the omen is not a product either of general laws or of contingent causes - although the primitive may be quite capable of including these interpretations of the event itself - it is understood as a particular and non-ordinary ('mystical') intentional action, communication or warning. In order to convey this in our conceptual terms, this may be termed the *address* of the omen. The omen is not simply meaningful, it is *meant*; and because its meant-ness depends not on logical predication but on affectivity, the omen is addressed to the individual for whom it is felt to be meant.¹⁹ By corollary, in seeking an omen or in responding to the spirit-world, it is a common (though not exclusive) pattern for the primitive in turn to specifically address the volitional agency: prayers, appeals and imprecations are offered up, not only to spirits in general, but to named spirits and ancestors.

In the first of the two main quotations from Lévy-Bruhl given above, he

¹⁷ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) p.59.

¹⁸ Lévy-Bruhl (1923) p.142.

¹⁹ Address is my term, not Lévy-Bruhl's. Divinatory address is affective, contextual and contingent, and depends on the circumstantial meant-ness for the participant(s) who 'just happen' to be involved. The foundation of the unique case in its contingent context is explored in Cornelius (1994/2003) ch.11.

suggests that the primitive attitude to divination 'cannot be expressed in our thought'; this polarised view is characteristic of his earlier work. However, there need not be a complete impasse. Lévy-Bruhl's final view is that 'there is a mystical mentality which is more marked and more easily observable among 'primitive peoples' than in our own societies, but it is present in every human mind.'²⁰ This widening of scope suggests an extension of his approach to divinatory and related phenomena wherever they may manifest. Where an abstractive mode becomes dominant, we expect the collective patterns shaping and reshaping divinatory practice to show complex variations, differing with each culture and historical epoch. Nevertheless, if Lévy-Bruhl's supposition is correct, then it provides a theoretical basis for examining the thought process involved across times and cultures.

We are therefore able to pose basic questions to divinatory practice, historical and contemporary, sophisticated and primitive: does divination entail an altered mode of thinking, a switch from an everyday orientation to the 'mystical mentality'? Further, to what extent does this entail spirit-agency? The alternative formulation is to ask whether divination is a matter of our ordinary cognitions, thought processes, and logic, based on the cultural patterns and beliefs, reasonable or otherwise, of practitioners. We can see that this debate is of a piece with the dispute over participation; only the theorist who accepts the feasibility of Lévy-Bruhl's description of participation is likely to accept the possibility of a similar 'mystical' process in divination.

With Lévy-Bruhl's help we have established an argument for *address* and the *unique case* as primary elements in the hermeneutics of divination. However, utilising his thesis depends on sustaining a distinction between ordinary and mystical cognition, the latter founded in *participation mystique*, and demonstrating that this

²⁰ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) p.101.

distinction applies generally to divination. There is no doubt that it is applicable to some practices of divination, especially those involving altered states of consciousness, for instance in ritual or trance-induced states. But, just as Lévy-Bruhl's description of primitive mentality has been criticised by many anthropologists, so there are major forms of divination that do not seem to involve any special cognitive process. If this is so, some qualification and development of the original thesis is required. With these questions in mind, I turn to accounts of divination that do not require special skills or initiation, and which do not induce any obvious *abaissement*, which is the hallmark of the affectivity seen by Lévy-Bruhl as characteristic of the working of the mystical.

Binary and non-symbolic divination

Selected accounts of traditional African divination are discussed with two main purposes in view. The first purpose is to further delimit the category of inductive divination, and to indicate primary hermeneutic elements that, it is argued, are characteristic of divinatory interpretation as a whole, and across cultures. We are therefore continuing with the project of defining terms of hermeneutic analysis begun above. The second purpose is to suggest a necessary qualification to the fundamental thesis of Lévy-Bruhl, since the forms discussed here do not immediately match his descriptions of participation. I start with accounts of elementary binary forms offered by E.E. Evans-Pritchard in his well-known monograph on divinatory and magical practice amongst the Azande, undertaken between 1929 and the late 1930's.²¹ Evans-Pritchard is an ideal source for our purposes, not only because of the authority of his fieldwork, but also because he is an attentive and fair critic of Lévy-Bruhl. Like many anthropologists of his generation, he has to deal with or rebut the French philosopher's theories.

²¹ E.E. Evans-Pritchard *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937). The abridged edition (1976) includes a useful introduction describing the context and influence of the original work, with additional details on Azande culture; significant material on the methods of divination has however been omitted.

The binary forms discussed by Evans-Pritchard depend on a conventionally predetermined pair of opposite responses, essentially a 'yes' or a 'no', and do not entail further symbolic interpretation; for this reason I designate them as non-symbolic forms of inductive divination. The most authoritative of these binary oracles is the Poison Oracle, where a chicken would be given *benge* poison, and its death or survival would be taken as the oracle's response 'yes' or 'no' to a question put to it. In gaining the trust of the Azande, Evans-Pritchard regularly used this oracle and took its verdicts seriously: 'I may remark that I found this as satisfactory a way of running my home and affairs as any other I know of'.²² The possibility of an effective usage of an oracle without sharing fundamental beliefs of the culture in which it arises is an intriguing subsidiary question.

The *mapingo* oracle is a useful starting point in illustrating the Zande attitude to the most elementary forms of divination.²³ This oracle is used to determine whether a proposed new location or dwelling will be fortunate for an individual. Most Azande oracles are the preserve of men, but this oracle may be employed by women and children. Three smooth and firm large twigs are cut to about 10 to 15 cm in length; two are placed side by side on the ground concerned and the third is laid gently on them, lengthwise, in such a way that if the twigs are disturbed by a draught or a small creature then they will separate, allowing the third twig to drop to the earth. A brief invocation is made, and the twigs are left overnight. If the twigs remain undisturbed then it is a fortunate omen.

²² Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.270 (1976, p.126): a magnificently unorthodox statement for a European anthropologist of his generation. Cf. p.367, where he comments on the efficacy of the rubbing-board oracle when approached in the correct way (ie. not with a desire to immediately test its accuracy): 'when I asked it questions in more general terms, as the Zande does, it gave me straight affirmative or negative replies, and usually correct ones.'

²³ Evans-Pritchard (1937) pp.358-9. 'Zande' is the singular of 'Azande', and the words are often used interchangeably by Evans-Pritchard.

The *mapingo* is a minor oracle, and its showing is therefore a minor showing. It may be underwritten or annulled by a more authoritative divination; in effect, therefore, an individual receiving an answer that is not trusted or seems disadvantageous has recourse to a more authoritative oracle, such as the rubbing board,²⁴ or the termite oracle. Here two sticks are placed in a termite-run overnight; whichever stick is eaten gives the answer.²⁵ The Azande assume the termites are listening to their request, but they may also address their enquiry to the trees which provide the sticks, suggesting that 'the oracle as a whole' is considered to provide an answer, rather than a specific intelligence of either termites or trees.

The most authoritative of all, above even the pronouncements of the witch-doctors, is the Poison Oracle. There is a definite ranking of these oracles, and the result of a higher-ranked oracle will not be further tested by an oracle inferior to it.²⁶ This makes evident that we need to distinguish *a generalised truth-status granted to the realm of the oracular* from the specific manifestation of the oracular in any particular instance. This necessitates in each divination an act of validation by the one seeking the oracle, who must decide as to its meaningfulness, and whether to act on its advice; validation or non-validation is inseparable from the act of divination

²⁴ Evans-Pritchard (1937) pp.358-74. The most frequently consulted of Azande oracles, used by certain middle aged or old men (who need not be witch-doctors), who make their own rubbing boards after having taken appropriate medicines ('medicine' = a potion made from various items, and imbued with power). A small wooden device consisting of a 'male' top is pushed over a 'female' surface with a handle, held firmly by the operator. Medicine oil, and some water, is put on the surface. In a consultation the top is pushed firmly over the female surface. If it sticks on being pushed over the female surface, this is considered to be 'affirmative' or a specific indicator (for instance, if a name is mentioned to the oracle); a smooth slide is usually taken to be 'no' or no indication. If the board alternately sticks and runs, it shows that the oracle is not prepared to answer.

²⁵ Evans-Pritchard (1937) pp.352-7. This is available to men and women. Two branches from different types of trees, *dakpa* and *kpopo* are stuck into the termite run. The different trees have a different symbolic status in that *dakpa* signals misfortune for the enquirer or his family if this is eaten; *kpopo* signals good fortune. If both branches are eaten it is a complex answer showing there are qualifying conditions at work in the situation; neither branch eaten shows the oracle is not responding.

²⁶ Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.352.

itself. This is why we encounter a pragmatic attitude amongst users of divination, with the possibility of a negotiation of oracles, where one is played off against another.

Even where an oracle is granted near-ultimate authority, as with the Poison Oracle conducted under the direction of the Chief,²⁷ the highest principle of Azande law prior to European colonisation, the principle of validation remains in operation. The Chief may decide that the oracle-medicine has been subverted by sorcery, or otherwise exercise his prerogative of justice and mercy.

It is possible to distinguish major components in play in the interpretation of divination even in the simplest incidents, revealing the tension that exists between the authority granted to the realm of the oracular and the necessity of choice at the heart of the particular instance of interpretation. There is a coming together of the intention to divine, the formal act of divination, and a validation (acceptance or rejection) of the particular divination. The 'meaning' of the divination, and its efficacy in further action by the individual, resides in this complex of acts and understandings. With the binary oracles of the Azande, the formal ritual of divination, its interpretation, its validation, and its following through into worldly action, are quite likely to be undertaken by one and the same individual; however, in more sophisticated divinatory forms these functions emerge as distinct roles taken up by, or negotiated between, different individuals, the diviner and the enquirer. This theme is developed further in the current study.

Truth and Presentiment

The principal foundation of any possibility of divination is a belief in oracles and omens. By 'belief' is meant something more than the theoretical positing of a

²⁷ Evans-Pritchard (1937) pp.292-3, 343-4.

possible truth to oracles, but a commitment in practice to the taking of oracles and to the enactment of what oracles show. In common with all traditional and primitive cultures known to anthropologists, the Azande in general take for granted that there is a realm of the oracular, and that it has within its scope an unquestioned authority of truthfulness. It is 'truth'. Individuals will vary considerably in their use of divination, and in the trust they place in particular forms and in particular practitioners, but any scepticism is likely to be within the context of an acceptance of the unquestioned foundation of oracular truth: 'Azande are only sceptical of particular oracles and not oracles in general'.²⁸ The belief in oracles and omens characteristic of primitive culture is the necessary taken-for-granted context, the *presentiment* which allows in advance the granting of meaning to the divination or the omen. I have chosen 'presentiment' as a key idea in the study of divination since the word is appropriate from a strictly hermeneutic point of view and in addition is commonly employed in descriptions of clairvoyance, divination etc., to indicate a paranormal future intimation. In this text the word will be used without the hyphen, but this should be imagined when it is being employed in its definite hermeneutic sense.

In a culture that accepts omens, their previsionary potential, and a faith that they shall show themselves when needed, is granted to them in advance of any particular showing. This presentiment is therefore the prerequisite basis for taking up any omen as meaningful even where its specific meaning remains obscure. The particular forms of divination, the mechanics and methods, are of a secondary status to this presentiment. Individuals are likely to recognise it and therefore recognise the intentionality of divination, even if this intention is articulated in a form of practice they have never before encountered. This founding presentiment constitutes a universal element of divination, identifiable across cultures.

²⁸ Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.350.

Evans-Pritchard's admission that he employed several Azande oracles, in particular the Poison Oracle, but also the rubbing board, is perhaps an incidental provocation for some of his academic peers; it carries wider significance for our current inquiry. It raises a question mark against the universal validity of the presentiment of divination discussed above. The question arises because it would hardly be satisfactory to declare that simply because Evans-Pritchard, or a curious modern reader of his text, does not see things as do the Azande villagers then what he has done is not 'really' divination, especially if a divinatory result is allowed to influence his conduct. In the case of the ethnographer who is a participant observer in the culture, then such practice is part of immersion in the life of the tribe, as important as speaking the language and honouring, if not wholly following, the mores and taboos. But this example reminds us that there is necessarily a halfway house in such practices, where they are 'gone along with' either as a matter of social convention, or as an experiment for the curious-minded.

Even within a culture steeped in oracles many divinations may therefore be undertaken in a provisional or even sceptical manner, with a commitment that is conventional or ambiguous rather than whole-hearted. This, however, should not obscure the collective and cultural foundation of understanding enframing the act: namely that divination bears upon meaningfulness and truth, revealing certain things in a way that goes beyond ordinary modes of perception and reasoning. It is this relationship with meaningfulness and truth, however variously conceived, that is foundational for divination. It is this that differentiates divination from apparently divination-like procedures, such as selecting individuals by drawing lots, or the convention of throwing a coin to decide the order or direction of play in sport. The distinction is seen when we observe that in these cases the intention of the act is not an inquiry into some hidden meaning but is a matter of convenient procedure established by the agreement of the interested parties. It is therefore a conventional mode of employing a random outcome, rather than an act of divination. The outcome

is likely to favour one of the parties, but however it falls out it is put down to blind chance, a matter of good or bad luck, rather than to any discernible meaning in the event. We also note that there can be no scope for pragmatic post-facto validation of the outcome - provided there has been an unambiguous toss of the coin, neither the referee nor the team captains are permitted to disagree with the outcome. There lingers a hint of the arbitration of truth characteristic of divination in that all parties understand that an outcome left to chance is necessarily 'fair'. But this is a shadow of divination,²⁹ and even if some individuals involved load the random event with affectivity or a sense of meaningfulness, a common phenomenon with superstitious sports fans, or in effect read the event as an omen, we remain in an obscure halfway territory of divination rather than encountering the meaningful validation and interpretation of divination in its authentic and whole-hearted form.

Although acknowledging variability in attitudes and intentions might appear to weaken the consistency of any analysis, the hermeneutic category of divinatory validation and its relation to meaningfulness remains clearly in view. This may be asserted because at the instant that someone permits their behaviour to be influenced by the outcome of divination on the ground that it might in any degree give a meaningful signification of an otherwise unrecognised truth, then whatever the nature of the presentiment, the act of divination has been fulfilled. Even the individual who simply goes along with what rest of the tribe does has assented to the enactment of divination, whereby a spirit-like or non-causally related signification has been declared to show the truth.

Several of the oracles favoured by the Azande, and in particular their authoritative Poison Oracle, have an elementary binary form, returning a simple yes or no answer to the question put to them. For reasons that will become clear, I refer

²⁹ Our attitude to randomness as an arbiter of truth, shown in the preeminence of statistical methods in modern science, is the inverse of divinatory understanding.

to this and similar modes of inductive divination as *non-symbolic*. This pattern is not restricted to African divination, neither is it an exception for simple binary or single-choice non-symbolic forms to be given a high status; this is evidenced in ancient sources including the *urim* and *thummim* of the early Israelite priests.³⁰ The practice in Roman augury, recorded for military campaigns, involved a yes or no response from chickens pecking or not pecking at corn scattered before them.³¹

The authority of inductive divination is a function not of the mechanics of divination but of the significance of the context, including the status of the one seeking or officiating in the divination. Although it suffers no obvious lack of authority in traditional and classical cultures, the binary form appears crude and limited, since all that is available is yes or no, good fortune or bad fortune, act or do not act. Restricted to a simple choice, validation becomes an equally simple acceptance or rejection, without pragmatic subtlety or any grey area of negotiation. However, from Evans-Pritchard's meticulous account of the Poison Oracle, the elementary binary form is enhanced and given subtlety by a method of cross-referenced multiple submissions of the same question, or directly related questions.³²

For an important matter where much depends on the oracle's answer, the same enquiry may be put in several ways. It might first be put in positive form (should I marry this woman?), so that chicken lives equals 'yes', chicken dies equals 'no'; then repeated for the reverse outcome, so that chicken dies equals 'yes', chicken lives equals 'no'; and then reversed in meaning (will marriage to this woman bring ill-fortune to me?), so that chicken lives equals 'yes' (therefore do not marry) and chicken dies equals 'no' (therefore no harm in the marriage). This is just one example

³⁰ *Urim* and *thummim*: see Chapter 8.

³¹ See Chapter 6.

³² Evans-Pritchard (1937) ch.III pp.299ff.

of a variety of permutations of enquiry and response available in a divination session involving the ritual administration of poison to four or five separate chickens in turn. It is usual for other enquirers, or proxies attending on their behalf, to put their own different questions to one or more of the chicken trials, so that at any instant the chicken's survival might determine a 'yes' or 'no' for several unrelated questions. This multiple usage may reflect the fact that the Poison Oracle involves a degree of preparation for an established householder, quite apart from the difficulties and expense of obtaining the *benge* poison and the sacrifice of valuable chickens. However, it seems likely that beyond this material consideration the greater significance of the oracle lies in the social nature of the event. The tribesman, says Evans-Pritchard, is never happier than when he is attending the Poison Oracle and discussing the implications of its results with his fellows. For Azande culture, the Poison Oracle creates a binding weave of common concern and serves as an arbiter of truth and conduct.³³

Establishing the Poison Oracle's consistency over the divinatory session is crucial to its validation. An ideal session giving assurance to all participants will be where there is a balance of chickens living and chickens dying, say two or three of each, with consistent answers given to multiple or reversed questions. If there is inconsistency because all the chickens live, then the *benge* is weak or exhausted. If the oracles are inconsistent because too many of the chickens die, then the *benge* is strong and unruly, and its wildness means that it is not prepared to answer truly. There remains the further occasional possibility of sorcery or witchcraft interfering with the oracle in order to cover the tracks of a guilty party.³⁴

It is clear from a consideration of the Poison Oracle that the form of the

³³ Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.261, including citation of other anthropologists: 'The oracle is one of the most important institutions of social life'. On the pleasurable nature of oracle-enquiry, p.91.

³⁴ Evans-Pritchard (1937) pp.329-35.

response does not involve symbolism. 'Chicken live' or 'chicken die' may arbitrarily mean 'yes', 'no', 'lucky' or 'unlucky', depending on the prior choice of the diviner in that instance. If we return briefly to the *mapingo* oracle, we might be tempted to speculate that the dislocation of the twigs is suggestive of a disturbance in the harmony of the proposed location, perhaps even of the 'fall' of whatever might be built there, prefigured by the fall of the middle twig. This is an appealing possibility, and it may enhance the plausibility and appeal, and therefore the cultural authority, of this particular oracle. However, what is of primary importance is not symbolic appropriateness but an unambiguous result one way or the other, capable of interpretation by a non-specialist diviner and readily agreed upon by his or her associates.

Since the binary form involves a non-symbolic conventional or predetermined pair of responses, the oracle's decision does not require a mediating interpretation. No special skill is required to interpret the answer 'yes' or 'no', although experience in the conventions of the Poison Oracle will be necessary to deal with the variables of validation raised by inconsistent oracles. The binary form is therefore publicly accessible and suited to the lay or non-initiated diviner. The characteristic of oracular immediacy in non-symbolic inductive divination, requiring no intermediate act of interpretation, is not in principle limited to the binary form. It is found in trivial popular expressions of European divination such as 'Napoleon's Oracle' or the Victorian Flower Oracle, where by a purely mechanical procedure a specific answer, laid out in advance in a table of answers, is derived for the question put to the oracle.

The commonplace nature of much divination, conducted by ordinary villagers rather than by ritual specialists or witch-doctors, raises a question concerning the adequacy of Lévy-Bruhl's definitions. These practices, while empirically ill-founded according to our preconceptions, are nevertheless often conducted in a relatively rational manner; they may involve public and non-expert

participation, and they do not appear to depend on marked alterations in consciousness. The Poison Oracle or the Rubbing-Board Oracle are not casually conducted, but they do not carry the weight of supernatural trappings sometimes associated with divination. The Poison Oracle medicine, *benge*, is talked about in a literal and practical way. On the other hand, if we start to pull apart Lévy-Bruhl's analysis, we are left with a problem of defining the spectrum of practices commonly grouped, across cultures, as 'divination'. In other words, there is an immense variety of practices and behaviours named under this heading, yet despite this the practice is broadly identifiable across cultures. Every culture knows people who make divination or contact the spirits, and every culture has recourse to these people to seek out their answers to both practical and spiritual questions.

Part of the problem lies with Lévy-Bruhl's early polarised statement of 'pre-logical' mentality, leading to a definition of participation seemingly removed both from some commonplace primitive practice and from our own contemporary experience. Lévy-Bruhl's later thinking reduces the polarisation; however, a more satisfactory model of the 'cognitive continuum' has been suggested. This is capable of bringing the essential insights of *participation mystique* within a broader scope, without losing the great relevance of Evans-Pritchard's findings.

The Cognitive Continuum

The *cognitive continuum* represents a major contribution to the study of divination. It is the name given by Barbara Tedlock to a concept derived from her own field studies, and from observations by other anthropologists.³⁵ Tedlock notes that descriptions given by diviners themselves commonly distinguish distinct modes of knowing through divination, located along a cognitive spectrum. As an illustration of this understanding, Tedlock refers to a graphic question-and-answer session

³⁵ Tedlock (2001). A tripartite division of *methods* of divination is perhaps self-evident. The importance of Tedlock's approach resides in seeing these methods as forming a continuum.

between M. Kohler, a white doctor, and Sikhumbana, an experienced Zulu *sangoma* (or *isangoma*), published in 1941. I give this section of text in full because of its significance with respect to various facets of primitive divination discussed in this and other chapters, and especially the idea of 'medicine':

Question: How is divination done?

Answer: There are three ways:-

1. Divination through *imilozi*

This is done with the medicines of the ancestor spirits. These are medicines used to make the diviners vomit, so that the spirits may speak by whistling. These *imilozi* do not speak from the person of the diviner but from the roof of the hut, and then the diviner interprets what the spirit has said. If something has got lost, the spirits are consulted and explain in what place it is. Or if the owner of a lost article asks them to fetch it, they do so and he gets it back. The spirits can bring the things to where the *isangoma* and the owner are, and lay it before them.

2. Divining with bones

Here the *isangoma* is given enlightenment about the bones by the medicine which he prepares and uses as an emetic, in this fashion that when he whisks up the medicine, he puts the bones in it, and takes them out again when he has vomited. He puts bones in the medicine so that they will tell him exactly what his client wants. It is the medicine which will show the bones (what to reveal).

When a person comes to a diviner, he says, "I have come to consult the bones," but without saying more. Thereupon the *isangoma* throws

his bones, and names all the matters his client is complaining about.

When the *isangoma* has divined correctly, he gets the payment he demands, and this fee varies according to the nature of the case.

3. Divining with the head

A diviner who divines by his head (without any tangible device to help him), instructs his client to contradict him if he should say what was not true, but if he spoke the truth to cry, "*Siyavuma*" (We assent).

Should a person maintain that the diviner has not told the truth, the latter says, "Very well, I do not take your money," for he only takes payment if he has divined correctly.³⁶

According to Tedlock, divination through the spirits is *intuitive*, while at the other end of the spectrum we find a rational and *inductive* interpretation of the arrangement of bones informed by the medicine (in our modern view, falling out by chance). Between these poles is divination with the head, an *interpretive* approach 'which is neither purely a non-rational possession nor a purely rational inductive process of examination of tangible objects or natural events'. The intuitive pole manifests in an affective *presentation*, a direct experience, bodily sensation, or spirit-possession. The rational-inductive interpretation, entering into narrative and communicable expression, becomes *re-presentation*, where the meaning is successively negotiated in dialogue or talked-about as an interpretation.³⁷ The meaning arises wholly in the unique case: 'divination is *applied* epistemology: it does not operate independently of the particular question before the diviner and the client.'³⁸

³⁶ Kohler, M. (1941) p.28; referred to and briefly summarised in Tedlock (2001) p.193.

³⁷ Tedlock (2001) pp.191-2.

³⁸ Tedlock (1992) p.171.

A significant feature of Barbara Tedlock's approach is that she offers a theoretical distinction of modes that gives them complementary rather than contradictory functions. This in turn allows us to locate common themes in a spectrum of divinatory practices, from simple binary oracles to trance possession, from rational objectivity to *participation*, with guesswork, metaphorical narrative and creative imagination moving back and forth along the centre of the spectrum. This represents a decisive advance in our description of divination and our understanding of 'divinatory intelligence'.

Chapter Three

Chicane

Most practices of the people we name as shamans, witch-doctors and medicine-men present our modern rational understanding with an impasse. The logic of much that is done defeats us, it is absurd and often disgusting. Treatments are offered that can have no empirical value, yet the simple primitives seem to believe in them. Primitive healing and divinatory practices are particularly obscure; yet there is in them something elusive and important that the educated modern should seek to accommodate if there is to be any hope of arriving at some understanding of divinatory intelligence. As good a name as any for this elusive quality is the *chicane*. Taking Evans-Pritchard's perceptive observations of the witch-doctors as a starting-point, we may discover that these remarkable individuals have a great deal to teach us about the *chicane* in all cultures, including our own.¹

The inquiry takes its lead from the recognition that the seeming-so of semblance and dissemblance are determinative in securing success in divination for both practitioners and clients. What on the one hand appears as illusion manifests on the other as truth; it is suggested that this is a universal aspect of divination. Before this wide-ranging theoretical conclusion is arrived at, the present task is limited to establishing the viability of such an interpretation for non-modern modes of divination, on the basis of ethnographic accounts of traditional African culture. Even here the subtle nature of the subject requires an indirect approach through witch-doctor healing, which complements their divination. It is

¹ 'Witch-doctors': I use this term in this chapter (rather than the more acceptable shaman, sangoma etc) in deference to Evans-Pritchard's own usage, to avoid clumsy references to his text. This is regarded as a demeaning naming by most modern anthropologists, in my view quite mistakenly since 'witch-doctor' is a relatively straightforward description of one of their principal functions, certainly in Azande culture. The name also connects us with unhappy but relevant features of our own culture's past. The word *shaman*, which in any case belongs to a distinct stream of Finno-Ugric culture, fudges and even romanticises the issue. At stake is that modern anthropologists cannot conceive the possibility of 'witches' in the way that traditional African cultures do.

in their healing practice that the chicane stands out unobscured, and I therefore examine this first. However, before we might broach the subject directly, it will help to explore the idea in our own culture.

The chicane has ramifications for the study of hermeneutics extending beyond traditional culture and beyond the limits of divination. This becomes apparent when it is related to wider categories of symbolic interpretation and to 'double-thinking', a mode of shifting yet discriminating definitions and fluid associations. This mode underlies the possibility of the chicane; it appears in all human dealings beyond the simply literal, and it is difficult to envisage an analysis of, for instance, play, theatre, politics, religion or psychotherapy that did not include double-thinking or an equivalent capacity.² However, it is in the area of what we may broadly term the mystical, the magical and the paranormal, the realms of faerie, enchantment, and the sacred, that double-thinking is fully revealed as a distinctive strategy.

The chicane has parallels in related areas of interest, notably in the studies of alchemy, divination and synchronicity of C.G. Jung. Jung recognised the significance of Mercurius and the 'synchronicity trickster', carrying forward a Platonic metaphor from antiquity and the renaissance.³ Like Ficino mixing his pantheons, the alchemist's Hermes in the same breath is the astrologer's Mercury.⁴ Mercury is the traditional planet of

² Double-thinking takes on a pejorative sense to the extent that it becomes a cloak for thoughtlessness, where it bears comparison with Kant's concept of the 'surreptitious concept' (cf. ch.1 pp.32-3). It is ethically ambivalent in serving both negative and positive ends, as in politics where it may characterise both statesmanship and fascist control; the chilling consequences of the latter are portrayed by George Orwell in *1984*.

³ Amongst extensive material in Jung, see his study 'The Spirit Mercurius' in *Collected Works* 13, IV #217: 'Mercurius, following the tradition of Hermes, is many-sided, changeable, and deceitful.' The trick that Mercurius played on Jung in the middle of his astrological experiment on synchronicity is described by von Franz (1975) p.238. See also Hyde (1992) esp. ch. 7.

⁴ Marsilio Ficino was a master of the method I have termed double-thinking, as in his essay on light and the Sun referred to here. This is 'allegorical and, to that extent, a mystical exercise of the wits'.(Ficino, 1975).

astrology, alchemy, magic - and thieves.⁵ An evocative metaphor is the Greek goddess Mētis, and in this respect Hermes-Mētis present faces of the same phenomenon. Modern commentators have brought forward the essentially metic nature of divination, its cunning intelligence,⁶ and Patrick Curry has related Mētis to Max Weber's theme of enchantment.⁷ Ethnographers have observed a similar relationship of divination and the trickster.⁸ These mythic indications need to be kept in mind; they are all too easily bypassed as delightful but superficial analogies, as if there is 'in fact' some other bread-and-butter way of talking about divination.

There is, however, a question mark about the person and embodiment of the synchronicity trickster, turning this into ambiguous terrain for the simple-minded believer and the ethnographer alike. We may recognise an implicit trickiness in divination, arising from the irregular nature of its phenomena; but how easy is it to make the further move and see the intentional and explicit chicane, where the diviner knowingly plays tricks, too?

It is therefore suggested that the fluid and unbound associative thinking underlying the chicane is also integral to understanding divination, and that knowing diviners may be aware of this. This phenomenon is especially apparent in the intermediate realm of interpretation that proceeds through a to-and-fro of negotiation, both in the mind of the diviner and in dialogue with a client. The process matches the description of the cognitive continuum at work in divination, as brought out by Barbara Tedlock; the mode I am especially interested in here is the mid-spectrum of inference and interpretation.⁹

⁵ Lilly *Christian Astrology* (1647) pp.77-8: 'he is author of subtilty, tricks, devices, perjury, &c'.

⁶ Heaton (1990) see p.11 for the relationship of Mētis and Hermes.

⁷ Curry in Willis & Curry (2004) pp.104-7.

⁸ Shaw (1991) pp.137ff sees the trickster myths of divination as a corrective to one-sided positivistic categories which she suggests are characteristic of interpretation in the tradition of Evans-Pritchard.

⁹ This is 'divination in the head' according to the Zulu diviner Sikhumbana. See the discussion in Chapter 2.

Metaphors of the Chicane

The chicane is an unsettling notion for anyone seeking a sympathetic reading of divination within a single definition of truth. The idea appears at first to belong to the sceptical inquirer, who at best may allow a sociological rendering of divination into a belief-system; as such it fulfils certain social functions but it has no inherent epistemological bite, no truthfulness in-and-of-itself. For our sceptic, since naive belief is readily manipulated by knowing fraudsters, here is the common English usage of 'chicanery' as deception and trickery. Conversely, practitioners of divination expend much energy in assuring everyone that of course this sort of trickiness has nothing whatsoever to do with their particular corner of the universe. A curiosity of these stances is that they complement each other, the naive literalism of some believers mirrored by the reductionism of some theorists. This very polarity becomes a virtue when it lets the diviner pull concealed questions into the open like rabbits out of a hat. Chicane comes to signify both an element within symbolic and divinatory performance, and the game of interpretation for both insider and outsider concerning the mysterious phenomena involved.

'Chicanery' is found in literature as a term for pettifogging legal diversions, designed to deflect the course of justice to the advantage of one of the parties. Chicanes are also practical features in road construction, created for safety or alternatively to enhance racing circuits; here the term designates an artificial bend, intended to force traffic into single file, or to slow it down. These usages may derive from military engineering: chicanes are false battlements or obstructions intended to deceive or hinder an advancing enemy. In all of these cases the semblance influences another party's behaviour; it redirects the intention of the other. It does not 'come from' the real, but is employed 'in order to' produce the real. The idea also has a naturalistic and non-dialogical usage in the 'baffle' (French *chicane*) found in fluid dynamics and in acoustics; in the latter case it diverts air and sound-flow in speakers. Although the semantic thread here become tenuous, it is retained in the image of diverting a movement away from its pre-determined

natural course.¹⁰

Many games involve feints and ploys, and for our purposes an illuminating thread of the metaphor comes from card games, where the term means 'void of trumps'.¹¹ Chicane is a complement to the *trump* which may override the highest ranking power of an ordinary suit and take the trick; this word in turn derives from *triomphe* or triumph; the art of the chicane supports the trump, for that is its goal, to triumph. In older conventions of Bridge and some forms of Whist, chicane is a term for a hand holding no cards in the trump suit. Here we find the connotation of the *empty hand*; the hand is void of trumps and therefore unlikely to triumph, and skill is required in bidding and playing to a successful conclusion. In partnership games of the Whist family, coded communication is required to confound the enemy and create a successful bid. The no-trump state is the unartful state of nature, the state before the game, where each suit is empty; the game begins with bidding, in the sequence bidding-bluffing-playing-tricking-taking. Consider also Poker's duplicitous *bluff*, which is a major part of the art of the game. Here by deception an empty hand may force out rivals and rake in the pot; alternatively a full hand is played as if empty, drawing an opponent into a trap.

Granny's Ring

Chicane depends on a capacity of associative and double-thinking. Its hallmarks are allegory, metonymy and metaphor, paradoxically compounding subtlety and concrete simplicity. It sometimes proceeds by simple and sometimes absurd assertion, and by hint and innuendo. Its style as well as its significance for divination are exemplified in the

¹⁰ Amongst minor usages the term is reported to exist in the slang of petty criminals as 'chic', meaning having no cash. (source: Wikipedia) A hustler starts with an empty hand and ends up in pocket. The French *chic* = elegant has a separate origin in German *schicken* = 'to outfit oneself', which is not without a certain semantic resonance.

¹¹ 'Chicane: a term from Bridge Whist referring to a hand that is void of trumps. It was scored the same as three honours. In Contract Bridge, the term is obsolete in its original sense, though it is occasionally used to describe a void suit, as "chicane in hearts".' ed. Ben Cohen & Rhoda Barrow *The Bridge Player's Encyclopedia* International Edition (London: Paul Hamlyn, 1964) p.63.

following anecdote of Granny's Ring.

I have from time to time experimented with dowsing, which, as with many simple divinatory forms, has an erratic and unpredictable occasional capacity to yield useful results. I am not an especially effective dowser, so on one occasion when I sought an answer to diet problems I asked a thoughtful friend with more talent to help me dowse samples of food hidden by her from my view. The trial was repeated by my hiding the samples for her to dowse, asking the ring to indicate which foods were bad or good for me. Good foods were to be indicated by a strong clockwise circling of the ring; bad foods by a counterclockwise movement; indifferent foods by little or no movement.

For the experiment my friend used a gold ring on a thread; the ring was precious to her, having belonged to her long-departed grandmother, whom I never knew. The experiment yielded mainly inconsistent results, but that is not what stuck in my mind. What stayed with me is our discussion of the principles involved, which succeeded in articulating the state of mind in which we both approached the divination. We agreed that by using her ring we were *asking Granny to help us*. This goes beyond even *asking the ring to show us*, but we were doing that, too. How can one 'ask' either an inanimate object or someone who is dead to do anything? Therefore from one point of view this is simply a figure of speech; but behind this figure it is a reasonable suggestion that this way of talking gives voice to an affect we acknowledge with that particular ring, and which we have invested in it. By evoking an imaginative and emotional element, the experiment becomes special and charged with significance, which in some way allows a subliminal knowledge to show itself, leading the operator to 'unconsciously' vibrate the thread and tweak the ring to give the right answer. Perhaps my body already knows what is good for it. Put this way, I have described a theory of amplification of subliminal knowledge through physiological responses. This type of explanation is often advanced as a possible 'scientific' theory of dowsing, and it might therefore explain any successes from our experiment.

This seems to be a reasonable theory, yet it is not quite enough, because it does not capture the *sense and meaningfulness* that go with the experience. This 'sense' is difficult to describe, yet is obvious on reflection. It is about an open-handed stance to reality, an unarticulated *modus operandi* in the face of things. When we question this orientation, within a short stretch of investigation we run into paradox; but it is characteristic of this stance *not* to track back to initial premises or draw out resulting conclusions. It is a simple matter to expose the paradoxes. It does not take the skill of a lawyer to see that the logical conclusion of saying 'let granny help us' is to posit the survival after death of a discarnate entity of - or associated with - granny; this entity has furthermore maintained its or her wits sufficiently over the decades to be with us in the proximity of her ring, and to have the acumen with regard to diet - my diet - to know *how* to help. I do not, and did not at the time, see the need to push through to this particular logical conclusion, but neither did I seek to deny it. In any case there was no reason to suppose that granny, whether incarnate or discarnate, would have had much useful to say about my diet.

If I do not wish to be taken down the road of granny-survival, then there is a different possible interpretation, that we have adopted an animistic approach to granny's ring. This suggests that we must be attributing some power to the ring itself, perhaps passed into it by granny in her lifetime. Then it is the ring that seems to have this wonderful capacity, imbued with some mysterious intelligent power. But for my part I am not sure that is what I think, either. I have therefore proceeded in defiance of known explanations, since in choosing to leave the matter open and undefined I have resisted the full implications of the several explanatory possibilities. This defiance is not obscurantism, however, but rather a *resistance to mutually exclusive logical conclusions*. I remain open to possibilities because each of these suggestions, both the normal 'reasonable' conclusion of subliminal amplification, and the two paranormal variants (granny-survival and animism), seem to me to have a shade of truth to them, and none of them offend my general orientation. Crucially, therefore, the act of dowsing, and likewise the possibility of moving on any act of a symbolic, ritual or divinatory nature, may occur and be effective without requiring worked out conclusions and without requiring that 'good reasons' are

established to justify the act.

This means that in the act of dowsing, to the extent that I am thinking discursively about dowsing, then I am thinking in two or three contradictory ways. This certainly will not do for scientific experiments, but it is surely how human beings decide most things of importance, which, despite our declarations, are only inconsistently worked to their logical conclusions or founded in coherent rational principles. Logical principles are abstractions drawn from consideration of human being, not determinants of human being; where this is not well understood 'good reasons' all too readily become tyrannies of thought.

With the suggestion that one may think in two or three inconsistent ways about a thing, we come to the nub of the idea of knowing that can hold apparently inconsistent possibilities in one and the same act and intention. This is what I mean by 'double-thinking'. I have not come across much satisfactory thinking about double-thinking; we should however avoid the temptation, common in anthropology, of simply equating this phenomenon with Freud's 'primary process'. If we are to follow Freud it might be better described as a quite mindful partial-discursive, a play of secondary cognitive process that evokes affective and imaginative associations but is not bound by them. The discursive threads are lightly held, as in free-ranging conversation, and they are not grasped and rolled up tight towards their conclusions. The effect is to strip the event of any single overriding explanation. This cedes the authority of the real to the event, the fact of the act.

A comment from Evans-Pritchard, mentioned in the previous chapter, is relevant here.¹² The Azande have a termite-oracle where they receive an answer depending on whether termites strip bare one or other (or both or neither) of two branches left overnight. The Azande understand that the termites can hear their question, but they might also address the trees from which the branches are taken. So does the oracle depend on the termites - or on the trees? What is their theory for how the oracle works? From the many

¹² Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.353.

conversations Evans-Pritchard records on related matters, it is obvious that the Azande would find it curious and even foolish to push this question very far. Evans-Pritchard says that it must be 'the oracle as a whole' that is taken to provide an answer; this seems true enough, but we need to add that the Azande are very likely adopting the same light-touch double-thinking that has been discussed above, where either *no* explanation is needed, or depending on the circumstance several inconsistent explanations could be entertained at the same time, if so desired.

The Chicane and Primitive Mentality

We arrive here at a fruitful comparison with the theories of Lévy-Bruhl. In his terminology, this same phenomenon is characteristic of 'primitive mentality', which likewise eschews what we would term logical consistency when it comes to some of the most significant dealings in life. According to Lévy-Bruhl, this mode is predominant in the realm of the mystical and magical:

In our thought, the conditions of the possibility of experience are universally valid for every experience, past and to come; what does not satisfy them cannot have been real nor ever become so. In the primitive man's world-view the conditions of the possibility of experience such as we conceive them are valid only for ordinary experience; the mystical experience, the extraordinary experience is not subject to them.¹³

As always, Lévy-Bruhl's use of 'mystical' and 'extraordinary' makes his expression of ideas seem over-dramatic, especially since the Azande generally treat their oracles in a matter-of-fact way. However, the fact remains that his approach brings out an important distinction, that when it comes to matters of 'medicine', witchcraft and oracles, the Azande do adopt this open and associative 'non-logical' mode of thinking which is neither practical

¹³ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) p.53.

nor necessary for everyday affairs.¹⁴ The background of the modern educated person puts him or her at a disadvantage here, because centuries - if not millennia - of abstractive Western philosophy have steeped us in a logic of universal rational categories entirely at variance with such partial and non-concluded double-thinking. As Lévy-Bruhl observes, in contrast to the primitive 'we do not see another sense in which a story may be said to be true or not true; there are not two ways for an event, an act, a thing to be objectively real'.¹⁵ Perhaps the multiple knowing of the primitive real is the message of Granny's Ring.

The Witch-bone Chicane

Evans-Pritchard makes a cardinal observation of the functional relationship of witchcraft, magic and oracles amongst the Azande: 'the two functions of a witch-doctor are to divine and to extract objects of witchcraft from the bodies of the sick', and sickness is closely bound up with witchcraft, so that any significant illness is held to be a result of its action.¹⁶ This is a common pattern in African culture. '*Witchcraft*' is something of a misnomer, since its action is an erratic and occasional outcome of ill-intention; in Evans-Pritchard's view, witches are not conscious agents even if their enemies claim they are.¹⁷ Except in very serious instances the 'witch' is usually forgiven as soon as the error is acknowledged and appropriate ritual and reparation is made. Amongst the Azande, the power manifesting in the witch is hereditary, and is effective without magical ritual. Where magical ritual is intentionally employed to harm others, this involves bad medicine and is in the distinct category of sorcery; this is a crime which is abhorred.¹⁸ The principal function of witch-doctor divination is to seek out the ill effects of witchcraft and sorcery

¹⁴ Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.340: '...the main purpose of the oracle and its principal value to the Azande lie in its ability to reveal the play of mystical forces'.

¹⁵ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) p.63.

¹⁶ Evans-Pritchard (1937) pp.235,257.

¹⁷ *ibid.* part I ch VIII 'Are witches conscious agents?'

¹⁸ *ibid.* pp.387,391.

and to determine the appropriate cure or response.

The witch-doctors come together in an informal but nevertheless tightly-knit association in their local area, with a shared understanding and practices known only to themselves. They have an extensive knowledge of herbs, which includes what the Westerner will term their empirical attributes as well as their magical functions. Their songs and dances are well known and enjoyed in the community, but their most important methods are a closely guarded secret.¹⁹ Leechcraft, the apparent extraction of objects from the bodies of patients, is one of these secrets. The practice is common to witch-doctors not just in Africa,²⁰ but in primitive culture world-wide. As in Azande culture, this practice rests on an understanding that although illnesses are literally embodied, they are nevertheless magical or psychic in origin. In this respect, they are treated in much the same way as other misfortunes befalling a person. The magical interpretation is the cultural norm, the rule rather than the exception, shared by the witch-doctor and the patient.

Before commencing treatment, the Zande witch-doctor privately cuts a small piece of material into a 'witch-bone', or witchcraft object. He hides it between his fingers or under a fingernail. A layman prepares a poultice, and into this the witch-doctor covertly inserts the witchcraft object before placing the poultice on the patient's body. A powerful medicine, *mboro*, is rubbed across the mouth of the patient, and also into a cut in the affected part of the patient's body. The poultice is removed and examined. When the object is found the witch-doctor shows it to the onlookers and says 'Heu! Well I never! So that's the thing from which he was dying'.²¹ The same act is repeated; according to Evans-

¹⁹ *ibid.* p.153: 'In spite of the methods of investigation I employed, my informants did not communicate their entire knowledge to me, even indirectly, and [it] suggests that there were other departments of their knowledge which they did not disclose'.

²⁰ *Ibid.* p.153. In Zande culture leechcraft is also sometimes practised by other healers, both men and women; Evans-Pritchard does not discuss the methods of these healers.

²¹ *ibid.* p.235.

Pritchard's informant, Kamanga, 'a man who is good at cheating makes use of the same object about three times'. Some witch-doctors are highly skilled illusionists, comparable to modern stage magicians.²²

Amongst a portfolio of other tricks are simulating blood with the juice of red berries, and producing worms.²³ A related procedure is employed where sickness is determined to have occurred because a witch has stolen and hidden the *likikpwo*, a psychic agent belonging to a person. After dancing the dance of divination, its location will be discovered by the witch-doctor who produces a previously prepared dried rat-gut. This is thumped back into the body of the patient to effect the cure.²⁴

Evans-Pritchard gained unique access to these secrets, on account of his immersion in the culture, through the respect in which he appears to have been held, and through the fortuitous circumstance of rivalry between two leading practitioners together with the desire of Kamanga, his servant and informant, to become initiated by them.²⁵ Evans-Pritchard assisted with the necessary gifts to both Badobo, Kamanga's teacher, and to the formidable Bögwözu, a visiting witch-doctor from the Baka tribe. There seems to be no report of hostility to Kamanga or to Evans-Pritchard as a result of these researches, although it is significant that following the humiliating denouement recounted below, Bögwözu left the district.²⁶

Given Kamanga's known role as an informant, the witch-doctors held back from his full initiation. The frustrating stalemate lasted until Evans-Pritchard called out

²² Skill of the witch-doctors: see for instance Evans-Pritchard (1937) pp.238-9.

²³ *ibid.* p.236.

²⁴ *ibid.* pp.237-8.

²⁵ *ibid.* pp.152-3: 'when informants fall out, anthropologists come into their own'.

²⁶ *ibid.* p.232.

'Badobo's chicanery and Bögwözu's bluff' in an exquisite counter-chicane.²⁷ One of his houseboys fell mildly ill, and Evans-Pritchard seized the opportunity to suggest that Kamanga should operate immediately, and if this turned out successfully then Bögwözu should receive his full payment for the completion of the training. The procedure necessitated the attendance of Bögwözu. While the trainee was making a cut on the boy's abdomen, Evans-Pritchard saw Bögwözu secrete a small piece of charcoal in the poultice. He intercepted the poultice, and pretending to casually comment on it, he felt for the hidden charcoal and removed it. Bögwözu may not have realised the trick that was being played. The charade continued with Kamanga disagreeably surprised not to find the object that he had from his previous supervised practice come to expect. Evans-Pritchard caught a glimpse of Bögwözu moving his hand over the ground, seeking another piece of charcoal to rescue the situation.²⁸ At this point he stopped the proceedings and asked teacher and novice to go to a nearby hut where he challenged the deception. The imposture was admitted, Bögwözu was rewarded with part-payment of his fee, and went his way.

Any concern on Badobo's part about Evans-Pritchard's precipitate intervention appears to have been more than compensated by his relief at seeing the back of a dangerous rival. However, the effect on Kamanga was 'devastating', leaving him in serious doubt about continuing. He soon recovered his poise, and with no further reason for this particular secret to be kept from his European master, Kamanga was granted his initiation. He developed 'a marked degree of self-assurance' so that, like his colleagues, he was well able to rationalise the chicanery of the witch-doctors, and to explain it to Evans-Pritchard.²⁹ Here is Kamanga's description of what was taught to him about the leech chicane:

Witch-doctors treat a sick man and deceive him, saying that they have

²⁷ *ibid.* pp.230-2.

²⁸ *ibid.* p.231.

²⁹ *ibid.* pp.231-2.

taken an object of witchcraft from his body... but, on the other hand, they have put medicine into the sick man's mouth and cut his skin at the part of the body where he is in pain and have rubbed their medicine across the cut... It is the medicine which really cures people... The people think that healing is brought about by the extraction of objects, and only witch-doctors know that it is the medicine which heals people.³⁰

Chicane and Embodiment

Why is such a deception necessary? We may speculate that this is because sickness embodies literal truth in a physical dimension that is out in the open, public and undeniable. In an empirical and material sense the witch-doctor must often fail in this embodied half of the work. People will continue to sicken and die, and everyone appreciates this fact of life and death. Despite the qualifiers and caveats that offer leeway, success is measured by health, or at least by amelioration, where failure is suffering. The spectacular ideal is for us to feel with our own bodies and see with our own eyes that we are healed, and for others around us to see this, too. Many truths may be symbolised in the body, its woes might be sociopathic, psychic and obscure, but those woes are manifest, so that when the patient says 'I am sick' the literal truth of the matter and the material facts of the case become one.

In this sense, the body does not brook interpretation, but it is exactly at this point that the chicane of the witch-doctor does its work, between seeming and being, matching the material 'given' of the illness with the material given of the witchcraft-object. The patient must perforce attend the material and physical given of the illness, since this is

³⁰ *ibid.* pp.235-6. We might speculate on the translation and moral nuance of the word 'deceive' for Kamanga, and we should be alert to the possibility that his response bends to the language and conceptualisation of Evans-Pritchard. Such bending to the ethnographer is a problematic issue for participant observation in an alien culture, since it is inherently unlikely that the European will think like the native. However, this subtle consideration does not seem to me to be of an order that would materially affect the present discussion.

what the pain and discomfort of disease demand of our consciousness. By contrast the witch-doctor works on a double level, carrying over material illness to a material symbol - the witchcraft object - which becomes both the carrier and the representative of the non-material psychic matrix of the illness.

There is a dialogical process at work between actor and acted-upon, but different requirements of conscious intention between them, since the witch-doctor knows what the patient thinks, but also knows what the patient *needs*. This presents us with a double mode of interpretation for one and the same act. The patient thinks the illness is *caused by* the object, and its removal removes the illness. The witch-doctor treats the object and its removal as *semblance*, since for him its literal removal does not literally remove the illness, but - crucially - since the removal symbolises the healing, by the chicane of the whole performance he *effects* the healing. This is a good place to return to the card-playing metaphor with which we started, for witch-doctor and patient are playing this game together. The witch-doctor's trump, his manifest triumph, is the removal of the psycho-spiritual complex, the witchcraft that he and his patient agree is the source of illness. Through chicane the witch-doctor trumps the illness. The trick is played in the sleight-of-hand, and the trick that is taken is at the self-same moment the healing of the patient. This is the instance of empirical healing; honours go to the witch-doctor who performs this feat.

Symbolic Instantiation

In considering how the witch-doctor achieves his healing effect, our ordinary naturalistic and positivist concept of cause and effect may let us down, since there are overlapping and double-thinking senses in which the idea of causality is employed in the compact between witch-doctor and patient. Perhaps we need a more subtle and extended analysis to handle the interpretive moves involved, and Aristotle's approach, foundational for pre-enlightenment philosophy, provides a convincing hermeneutic strategy. For the most literal of possible interpretations by a patient, the witchcraft-object is both the *matter* (the material substance) and the *efficient cause* (the active agent) of the sickness. For the witch-doctor, the same object is not in-and-of-itself either the material or the efficient

cause, but is a symbol for both efficient (agent) and *formal* (ideational and intentional) causes. The formal element is the mental reality of the witch's bad motive; this is countered by the intentional mental reality of the healing chicane. That is why the chicane is a symbol, and why healing is a ritual-symbolic act. The *final* cause, to which everything is turned, is the annulling of the malevolent intention of the offending witch, with the consequent well-being of the patient.

The chicane is the symbolic instantiation of the cure in the physical removal of the witchcraft object. The witch-doctor 'knows' this even if he does not use our words. But what does the patient 'know' about this sleight-of-hand? It is not necessary for patients to be naive and credulous, even if often they are. Evans-Pritchard is emphatic that many Azande have a healthy scepticism about their witch-doctors,³¹ but there is no need to suppose that this hinders engagement in the performance where physical need and emotional affect are invoked. The body and the emotions have their own good reasons to suspend judgment where issues of health, life and death are concerned. Perhaps most witch-doctors cheat and are no use most of the time, but this witch-doctor here-and-now *may* be good, and that is what counts. We infer yet again in the attitude of ordinary Azande the softening of logical generalisation and the unbinding of abstraction characteristic of double-thinking and primitive mentality. All that is required is that the patient enters into the one-off performance here-and-now, 'as if' the witchbone removed from his or her body 'really is' the illness removed.

A sympathetic modern interpretation would allow the witch-doctors an erratic modicum of empirical medicine amplified by suggestion and the placebo effect. This may not be an inaccurate representation within a modern and scientific perspective, yet laying out the case in this way nevertheless falls far short of understanding. This is because the clear distinction we make between pairs such as empirical medicine and placebo, literal and symbolic, is a function of *our* conceptual framework and cultural presuppositions, and

³¹ *ibid.*, see for instance pp.165, 183, 191.

therefore of our reality. We face a problem insisted upon by Lévy-Bruhl, and conceded by Evans-Pritchard,³² that there are elements of the primitive mentality that are opaque to us, and which we are consistently prone to misinterpret. Quite apart from cultural nuances lost in translation into European languages, if we accept the likelihood of double-thinking then even apparently straightforward statements may not grant us a reliable understanding of the mental process at work. We also note that at the time of his acting as an informant to Evans-Pritchard, Kamanga was young in the craft. Given the marked reserve of his teachers, their love of allusion and innuendo and the duplex nature of their thinking, we remain with an uncertain hinterland where the paths, shadowy and mysterious for the witch-doctors themselves, are utterly obscure for us. For us to make any advance into this realm requires the uncommon gift of having at least an inkling of those same paths in our own experience, whether this is attained by symbolic and divinatory practice, or whether it springs from inborn *Mētis*.

Defining Medicine

Even without treading obscure paths of our own experience, we will recognise with some clarity a fundamental concept that enables us to take the first step into this hinterland. This resides in the understanding of *medicine*, common not just to the Azande but to primitive thought as a whole: 'it is of mystical causes and cures and not physical causes and cures that Azande speak and towards which they chiefly direct their attention'.³³ Evans-Pritchard counters the suggestion that Azande are 'stating in mystical idiom facts based on observation and experiment'. He allows that some Zande medicines do produce the intended empirical effect, but the Zande does not seek a distinction that we would make between ritual and objective consequences. Medicines that from our

³² Evans-Pritchard's enterprise comes consistently closer to the Lévy-Bruhlian perspective of the late *Notebooks* than he sometimes appears to recognise, and this proximity of thought emerges in the material on witch-doctor practices discussed here. This ambivalence is likely to be a consequence of his acknowledged reaction to the polarised definition of primitive mentality as 'pre-logical' found in Lévy-Bruhl's early work. There are a number of occasions in *Witchcraft, oracles and magic...* where he implicitly sets out to counter this earlier definition. See Evans-Pritchard (1981) p.131.

³³ *ibid.* p.315.

pharmacological understanding are wholly ineffective 'are all alike *ngua*, medicine, and all are operated in magical rites and in much the same manner'.³⁴ This is well brought out in the Zande attitude to the key material agent of the Poison Oracle, *benge*, a red powder prepared from a wild forest creeper; this was used on chickens, and in pre-colonial times occasionally on humans.³⁵ Although from a botanical perspective the creeper of the same name is a poisonous plant, the oracular function of the medicine is not a natural attribute, but depends on it being addressed correctly and employed in the traditional manner, observing appropriate taboos; 'hence Azande say that if it is deprived of its potency for some reason or other it is just an ordinary thing, mere wood'.³⁶ Evans-Pritchard suggests that the Zande would be 'amazed at the credulity' of the European who might attempt controlled experiments in poisoning chickens in order to determine the natural properties of *benge*.³⁷ This would show an astonishing ignorance of 'medicine'.

On this basis we may comprehend something of the potent *mbiro* medicine of the witch-doctors, used for both divination and healing.³⁸ A witch-doctor keeps *mbiro* in a special pot, and mixes it with various herbs and substances; if he falls ill, it is his own *mbiro* that he takes as medicine. There is an intimate relationship between *mbiro* and the witchbone through *ranga*, which is the name for a plant from which witchbone is made, and (it seems by extension) for other witchcraft objects manipulated in healing. *Ranga* is

³⁴ *ibid.* pp.316,448. The efficacy of each medicine is self-contained and operative only for the unique situation for which that medicine is intended. This attitude to medicines is a function of the 'unique case of interpretation'.

³⁵ *ibid.* pp.309-312.

³⁶ *ibid.* p.314, also p.448: 'it is man who manufactures from it the medicine...'

³⁷ *ibid.* p.315. From our scientific perspective, the efficacy of *benge* resides in a compound of the strychnine family. Evans-Pritchard established that Azande have no concept of *benge* as 'literally' poisonous in our simple pharmacological sense - when it kills it kills ritually as an aspect of its function as oracle. This well illustrates the fact that medicines - like illness itself - are all alike taken up by Azande ritually and symbolically, a mode of concern that is not categorially founded in natural properties.

³⁸ *ibid.* p.227.

eaten to create the *mbiro* in the belly of the witch-doctor. This in turn becomes or produces witchcraft-phlegm; a significant moment in the initiation of the novice involves his swallowing a small amount of this substance retched up by his teacher.³⁹ It is in this manner that the transmission of *mbiro* magic is effected; and it is a transmission that comes into play in the chicane. Kamanga explained that his teachers had spoken to him 'with hidden meaning in their words' prior to his knowledge of the witch-bone; they said '*mbiro, mbiro, it is mbiro which is the great curer, don't play the fool with mbiro*'.⁴⁰

The Literal Stop in Interpretation

It is an inescapable element of theory and interpretation that we arrive at a point where we declare what is 'really going on', as opposed to what seems or is commonly thought to be going on. Here is the trading post, the meeting point of metaphoric and literal knowledge. In talking of the literal, it should be borne in mind that literal expressions may at the same time be entirely abstract, philosophical, or theoretical (eg. 'kinship structure'); similarly, a symbolic or metaphoric form may be treated literally (eg. 'underlying the chicane is the Mercurius archetype').⁴¹ This is a stopping-point when we imagine we have to look no further back and behind the phenomena to find another explanation.

This hermeneutic element is itself a device of literal explanation; as such it serves to clarify the several understandings involved in the witch-doctor's chicane. For the most

³⁹ *ibid.* p.225: from the account the term *ranga* may refer also to other objects carrying the same magical potency. There is, perhaps understandably, some ambiguity in Evans-Pritchard's text on the definition of *ranga*.

⁴⁰ *ibid.* p.227.

⁴¹ Moving in a complementary direction to the literal, the symbol, recognised as symbol, is equally the stopping point of interpretation. Examples are archetypes *in themselves* and true religious symbols, such as 'Christ'. This interpretive movement is elusive in ordinary parlance, since symbols spontaneously and continuously metamorphose into literals, concrete or abstract, in the process of thinking and talking; and as suggested in this study, the distinction we have learned to make between 'literal' and 'symbolic' may be less secure than we sometimes imagine.

credulous patients interpretation stops at the surface of events. The chicane has no back-and-behind, and *is not chicane*, since the real happening is the performed event, unseen as chicane. The witchcraft object 'really is' the evil of the illness, its removal literally is the removal of the illness. This is why Kamanga is truly shocked by Evans-Pritchard's exposé of the chicane of Bögwözu; he discovers a hinterland that he never even guessed at, and the veil is torn away without appropriate ritual and without symbolic guards.

The need for a hermeneutic of the chicane becomes pressing as we leave the ordinary villager and seek to penetrate witch-doctor imagination, for we find that the literal stop is moved at least one step back from the surface of things and into the symbolic domain; it is this step above all that distinguishes the initiate. This is readily observed in Kamanga's account, introduced above. As an initiate he now understands that the leechcraft performance is chicane: the 'real' cure is effected by the *mbiro* medicine, rubbed onto the patient's body, 'and only witch-doctors know that it is the medicine which heals people'.⁴² But this raises a further puzzling question.

We have well enough established the game of reciprocal intentions in play in witchcraft healing, but the issue becomes more rather than less subtle as we focus our attention on the mode of thought of the witch-doctor. We bump up against the inadequacy of our taken-for-granted distinction between 'literal' and 'symbolic', and likewise between 'objective' and 'mystical' categories.⁴³ Fluidity across the literal-symbolic bound is part of double-thinking. This is most obvious when we consider the apparent literal stop to interpretation offered by Kamanga, when he asserts that *mbiro* medicine is the 'real' agent of healing. But what is *mbiro*? As we have seen, the power of a herb or medicine is essentially psycho-spiritual rather than material, and by psycho-spiritual is meant the efficient agency of knowing and intention, in this case the witch-doctor's healing intent.

⁴² Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.236.

⁴³ Philip Peek (1991) p.8, argues that primitive divination 'makes definite use of both modes of thinking'; there may still be a demarcation, but the modes may alternate. I suggest that this alternation is an expression of double-thinking.

Mbiro 'literally' embodies the transmission of knowledge from initiate to pupil, and it is amongst the most intimate carriers of the witch-doctor's own power. It is the non-mediated, non-conceptual fabric of ritual and medicine within which he has been initiated. The *ranga* which produces it is at work in the belly of the witch-doctor,⁴⁴ but it is also *ranga* that he uses to fashion the witchcraft-object extracted from the patient.

Although Kamanga talks literally as if *mbiro* is the literal stop, we remember the lesson of granny's ring and realise that it is highly unlikely that experienced witch-doctors take all of their devices and rituals 'simply literally' in our rationalistic modern sense. I infer - although it seems difficult to imagine a way of proving this - that the movement of thought will be towards non-concluded double-thinking. Perhaps some witch-doctors adopt a simple literalism of *mbiro* much of the time, yet the apparent literalism in Kamanga's statement - or in what Evans-Pritchard has understood from Kamanga - scarcely disguises the fact that in our terms *mbiro* is a participatory complex of psycho-spiritual (symbolic) healing for a psycho-spiritual (symbolic) wound manifesting as a literal bodily ill. The psycho-spiritual (symbolic) wound is the embodied malaise of sociopathic disturbance and ill-intent that Europeans call 'witchcraft'. My parentheses assert that we must take the idea of symbol not simply as a remote signifier but in an immediate and embodied sense; or if we say the medicine is a metaphor, then it is a metaphor that 'carries over' into empirical phenomena - and the ultimate empirical phenomenon of the human body - in the most material of ways. Such embodiment astounds us, it is alien to our ordinary assumptions, making it difficult for us to understand.

It is therefore in the magical thinking of the witch-doctor with his consubstantiality of herbs, medicines, body-fluids, and magical objects, and the participation of all of these objects in the field of his conscious intention, that we see the relevance of Lévy-Bruhl's

⁴⁴ Medicine in the belly suggests a mythological motif. Like *Mētis*, wisdom resides in the belly of Zeus.

participation mystique, for here above all we find the gathering of symbolic and literal, ritual and material metamorphosed in an embodied and empirical worldly goal. Kamanga's self-assured rationalisation of the chicane shows that he has imbibed its essential nature, and that is why he has begun to travel the path of the initiate. The witch-doctor's move carries the symbol, known or intuited *as such*, into the body of his patient, where the simple villager - and the simple ethnographer - may cling to more literal interpretations.

The Dance of Divination

I have discussed in some detail the chicane, the symbolic and the literal in the medicine of the Azande witch-doctors, in order to suggest that a similar double-thinking is likely to be found in their divination practice. With this suggestion in mind, I focus here on the Azande 'dance of divination'.

Evans-Pritchard gives an evocative account and close analysis of the 'seance' and the dance of divination, allowing us to infer something of the cognitive process involved. A group of witch-doctors will perform publicly at the request of a householder who may have suffered misfortune.⁴⁵ There is a chorus of boys backing up the songs, but everyone is harangued to take part. Dancing takes place to the beat of drums and gongs. Throughout the whole exuberant performance there is a ceaseless battle against witchcraft; if someone annoys the witch-doctors by a wrong attitude, or in their divination they suspect the person of being a witch, they may with a flourish project a witchcraft object into the offender. This is done by the witch-doctor 'raising his leg and sharply kicking out in the direction of his objective'. Following the attack, the witch-doctor 'may walk up to him and theatrically remove his shaft, generally from the forehead when the missile is a black beetle'. There are in addition spectacular mock battles between witch-doctors, with an occasional ill-natured element; in one such incident Kamanga achieved a notable victory, causing the hat and

⁴⁵ *ibid.* pp.163-4.

leglets of a jealous rival to fall off by means of his magic ammunition.⁴⁶

Projecting witch-bones in a theatrical manner is a feature of the dance and is an explicit and intentional chicane, but it does not directly bear on divination. However, the dance for the *likikpwo* mentioned earlier is an explicit chicane combining both divination and healing. This takes place with a group of unfortunates who have all had this psychic organ stolen and hidden by witches. The witch-doctor has a secret supply of rat-guts on his person while he dances, waiting for his divinations to discover their supposed hiding places,⁴⁷ and in this sense the divination itself is a chicane. As with leechcraft, we infer that the embodiment in rat-gut is interpreted in a literal manner by most villagers. For the witch-doctor it exists in ritual-symbolic form, as he metamorphoses the symbol into the patient's body with a thump.

In the usual dance of divination, the witch-doctors dance singly or in twos or threes, taking questions from their audience.⁴⁸ The witch-doctor responds by dancing until he is breathless, and stumbling as if drunk. This is the usual moment for him to utter an oracular response, in a strained voice: 'it appears as though the words come to him from without and that he has difficulty in hearing and transmitting them'.⁴⁹ As he proceeds, he 'begins to throw off his air of semi-consciousness and to give forth his revelations with assurance, and eventually with truculence'. He may dance again for further revelation, or move to another inquiry. He may run across to gaze into his medicine-pot.⁵⁰ Sometimes he halts midstream, and another witch-doctor interjects to assist him with a response.⁵¹

⁴⁶ *ibid.* pp.179-80.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* p.237.

⁴⁸ *ibid.* p.168.

⁴⁹ *ibid.* pp.162,169.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* p.167.

⁵¹ *ibid.* p.166.

Questions are often gradually answered, bit by bit over many hours, by a drawn-out process of exclusion (it is not this person who is the witch, it is not that person). At the end, it is common for the witch-doctor to whisper the name of the culprit to the inquirer; this is safer for everyone, and the inquirer can then choose to settle the matter by consulting the more authoritative Poison Oracle, apart from the witch-doctor performance.

It is apparent from various accounts that witch-doctor divination commonly involves two principal modes. The core mode is an altered state of consciousness, marked by unusual physiological phenomena. Certain of these gatherings lead to frenzied performances where the witch-doctors enlarge the whites of their eyes, contort and cut themselves, or gash their tongues with knives and foam at the mouth.⁵² Cognitive dissociation is induced by drumming, dancing, and exhaustion; this is the *abaissement du niveau mental*, the 'lowering of the mental level' to induce the manifestation of subliminal phenomena.⁵³

The witch-doctors, obtaining the names of several potential culprits (ie. witches) by a separate procedure discussed below, enter the core mode of divination by 'dancing to' the name of the individual:

...they keep the names in their memory and repeat them now and again, but otherwise allow their minds to become a complete blank. Suddenly one of the persons to whom he is dancing obtrudes himself upon the witch-doctor's consciousness, sometimes as a visual image, but generally by an association of the idea and the name of the witch with a physiological disturbance, chiefly in a sudden quickening of the heartbeats, which begin

⁵² ibid. p.162. Evans-Pritchard reports Mgr. Lagae's observation of witch-doctors walking on burning embers.

⁵³ The *abaissement* emerges in psychological theory in the work of Pierre Janet.

to pulsate violently, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat, pit-a-pat.⁵⁴

This core mode of divination is where participants know the oracle to be active; without this, there may be no oracle. According to the witch-doctors, the dance 'stirs up and makes active the medicines within them, so that when they are asked a question they will always dance it rather than ponder it to find the answer'.⁵⁵ The witch-doctor 'goes into the soul of the medicine...[until it] will stand alert within him'.⁵⁶ The medicine 'glows in his body and through it he begins to see witchcraft clearly'.⁵⁷

It is difficult to come to a firm view on chicane elements in the core mode in the absence of studies dedicated to this task. Evans-Pritchard provides us with some marvellous descriptions, but he also exemplifies the struggle of classical anthropology to offer an adequate interpretation of divination. He declares that 'a witch-doctor divines successfully because he says what his listener wishes him to say, and because he uses tact'.⁵⁸ On the other hand Evans-Pritchard asserts that 'we must allow the Zande witch-doctor a measure of intuition and not attribute his utterances solely to his reason'.⁵⁹ The witch-doctors fully believe in their magic,⁶⁰ and they will undoubtedly identify with its power at the instant of being seized by a clairvoyant image or a strong mental impression accompanied by physiological sensations. So is this chicane or not-chicane? Evans-

⁵⁴ Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.175.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p.167.

⁵⁶ *ibid.* p.176.

⁵⁷ *ibid.* p.165, quoting an informant of Mgr. Lagae.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p.170.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* pp. 175-6: 'a witch-doctor... does not simply weigh up the advantages of denouncing this or that man... there is a measure of free and unconscious association'.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p.255.

Pritchard has to settle for the dance of divination as 'only partly a pose'.⁶¹ This ambiguity perfectly expresses the paradox of double-thinking. In the midst of his ecstasy the witch-doctor keeps his wits about himself sufficiently to avoid causing dangerous offence in what he says, as when he employs innuendo,⁶² or whispers the name of a witch to the interested party. This shows us that a guiding light of ratiocination passes right through the ecstasy and holds it in an ethical and social compass. It is not an either-or case; both sides of the equation define divination.

Locating the Divinatory Chicane

Beyond the ecstatic state at the core of witch-doctor divination, there is a broader phase or mode involving dialogue, negotiation and interpretation. It is in this broader mode that the divinatory chicane emerges more obviously, and where it has been readily (and negatively) interpreted as chicane by ethnographers. This part of divination is a vehicle or container for the core of divinatory 'realisation', establishing the ground and even the possibility of divination and sustaining its meaningfulness for all participants, before and after the event. It is both the precondition for divination and the way in which divinatory meaning is worked out to the satisfaction of everyone involved, including the audience in a public performance. Its first and most important element is that the questioner establishes a limited field of concern for the diviner, usually by stating his or her misfortune or problem and by negotiating with the witch-doctor several possible witches to be considered.⁶³ These are the names to whom he will dance.

The declaring of the problem and a list of suspects is only the most obvious of the preparatory elements for divination; the witch-doctors have other work to do. The following summary of this groundwork is drawn mainly from Evans-Pritchard's

⁶¹ *ibid.* pp.169-70.

⁶² *ibid.* p.172: *Sanza*, innuendo, is much appreciated by the Azande, and is a common device in divinatory responses.

⁶³ *ibid.* p.175.

deconstructive analysis of the chicane. He observes that the witch-doctors pay considerable attention to moulding the expectations and understandings of client and audience. They build up faith in their powers 'by lavish use of professional dogmatism'.⁶⁴ They display great confidence, boast of their prowess and successes, and continually promise that they will discover the secrets that lie behind the various misfortunes in their audience; all this within a dramatic performance of dancing, drumming and singing. Whenever they give answers, these are tailored to provide maximum impact for minimum specificity.⁶⁵ Where the diviner is specific, then it is likely to be on a magical or witchcraft topic which of its nature is not open to verification. Here he can speak with the unchallenged authority of the oracle.

However, it is in gaining information from his audience and potential inquirers that the diviner is most adept. This is skillfully elicited in exchanges either before the ceremony, or during the dance of divination. There is a limited stock of common human concerns to draw on; the witch-doctors know the power and status relationships in their community, and they know most of the local squabbles and scandals in advance. A visiting witch-doctor will get advice from his local colleagues.⁶⁶

In contact with the questioner and an audience, the diviner employs what has come to be known as *cold reading*.⁶⁷ This refers to the capacity, which may be subliminal or fully conscious, to pick up clues from the body language of the client and in this case also

⁶⁴ ibid. p.171.

⁶⁵ This is known as the *Barnum effect*. The diviner offers statements of an almost universal applicability that seem specific yet will be agreed upon by everyone; or, offers a general statement geared to the particular client's situation, yet with no obvious falsifiable detail. The client fills in specific details, crediting the diviner with having a marvellous insight into their situation. See note on 'cold reading' below.

⁶⁶ Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.170.

⁶⁷ For cold reading and the Barnum effect see Geoffrey Dean 'Astrology' in ed. Stein (1996) p.91. These terms come from modern psychology and are common amongst rationalist sceptics ('skeptics') of astrology and divination.

the audience. In addition clues are garnered from the response to questions. From this information the diviner is able to feed back a plausible interpretation without apparently having been told the relevant details.

It is worth mentioning here the parallels with Victor Turner's analysis of the Ndembu diviners.⁶⁸ His study concerns basket-divination, involving the initiated diviner shaking a basket of symbolic objects (his 'bones'). In terms of the spectrum of divination, 'divination with the bones' does not involve the ecstatic condition of the dance of divination, and falls nearer the objectified end of the cognitive continuum. In my view the universal structure of divinatory interpretation is replicated, however, with a negotiating and dialogical element fundamental to the act of divination. Consultants of basket-divination will travel far to ensure that a diviner is not simply relying on local knowledge, but his skill at cold reading will soon overcome their guard: 'he notes the kind and intensity of their reactions, positive and negative, to his questions and statements...'; the symbolism of the bones is vague and flexible, allowing him to easily establish a reference to the situation he now infers. When he has fed back a convincing interpretation, he has established a 'certain psychological ascendancy over his audience, "softened them up".⁶⁹ He even rebukes them when he guesses they are misleading him or withholding vital information. He probes them 'after the manner of the English party game "Twenty Questions"', which allows him to rapidly close on the particulars of a name, such as the undisclosed name of a deceased relative, in a way that appears miraculous. At that point he has increased their credulity to such a pitch that 'the logician is felt to be a magician'.⁷⁰ Turner comes to a conclusion that accords closely with the observations of Evans-Pritchard amongst the Azande, concerning the end-point of the divining process. The principal revelation obtained refers to witchcraft, to errors in ritual, or to the ancestors: 'the causes of misfortune or death ...are almost invariably mystical or nonempirical in

⁶⁸ Turner (1973).

⁶⁹ *ibid.* p.240.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* pp.240-1.



character, although human wishes, desires, and feelings are involved in their operation'.⁷¹ This appears to be a cardinal principle of primitive divination.

Interpreting the Divinatory Chicane

Within anthropology there have been two broad directions of interpretation of the divinatory chicane. The rather old-fashioned and simple-minded version is that the phenomena we have discussed show a combination of outright charlatantry (such as the explicit and intentional chicane of witch-doctor healing) and simple ignorance. Simple ignorance is of course shown by the villager, but may be the situation of the diviner who does not understand the power of cold-reading and the psychology of dialogue; in this case the chicane is implicit. A more modern version, illuminated by the insight of sociology and structural functionalism, sees in these interactions of diviners and clients the sustainment of social harmony and the social structure: divination is one of several 'institutionalised mechanisms of redress which are ordered towards the maintenance of that social structure'.⁷² For sociological interpretations, even the explicit and intentional chicane may be explained by this mechanism, while the broader negotiated element of the divinatory process depends on a structural but subliminal and implicit chicane.

In terms of our metaphor of chicane, a feature of the sociological imagination is that the chicane is interpreted more naturalistically, like the function of a baffle-board in a speaker; this tends to downplay the possibility of 'intelligent semblance' by a fully aware diviner, witch-doctor or shaman. Even very subtle and convincing demonstrations of the role of kinship structures in divination, such as that of Devisch,⁷³ prove beyond doubt that this social structure is foundational, yet tend in my view to underplay the role of the initiate's intelligence. I do not wish to criticise a valid sociological perspective; however, if

⁷¹ *ibid.* p.209.

⁷² *ibid.* p.236.

⁷³ Devisch (1991) pp.112-132.

the approach I have adopted is plausible, then this perspective needs to be augmented by the recognition that these diviners are working at a high level within their culture, moving in the mode of sophisticated double-thinking, and negotiating the order that we call 'symbolic'.

There is certainly no doubt about the intelligence of the witch-doctors and the diviners, treated as a class. This is a common report from many observers, although depending on the style of interpretation of the chicane, this may also be called 'cunning'.⁷⁴ However, Philip Peek speaks for a new generation of anthropologists who completely reject the charlatan tag: 'we have found diviners to be men and women of exceptional wisdom and high personal character'.⁷⁵ This new appraisal goes together with the view that diviners and divination embody the epistemology of a culture, in much the same way as a system of law or the interpretations of theology and metaphysics.

The Joker

This brings me to a final remark about current interpretations of the chicane. Apart from scattered heretics,⁷⁶ orthodox anthropology appears to have ducked a major epistemological and metaphysical problem. This may be expressed as follows: quite apart from all the rational and functionalist interpretations that might explain the behaviour of witch-doctors; quite apart from the possibility that they have acquired a pharmacological knowledge of some herbs, and apart even from psychophysical explanations of placebo; apart from all these, there may be some other residuum in their knowledge, for which we can offer no adequate account. With very few exceptions, the explanations that we have adopted fail to give weight to the following possibility: that empirical phenomena of a

⁷⁴ Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.175.

⁷⁵ Peek (1991) p.3.

⁷⁶ A significant heretic in the field of divination studies is Roy Willis; see Willis and Curry (2004) esp. ch 9, 10 discussing the breaking of the taboo on the paranormal.

paranormal (supernatural or preternatural) provenance are at least partial determinants for primitive ritual and divinatory practice.⁷⁷ Any such suggestion has been treated as taboo and an absolute non-possibility by most anthropologists; 'witchcraft is imaginary', says Evans-Pritchard, 'and a man cannot possibly be a witch.'⁷⁸ To bring in the paranormal is the Joker in the deck, not least because we have almost no way in our present thinking to deal with it. I will however appeal to my first mentor in these discussions, Lévy-Bruhl, in his perceptive observation that primitive mentality is founded in the mythopoeic realm and in what he termed the 'affective category of the supernatural'.⁷⁹ This may well prove to be where the chicane will lead.

⁷⁷ I have used the term *paranormal* to encompass two possible classes of occurrence, and to avoid getting stuck in distinctions between them that would take us into a large metaphysical debate. These possible classes are those of the *supernatural*, which is supposed to lie entirely beyond and 'above' our known world and the order of nature; and *preternatural*, which lies beyond the order of nature as known to contemporary science, but which is presumed to fall within the scope of a much-enhanced future science. Telepathy between dogs and their owners may well class as 'preternatural' without us needing to invoke the theological implications that tend to go with the idea of the supernatural. Witchcraft phenomena, if they are considered to be 'real', may arguably be preternatural rather than supernatural, but this question remains wide open.

⁷⁸ This *literally stops* any further consideration that there might be a way in which the Azande notion is 'real' (ie. in our terms, has some empirical foundation).

⁷⁹ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) see for eg. pp.59, 63-6: 'It is a reality which is felt at one and the same time as beyond doubt and as having something peculiar to it which characterises it directly'.

Part Three

Theōros and Hermeios

Chapter Four

Dual-Unity

The preceding chapters have suggested primary sources for the study of divination, drawn from anthropology. The analysis is now advanced with comparisons from classical Greek and Hellenistic thought. That tradition has embedded the debate about divination within spiritual philosophy, which is readily identified as philosophy-about-spirits. This is especially the case in the neo-Platonism of Plutarch, with the development of a daimonic theory of divination. In the connection of Spirit and spirits the subject is plunged into the modern notion of occultism; this is a principal reason why the possibility of thinking divination as philosophy has been swept away by Kant and the philosophers of the enlightenment. In the attempt to retrieve this thinking, a path of approach has been indicated through hermeneutics, which allows us to manoeuvre around the impasse laid in our way by modern notions of objectivity and rationality. Terms of both a cognitive and a hermeneutic analysis have been suggested. With these definitions and descriptions - or with something like them - we might hope to propose the study of divination as a discipline *sui generis*.

Thinkers in the classical and Hellenistic tradition thought about divination and many of them practised divination. They accordingly established plausible theories of divination, and equally plausible critiques of those theories, setting terms of debate for much of the later discourse. We are sometimes taken aback to realise how close is the parallel between a modern argument and its ancient forbears. Frequently the ancient argument, being closer to the prime material of lived experience woven into explicit cultural significance, is rather more educated.

However, the intention of this study is not historical analysis, it is the possibility of modern debate; we are called to this debate because divination shows every likelihood of continuing to be an important mode by which many individuals understand the world, themselves, and whatever the divined Other may be. The historical material under review here serves the present and future of divination, and not simply its past.

With this goal in mind, this chapter introduces a way of interpreting divinatory interpretation through the dual-unity of *theōros* and *hermeios*. Their use matches a classical imagination vibrant with omens and oracles; however, as I seek to demonstrate, they illuminate the practice of divination in quite different times and cultures. With this mode in place, I move to refine the hermeneutic analysis through a description of the principal theoretical models of divination from Greek-inspired antiquity. *Theōros* and *hermeios* are necessarily embodied in the historical human actor; however, I am using them here as formal terms in a hermeneutic, expressing moments and stances in the move to make meaning in divination. For that reason I will adopt the convention of naming them in the third person neuter, serving as a reminder to differentiate them from the human actor. Since the pair have equal priority in a dual-unity, the order *hermeios-theōros* or *theōros-hermeios* is a matter of emphasis or direction of movement within a particular context.

If we consider divination not simply as an act observed but as a process of understanding, then we may demarcate two related but distinct aspects of its coming into meaning. There is a duality in the appropriation of the oracle, consisting of complementary hermeneutic modes. This dual-unity finds a conventional representation in two persons, a diviner who interprets the oracle and therefore speaks for it, and an enquirer who seeks an oracle from the diviner and on hearing the interpretation has to decide what to do with it. Describing divination in this way moves its centre of gravity to a reciprocation of complementary understandings. This reciprocation or double-consciousness is present in one person seeking an oracle for

themselves, even where there is no particular knowledge of the oracle, other than a general notion of what 'divination' is. On this account people come across the images of Tarot cards or the relatively accessible texts of the *I Ching* and decide to 'have a go' at divination. It is a double-consciousness even in the one-person situation because there remains a root distinction between making an interpretation and assenting to it, which means following it through into choice and action. When divination is said to 'work' then interpreting and acting form a unity. The double-consciousness may equally be enacted in part or wholly in several or many individuals together, whether they are nominally enquiring or nominally divining.

I adopt the terms *theōros* and *hermeios* to denote these modes of the unitary act of divination; their relationship to Greek thought is discussed shortly. While this conceptual approach is not explicit in any analysis that has survived from the past, I suggest that it is consistent with classical Greek and Hellenistic philosophical debates on divination. The significance of this pairing is however that it steps beyond any particular historical context to reveal a primordial duality in divinatory intelligence across cultures, ancient and modern.

The notion of double-consciousness suggests that this pairing identifies the *chicane* already discussed in Chapter 2 as a modality in primitive divination; the pair *theōros-hermeios* offers a theoretical equivalent for the analysis already undertaken. This brings us to consider the pairing in the light of the anthropological cognitive continuum; however, before comparisons are drawn *theōros* and *hermeios* need to be more closely defined.

Theōros and the Presentiment of the Oracle

Theōros is the origin of our word 'theory'. In the following description of the early Greek term *theōros*, and its analogy with the Hindu concept of *darsan*, I have

drawn extensively on the work of Ian Rutherford.¹ In early usage it referred to a celebrant or participant in a festival, ritual or mystery rite; it also referred to individuals sent to the games or to an oracle centre. These individuals were in the role of ambassadors, watchers of the spectacle on behalf of others who had sent them, perhaps a city-state. They would come back to their community to convey what had happened.

Theōros has come into modern philosophical hermeneutics through Hans-Georg Gadamer, where he discusses the temporality of the festival, a discussion with direct relevance for the temporality of oracles: 'the time experience of the festival is ..its *celebration*, a present time *sui generis*.'² There is no festival unless it is celebrated by those who are there, and their thereness, although entirely passive (*pathos*), is participatory, since they are 'carried away'. The truth of their participation lies not in their subjectivity but in that which they see.³

Although it has from antiquity been suggested that the word is related to *theos*, god, the consensus of modern scholarship appears to be against this; it nevertheless was associated with religious rites, and it has as one of its connotations our concept of pilgrimage. Distinct from this wider meaning, 'theōros' was used with the specific sense of *consultant at an oracle*, especially where a city-state delegated its enquiry to a formal mission; it was the task of the delegation to bring back the god's answer to those who had sent them.⁴ This is my justification for extending the generic term theōros to private or collective supplication at an oracle, the act of

¹ Rutherford (2000).

² Gadamer (1989) p.123.

³ Gadamer (1989) p.124-5.

⁴ Rutherford (2000) p.135 indicates that the term might have been limited to oracles of state, and not to personal consultation; in this official role 'by the fifth century [theōros] seems to be the *vox propria* for the concept in most sources'.

enquiring in divination.

In the pilgrimage or celebration there is a significant delimiting of function with respect to theōros in ancient usage. The word theōros 'seems to be usually confined to the activities of the ordinary pilgrim, whereas for the viewing of the secret sights associated with the Mysteries... we find a special term: *epopteid*'.⁵ The initiate into the mysteries is one who knows the ropes, and may be a peer of hermeios. We need to keep in mind the idea of initiate-as-peer in many forms of divination, for instance when a thrower of bones looks over the shoulder of a colleague, or when astrologers discuss an interesting horoscope. The initiate occupies the observing role for the tradition, and is responsible in at least equal measure with hermeios for its coherence and transmission.

Divination is the essence of questioning being, hence it precedes discursive philosophy. Theōros theorises, which makes philosophy a metaphor of *theoria*. The ground is prepared by Socrates. Then in Plato, and conclusively in Aristotle, we observe the knowing transfer of *theoria* to the philosopher, contemplating the source of divinity.⁶ Rutherford has developed the parallel of *theoria* with the Hindu *darsan*. This is the goal of a pilgrimage in seeing or making physical contact with a spiritual teacher, a temple or a sacred object. *Darsan* means 'sacred vision' where not only does the worshipper gaze upon deity, but deity gazes back in return; as with the Greek tradition this has passed metaphorically over to philosophy, since *darsana* is a

⁵ Rutherford (2000) p.139 explains that etymologically both terms indicate 'vision'; *epopteia* and *theōrias* are however explicitly distinguished in ancient sources. Where relevant I use the term 'initiate' for the equivalent role in divination.

⁶ Rutherford (2000) p.140: 'For Aristotle, *theoria* is roughly the activity of the divine part of the soul, opposed to political virtue'. Nightingale (2004) pp.187-8 shows that for Aristotle philosophy becomes 'useless' knowledge, the goal of truth known in its own right; theōros no longer returns to the world to enact what has been understood. In this sense divinatory *theoria* belongs to the pre-Aristotelian conception of spiritual knowledge.

name for philosophical schools or systems.⁷ Just as philosophy is a metaphor of *theoria*, hermeneutics is a metaphor of divination. For current purposes I limit the term 'theōros' to the hermeneutic analysis of divination; at the same time I intend the words 'theory' and 'theoretical' in their conventional modern usage, veiling the religious connotation, yet never forgetting that the original mystical sense and its conceptual abstraction are always together in play.

Theōros theorises. Theōros (as a term in the hermeneutics of divination) theorises (in the manner of our modern understanding of abstracted conceptual thinking); in this way the one enacting theōros gradually abstracts himself or herself from ritual celebration and from far away finds the need to create theory. This is the achievement of Aristotle. For the practitioner of divination theory models the forestructure of divination and therefore the *presentiment* of the omen. We start out on the pilgrimage with a pre-given notion of what to hope for, what to expect at its goal and destination, and this enacted hoping and intending is what a pilgrimage *is*. So there never is an omen or a divination without a 'theory' about it. Theōros in theorising finds itself always thinking, creating the space in which 'I' am, creating distance between the individual and whatever the individual contemplates, regards, identifies and infers. The primary data for theorising is the sensual experience of itself and otherness and something in between, farness and nearness, emotions and remembrances, and the phantasms of its own past thinking.

Theōros is full of doubt. Since it knows how to set everything against everything it cannot be sure it knows anything, including what it is to 'know'. The enquirer sets out on the pilgrimage to cross the gap, to find out what ought to be known. In contrast to *hermeios*, theōros stands at a certain distance from the oracle. The one enacting theōros may be critical and objective about the oracle, even while fully participating; to stand critically with respect to one's own divination is

⁷ Rutherford (2000) p.145.

characteristic of theōros. This present text is theory in the service of theōros.

Hermeios

It is easy to understand, at least provisionally, what theōros is and who can play that role. Even a non-religious person is able to speculate on what a pilgrimage is like for a serious participant, and we can imagine ourselves 'going to the oracle' whether or not we have a clear idea of what is happening behind the scenes. It is more problematic to define what we mean when we speak of 'interpreting the oracle'. With most practices of inductive divination, such as a Tarot reading or a horoscope consultation, the one making the ritual of divination takes on the task of interpretation, or if there is a dialogue with a knowledgeable client, guides the interpretation. There is specialised knowledge in play, requiring techniques that have to be learned; these can be quite intricate, as in the case of horoscopic astrology. Reinforcing the separateness of the role of diviner is the occasional allusion to an out of the ordinary state of consciousness. Different diviners will give widely differing emphasis to this concept, but it is common enough in the discourse concerning divination.⁸ Once we posit double-consciousness then there is the implication of a mind-space that is not democratic, easily available, or publicly shared. To be a diviner is to open a window of mind and to be a seer, and most diviners will at least nod to the metaphor of some special 'seeing'.

The territory of interpretation is even more uncertain in the case of natural divination; here the image of the seer takes command and consciously articulated technique drops away. We are in the presence of another reality where the god gazes

⁸ Roy Willis gives a description of an altered state of consciousness occurring for an astrologer (Jane Ridder-Patrick) in a consultation: 'She was calmly rational at first, and it seemed to make sense. Then, about two-thirds of the way through the hour-long reading, the atmosphere changed. The relatively mild-mannered Jane became suddenly powerful and authoritative, as though someone or something was speaking urgently through her...'. He describes this as his 'first intimation of transcendence in an astrological setting.' Willis & Curry (2004) pp.10-11.

out from within. Something possesses us, the seer is god-filled (literally, *en-theos*, the enthusiast) and under inspiration, perhaps in a trance. Sometimes, as in direct clairvoyant perception, there appears to be no room whatever for interpretation - it is as if there is a direct and unmediated perception. I will return to a modern report of this phenomenon in considering Socrates' *daimonion* in the next chapter.

A common pattern in natural divination is for an intermediating role between oracle and enquirer. In speaking of the Pythian priestess Plato refers to this functionary as a prophet who is not himself the oracle but who interprets, and the same institutionalised separation of function is referred to in several classical sources.⁹ Here is Plato's discussion:

It is not the task of him who has been in a state of frenzy, and still continues therein, to judge the apparitions and voices seen or uttered by himself.. Wherefore also it is customary to set the tribe of prophets to pass judgment on these inspired divinations.¹⁰

The ignorant call these interpreters 'diviners', says Plato, but 'the most fitting name would be 'prophets of things divined'. So how do we lay out the process of interpretation when there are two separate people involved? There is in this debate a marked ambiguity; little is known about the actual practices at the great oracle centres and our classical sources remain obscure.¹¹ This recurrent ambiguity matches

⁹ Struck (2004) p.167.

¹⁰ *Timaeus* 72a,b (Bury transl.) Plato uses the term *prophetes*, prophet; it is a matter of some dispute as to whether the Pythian priestess composed her own responses or required the intermediating priest to create an intelligible response.

¹¹ Struck (2004) p.167. It is likely that at the time of Socrates divination by lots was in use at Delphi, as well as the method of direct voice by the Pythia (divination by lots = cleromancy; sortilege; *sortes*) - see Cohen (1971) Additional Notes 6.3 pp.288-9; also Reeve (1989) p.29. This is the far 'bones' end of the spectrum of divination; it could feasibly match Plato's description if the Pythia selecting the lot was in an altered state, and the mediating 'prophets of things divined' remained in a relatively normal state. However, Plato's text does not suggest this possibility.

the very nature of the oracle, and the difficulty we have in finally pinning down how an interpretation is arrived at. Is the oracle something that is interpreted or is it an act of interpreting, and even of self-interpreting? Guided by the Platonic description, however, we observe that whether the situation requires one person or two there is a *double process* at work. If there is indeed a marked altered state of consciousness - the 'divine frenzy' - then the inspiration must be moderated by ordinary speech if the Pythia is to make herself intelligible - or is to be made fully intelligible - to the enquirer. We must not forget that the same ambiguous duality in intermediation, Pythia and interpreter, is constituted equally between oracle and enquirer, because an understanding must pass between them for it to be an oracle.

By holding the double-process in mind we might catch a glimpse of *hermeios*. The word appeared in Richard Palmer's influential overview of modern philosophical hermeneutics, where he states that '*hermeios* referred to the priest at the Delphic oracle'.¹² Palmer's own interpretation is much influenced by Gadamer and Heidegger. Although the etymology of the word is obscure, taken together with the related verb *hermeneuein* (to interpret) and noun *hermeneia* (interpretation), an explicit relationship or derivation is revealed with the god Hermes.¹³ A related word is *hermeneus* (translator or interpreter):

A hermeneus is one who communicates, announces and makes known to someone what another 'means', or someone who in turn conveys, reactivates, this communication, this announcement and making known.¹⁴

¹² Palmer (1969) p.13. This naming has attracted several authors citing Palmer as their source: Agar (1980), Ihde (1980), Svenaeus, (2003).

¹³ Heidegger (1999) p.6 explicitly relates *hermeneuein* with Hermes as 'the messenger of the gods.'

¹⁴ Heidegger (1999) p.6.

In the ancient sense understood by Plato the function of the interpreter is to be a herald, and what is conveyed is not a theoretical comprehension, neither is it simply facts or information, but a conveying of 'will' and 'wish': 'hermeneutics is the announcement and making known of the being of a being in its being in relation to... (me).'¹⁵ We are directly addressed by some definite 'one' - some being - through their intermediary. In the case of divinatory hermeios the being is a god, and the one enquiring has entered a relation with a god and is addressed by the god. The god's will 'in relation to... (me)' is the constituting mode of *address* in the divinatory hermeneutics of antiquity.

The aspect of this task that I wish to emphasise is the crossing between two realms, the other-worldly and the worldly. This is the basis on which I use hermeios as a generic term for the *medium of divinatory interpretation*, the heralding or carrying of the will of the divinity, spirit-being, or otherness, into intelligible and communicable form. This bringing-across is the act of interpreting, and it is the primary responsibility of the one enacting hermeios. This individual is therefore an embodiment of duality, with one foot in either realm. The herald has to have some idea of who he comes from, and an idea of who is to be addressed, just as divinatory interpretation is necessarily a translation and mutuality of understanding between two realms. The relationship with the *chicane* already discussed becomes transparent; this is the Hermes gift of the shaman and the witch-doctor.

As distinct from the noun for the interpretation itself (*hermeneia*), hermeios is the complement to theōros in the circle of oracle and enquirer, and the naming

¹⁵ Heidegger (1999) p.7. This characteristic Heideggerism from his original lecture series of 1923, published for the first time in the collected works of 1988, is foundational for divinatory *hermeios*: 'Hermeneutik ist Kundgabe des Seins eines Seienden in seinem Sein zu-(mir)'. - Martin Heidegger *Gesamtausgabe* Band 63 'Hermeneutik der Faktizität' (Frankfurt am Main, Vittorio Klostermann, 1995) p.10.

appropriately embeds our concerns in the study of hermeneutics. 'Hermeios' was the word that emerged as appropriate, early in the formulation of this analytic of divination. However, a surprise awaited at its completion - the term is a neologism, emerging providentially but strictly 'incorrectly' in Richard Palmer's own early studies under Gadamer. I have however stayed with the word because it is a perfect name for what it announces.¹⁶

The Dual-Unity of Theōros and Hermeios

Theōros is rooted in the world as given and as pilgrim seeks a divinely inspired understanding in that world; hermeios interprets from the concealed world in order to issue the response to theōros. On hermeios falls the initial burden of interpretation and proclamation; nevertheless it must be borne in mind that this is a dual-unity. Without there being divinatory presentiment and the intention of divinatory seeking then there will not be a divinatory response. This requires a fabric

¹⁶ Concerning the neologism *hermeios*, it is necessary to give a full account because of its central importance in my whole argument. Given an existing interest in the problem of oracles, I was inspired by the idea of hermeios and its connotations in my earliest readings in hermeneutics, on reading Palmer's study (Palmer 1969). In much later developing my own approach I profess to having been uneasy over a long period in my inability to locate the word in lexicons and texts known to me. At the time I assumed the word may have emerged in obscure 19th century scholarship or existed somewhere in writings of Heidegger. Several scholars knowledgeable in classical Greek were consulted, and the word appeared philologically plausible; eventually Dr. Efrosyni Boutsikas, an authority on Greek temple literature, especially that of Delphi, kindly confirmed that she could find no ancient source. With this lack of source clearly established, Professor Palmer provided me with the lead to his own relevant original sources; however the word does not appear in Heidegger's original text (cited above, n.13) or in its translation by van Buren (Heidegger, 1999). It does not appear in Hans-Georg Gadamer 'Klassische und philosophische Hermeneutik' (1968) in his *Gesammelte Werke* Band 2 (Tubingen, Mohr, 1986), nor in its revised version in *Gadamer Lesebuch* (Tubingen, Mohr Siebeck, 1997), nor in the translation of this version by Palmer (Gadamer, 2007). My speculation is that early on some slip has occurred in taking lecture notes from Gadamer speaking in German, perhaps involving the similar-sounding word *hermeneus* (translator, interpreter). The one who interprets the Pythia may be described in this way, without it being taken as a formal title. Professor Palmer has kindly confirmed that the word must indeed be 'an accidental neologism' on his part (private communication, 2009). It would be possible to substitute the word 'prophet' for hermeios (*Timaeus* 72a,b; see n.9 above), but this would be undesirable because of the misleading conceptual baggage that this carries. I conclude that hermeios is more than accidental; it is an inspired neologism, worthy of the god. It also metaphorically gestures to the intention that this analysis is not to be confined to antiquity but is ahistorical, concerning divinatory practice in all times and places, including our own.

of culture to validate the symbolic exchange, for without it there is no sustained expectation for the enquirer and no place for the diviner. It is a condition required of the one enacting theōros that he or she shall with genuine concern actually apply to the oracle, accepting the address of the oracle, followed by the personal decision on how to act. Even choosing not to act is a decision consequent upon taking the oracle.

A further recognition following from this dual-unity is that the distinction 'natural' and 'artificial', valuable though this is as a phenomenological starting-point, easily obscures a major feature of natural divination. The Pythia requires a sane interpreter, distinct from the enquirer, and all the more she requires this function if she is possessed and out of her normal mind; this is what lies behind the careful distinction offered by Plato. But this shows that an inferential and speculative process of ratiocination is of vital importance in fulfilling many types of natural divination; without it, theōros goes away empty-handed. Where it occurs, this interpretive process is not an add-on to the real oracle; it is essential to the process and fulfilment of divination, and as such it is the bridge of hermeios-theōros.

It should also be apparent that we misconceive the process of divination if we limit its definition to the simple act of interpreting a divinatory symbol or an oracular utterance. This is to pay attention to a truncated definition of hermeios and to forget about theōros. Indeed, to understand divination it is as important to reveal theōros as it is to know hermeios. Hermeios has a double role to fulfil, standing in two worlds, and it therefore embodies an essential duality; however, its pairing with theōros is the very same duality. Even where we interpret in our own oracle, we may locate the complementary principles of interpretation - on the one hand the seeing of the meaning, on the other hand our decision and its consequent enactment. The pair hermeios-theōros points to a dialogical form whereby questioning and desire are answered from the place of the concealed. In its cultural context this dual-unity in appropriating the oracle leads to the distinct role of the oracle-expert as opposed to the enquirer of the oracle; these two parties embody the fundamental pattern of

divination. Although a category of objectivity and rational decision-making belongs to the enactment of theōros, the role remains essentially participatory since by accepting the oracle the enquirer acknowledges *address* - that is, the oracle is understood to be 'for me'. In being accepted, divination is *proved*, by which is meant, its truth is tested by enactment, by being lived.

The idea of divinatory proving carries a factual and concrete empirical sense, much like the biting of a gold coin or the proof strength of the purity of rum, tested by soaking in gunpowder.¹⁷ The force of divination for the one enquiring comes less from proving the oracle true than from proving true what is brought before the oracle. Reciprocally and necessarily the conduct or proposal that has called forth the oracle is itself tested - that is, *proved* and shown true - by the oracle. In this way the divination is good, and the conduct that goes with the divination is good.

In many, if not most, instances of divination the relationship the diviner establishes with the divine or the unknown other is ambiguous and unresolved. A degree of indeterminacy, or some puzzling 'extra', is inherent in even the simplest modes of divination, and it is a commonplace of the literary tradition in antiquity to bring out the obscurity of oracles.¹⁸ Only by a combination of intuitive flashes of insight, proved and tested and thought through, do we arrive at knowing and some certainty in judgment, yet nothing is guaranteed. There is no certainty allotted to the diviner in making the crossing, there is no technique that underwrites any form of divination. And yet for the diviner, he or she must judge, for that is the mode of oracles and that is what god and theōros call on the diviner to do: 'the omen or mantic utterance... was understood to *require* interpretation'.¹⁹

¹⁷ The softness of gold allows it to be scored or indented by biting. Naval practice in the 18th century proved rum rations by soaking a small quantity of gunpowder in the liquor; if the gunpowder failed to ignite on being lit then the rum was too dilute and 'under-proof'.

¹⁸ Struck (2004) p.170.

¹⁹ Struck (2004) p.166.

How does the analysis of the *theōros-hermeios* compare with the cognitive continuum? We should first recall its description as a theoretical construct emerging from the concerns of anthropology and cognitive psychology. This concept arose as a means of understanding divinatory practices by locating them within a spectrum from spirit possession to rational modes of interpretation. The latter involve the interpretation of tokens or material objects presented to or manipulated by the diviner, as in the case of the witch-doctor's 'bones'. This type of divination employs a logic of symbolic analogies, patterns, and associations dependent to a greater or lesser extent on predetermined and culturally defined meanings. The greater the dependency on pre-given formulae and assignments of meaning, then the more circumscribed is the form and scope of the diviner's response; this will to a greater or lesser degree be limited to a range of possible interpretations capable of being communicated to, and validated by, other initiates with technical knowledge of the particular divinatory system. Even in highly circumscribed forms of divination, however, there is always the unpredictable possibility of stepping outside of the frame; there necessarily remains for everyone involved some indeterminate capacity for a creative interpretation or reinterpretation.

Spirit-possession is different in form to the bones, since its actual procedure is incommunicable through ordinary sense-perception and it cannot be validated in terms of technical expertise. Yet, as Barbara Tedlock observes, native diviners themselves recognise a categorial identity between spirit-divination and the bones. All the forms of divination are worked through 'medicine', and from our point of view they all belong to the distinct category of 'divination'. If with the Stoics we substitute *pneuma*, divine breath, for medicine, then we readily cross the divide between cultures. Socrates and Cicero recognise this underlying logical identity for divination just as readily as the Zulu sangoma Sikhumbana, and the likelihood of

universal application in turn lends credence to the concept of a cognitive continuum in divination.

Locating these different forms on the cognitive continuum is to suggest that they lie on a spectrum from presentation (unmediated or bodily manifestation) to representation (mediated, conceptualised, interpreted, talked-about). This is also a spectrum from full embodiment in a completely altered state of consciousness to a mode of distinct but near-to-ordinary consciousness easily understood and attained by a non-specialist. Divination may indeed involve a subtle switch of cognitive mode and open a window of mind, but this need not require an exhibition of wild behaviour, and in ordinary inductive divination the less this is worried about the better. What acts as the initial barrier to the non-specialist in most forms of the 'bones' is not the demand to brave some unknown altered state, but the need for practical knowledge of the symbolism being used.

The move from anthropology and cognitive psychology to hermeneutics opens a complementary perspective. We see that the function of hermeios, personified in an individual diviner and enacted as a distinct form of divination, can occupy any part of the cognitive continuum; the diviner may be a trance medium, a partial medium with free association of imagery, a reader of fortuitous and ominous signs, an astrologer, or a manipulator of lots or Tarot cards. At the extreme bones end of the spectrum where imaginative association and technical expertise are virtually absent, then the functions of hermeios and theōros come together in one and the same person. In this divinatory moment the unskilled lay enquirer can be his or her own diviner, as in the case of simple binary (yes-no) divinatory forms or the Azande Poison Oracle. As earlier suggested, this narrowing of interpretive scope does not necessarily entail any loss of authority or efficacy of the oracle from the point of view of the enquirer. The authority granted to the oracle depends on divinatory presentiment and the social and religious context of the act of divination, and is not a function of the particular divinatory form.

Speculative and Realised Interpretation

We also recognise that the cognitive continuum describes a range of interpretive movement *within* hermeios and therefore embodied in the diviner; this is the chicane, the move between two hands. The interpretive movement is also where the significant distinction between *speculative* and *realised* interpretation comes into view, for it is the task of hermeios to move securely between the two. Observation of astrology in particular and inductive divination in general over many years led me to posit a similar continuum at work between the two poles or modes of *realised* and *speculative* divinatory-allegorical interpretation:

Real-isation is the mysterious function by which the allegory is seen *as* reality and thereby we *make real* the allegory... it is like a bodily sense, indescribable to one who does not experience it.²⁰

Speculative interpretation involves rational inference employing conventional categories. For the thrower of bones the conventional categories are associations given to the various items thrown and the positions in which they might fall. For the haruspex, they are the conventions of the interpretation of the liver, and what each part of the liver is commonly understood to signify; for the astrologer the categories are recorded in the textbook interpretations of horoscopic factors. The categories are the transmitted language of each divinatory tradition.

Clearly distinguishable is *realised interpretation*, which carries a distinct affectivity or psychic charge. This latter may manifest as a hunch or intuition; astrologers and diviners will talk of it as a 'hit' or feeling 'on'. The category is self-evident to most experienced practitioners of astrology and divination. The spectrum

²⁰ These definitions are described in Cornelius (1994) pp.282-3 (2003) pp.293-4; and in (2007) pp.236-7.

or continuum between these poles forms the stuff of practical interpretation, as the astrologer moves between complementary modes of rational induction and direct intuitive apperception. I describe this as a 'complex process of negotiation... trying this and then that take until we hit upon the 'real' symbolism and we 'see' what this or that factor 'means'. Seen in this way, the cognitive continuum not only serves to differentiate types of divination, it also indicates the fluid intermediate dialogical process involved in any one single divination of the category described by Sikhumbana as divining with the head. This category includes all developed inductive divinatory forms, of which judicial astrology is a leading example.

'Speculation' therefore refers to a rational-discursive mode, where we identify categories and make logical distinctions between things. Theory, in the modern sense of the word, develops as we think about things, so that theory and speculation go together; much thinking in divination is necessarily theoretical and speculative. This is particularly relevant to complex bones forms such as astrology involving multiple possible combinations of symbolic signifiers. The multiplicity of factors coupled with a rich language of symbolic arrays ensures that diverse worldly events, objects and behaviours are differentiated and uniquely signified. By contrast, 'realisation' is much more directly an experience, and it is on that account non-rational, or prior to rational process. It refers to a moment of symbolic perception where an identity of symbol and thing symbolised is perceived, beyond an abstracted recognition of the likeness of symbol and thing. The distinction between symbol and thing becomes for a moment meaningless.

A comparison with the use of the term 'speculative' in Gadamer's hermeneutics is instructive. We might initially be tempted to locate the word along the lines of the enlightenment description of 'speculative philosophy'. Then as now this is seen as the attempt to derive a theoretical and a priori overview on large and indeterminate questions; abstraction is a common feature of this endeavour. 'Critical philosophy' after the style of Kant is commonly pitted against its speculative cousin

by the concern of the former with analytical and limited precision in its definitions, its leaning to scientific empiricism, and its caution with respect to abstraction. However, Gadamer rescues an older and more fundamental idea of speculation. He radicalises it to indicate an open play of thought characteristic of discourse as speaking-together, unlike the rigid concept formation associated with modern written scientific definition. Gadamer alerts us to a crucial difference between theory as non-participatory rationalisation and *theoria* as celebration. He cites the subtle distinction made by Augustine and Aquinas in differentiating speculation that is 'viewing, as from a watch-tower' (*specula*) and speculation as 'seeing in a mirror' (*speculo*), a self-reflection in the genuine recognition of the not-I.²¹ This radicalised description returns us to the early philosophical meaning of *theoria* as 'participation in the spectacle of truth'. In the sense understood by Gadamer, speculation is the true role of the *theōros*. The difference in the hermeneutic approach I develop here is my suggestion that the unique nature of divinatory interpretation necessitates the further differentiation of the distinct role of *hermeios*, rather than subsuming this within the act of speculation.

I will now dwell in more detail on realised interpretation since its theoretical implications are rarely adequately explored, even amongst diviners. It is a defining category in all inductive divination, but it is particularly illuminating in astrology. As a simple example, consider an astrologer identifying a signification for blood and iron. Mars is the pre-given textbook signifier for these two things; in the tradition of astrology it is understood to 'rule' them. Now it could so happen that in an actual situation in which the planet is revealed, the astrologer says 'Mars' in the same breath as saying 'iron' and sees Mars *and not iron* in front of him or her. So the astrologer wishing to consume an iron tablet, without thinking about it for an instant, asks for a 'Mars' tablet *with which it is momentarily identical*. The astrologer catches breath a

²¹ Gadamer (1989) p.465ff. Aquinas takes up the issue in his discussion of the contemplative life, *Summa Theologica* II:2 Q.180 article 3, reply to objection 2.

second after, with a laugh. This mode of momentary realised identity-interpretation carries a marked facticity, so that the symbol is seen in the world with the character of direct sensory perception, brooking no doubt. It is this that justifies the rhetorical device of illustrating the concept by hyphenating the word *real-isation*.

Realisation can be made to sound excitable and even miraculous, but in many cases there is nothing exceptional about it. It becomes more distinct by theorising about it in these pages than it usually is in practice; most of the time diviners are moving indeterminately somewhere between half-speculation and half-realisation. Nevertheless, one does not need to be around symbolism for long to develop a history of memorable realisations, little gems of practice with a potent affectivity. They can be childish in their simplicity or sophisticated and multiple; they may also be spontaneously realised and shared amongst several symbolists without requiring 'theoretical' explanation in order to be experienced.

The little example of Mars and the iron-pill, an actual case observed, is significant only in being made explicit and coming to attention. In this particular case it stopped a conversation in its tracks. In being made explicit, the interpretation is revealed as a distinctive mode of recognition or understanding. But what of it? Identities and differences are realised all the time in our thinking about the world around us, so what is special about symbolic and divinatory instances? I suggest that their special quality is that they transcend the register of the empirical-literal, and they do so in a quite explicit way. That is, they resist location as empirical recognitions of (supposedly literal) connections between things already given in our world; rather, they involve a momentary translation between metaphoric (non-literal) and factual (literal) expressions of the same reality, where the metaphor seizes for itself the facticity and here-nowness of the literal. It is this process that I have earlier suggested is at work in the witch-doctor's healing.

Lévy-Bruhl's description of *participation mystique* opens out the whole

theme for us. One of its expressions is a manifestation of identity, characteristic of primitive omen-reading. Lévy-Bruhl named this in several different ways, as 'momentary identity of substance', consubstantiality, bi-presence and dual-units. He also made the provocative observation that this 'cannot be expressed in our thought, nor even in our languages', and that the identity perceived by the primitive is *not* equivalent to what we would recognise as a 'symbolic relation'.²² I suggest that this is an important clue; the symbolic relation, as between planet Mars and iron, is grasped, remembered and re-presented theoretically in speculative mode; the momentary identity that planet Mars *is no other than* iron is immediately present in realised mode. Just a few moments later, however, we are left only with a report of our interpretation, a re-presentation when we once again think about what we for a moment had seen. However, we will not forget that we have indeed 'seen'.

There is a realm of experience that is closely related to divination, and where similar phenomena become manifest.²³ This is the realm of poetics, taking this to cover a diversity of narrative expression and theory, including drama and fiction. For our culture the status of symbol and metaphor employed by the poet is continually threatened with erosion, even from within. It becomes representation rather than presentation; it is taken as 'just' an imaginative relation, doubtless illuminating and possibly showing great artistry, yet of secondary and epiphenomenal status to the empirically real. Divination similarly struggles against the grain, but leaves the diviner exposed. Against the weight of our culture the omen or divinatory sign retains for the practitioner the status of the fully real - or even of the more-than-real. That places diviners in a seemingly indefensible position, whether they recognise this or not. They should at least be used to this unfortunate condition, since the disempowerment of poets and diviners is far from being a recent product of the

²² see Chapter 2, section 'Meant-ness and Address in the Unique Case', esp. n.14.

²³ Struck (2004) pp.165-170 traces the common use of allegory between divinatory and literary interpretation. 'Poetry and prophecy were mutually attracted from their earliest days'.(p.165)

enlightenment. The dilemma goes back to Greek philosophy and the divide between an Aristotelian definition of rhetoric and poetry and the neo-Platonic privileging of allegory and symbol.²⁴

Layers of the Symbol

We come at last to the question of symbol, since in symbolic seeing we encounter both presentation and mystical participation. The concept of the symbol presents us with problems because the word is variously employed by authors ancient and modern, sometimes exactly, sometimes loosely, and sometimes with contradictory meanings. Modern semiotics places metaphor in a definite category of transposed meaning but does not distinguish between 'sign' and 'symbol', allowing both terms to stand for literal and non-metaphoric reference.²⁵ By contrast in literary, psychological, religious and divinatory usage a symbol is often treated as distinct from the semiotic sign. In this case (as in my use of the terms) symbol suggests that the author intends a heightened and more engaged form of non-literal signification than is ordinarily conveyed by the word 'metaphor'.

To compound our difficulties symbolism commonly fuses together literal and metaphoric usages, while the divinatory showing and the religious 'sign' may be understood as symbolic in a wholly non-literal sense. We find our way through these

²⁴ Struck (2004) pp.66-7 discusses the rationalised demystification of poetic language, and the 'de-emphasis of allegorically oriented questions', in Aristotle's *Poetics*. The threat of disempowerment - being seen to be on the same 'merely imaginative' and enigmatic level as the poet - is in my view a motive behind the resistance of astrologers to any suggestion that their craft is allegoric or divinatory, a resistance that has been foundational since the Aristotelian interpretation became the defining mode for Western astrology. It is therefore not surprising that the few exceptions with a strongly allegorical and divinatory attitude are astrologers in the neo-Platonic tradition, notably Marsilio Ficino. Compared with astrology, most other forms of divination are undisguisedly allegorical. These themes are raised again in Chapters 10 and 11.

²⁵ Todorov (1982) pp.266-7; he cites Saussure, the father of semiotics, who refused to give epistemological status to symbol other than as a definite reference deformed or 'judged badly'. Writing on the mythic language of ancient texts he says: 'One might think that a *symbol* was present, whereas there is simply an error in transmission touching on words that originally had a perfectly direct meaning'. This positivistic interpretation has come down through later linguistic philosophy.

elusive definitions by keeping a clear view of practical differences in interpretation. To illustrate this, a cross marked on a map is the *sign* (literal reference) for a church-building. The cross also refers to the narrative of Christianity with a literal sign-reference to the wooden cross on which Jesus of Galilee was crucified. But it is also, and more significantly, a *religious sign* of Christ and the life of the Church into which the Christian enters. The religious sign leads into the mystery of the Eucharist, through which the worshipper is brought to *something* whose contemplation - and therefore interpretation - is not contained by any literal expression, nor by any conceivable accumulation of literal expressions. It is in this sense that we properly speak of the Cross as *symbol*. The literal sign-reference may be semantically and historically determined by its symbol-source, perhaps even yielding the objective and limited appearance of a 'symbolic relation' in Lévy-Bruhl's sense of this phrase, but the reverse is not the case. The symbol is commonly fused with a literal sense, but it does not depend on it. Unaided, the literal interpretation does not reveal the symbolic, just as one uses an Ordnance Survey map to locate a church building, but not to discover Christianity.

The story of the Greek 'symbol' is suggestive of the apparent dilemma in its own interpretation. On the one side it has an early literal development unrelated to figurative language, as a receipt or a tally for business deals - a piece of material such as cloth or pottery or wood would be split into halves and given to both parties to an agreement. When the transaction was fulfilled, the halves brought together verified the closure of the deal. The core of its meaning appears to have been coming-together as 'agreement'²⁶ It could also serve as an identifying token or pass, sometimes secret, for an individual. A key feature of this transactional meaning of symbol is that its meaning is social and rooted in convention - the material of the symbol has no further significance beyond its arbitrary choice by parties to the

²⁶ Struck (2004) p.78.

agreement.

In addition to the worldly meaning of commerce, and pointing unequivocally to its future usage, is an arcane dimension of symbol as a phenomenon of divination; this is common very early in Greek literature. It particularly referred to 'ominous chance meetings' as one distinctive possibility in an array of similar unexpected but meaningful occurrences such as an utterance overheard, a sneeze, or an animal cry.²⁷ Peter Struck describes an archetypal illustration of chance meeting as symbol in the *Hymn to Hermes*. Springing from the womb and already intent on stealing Apollo's sacred cattle, Hermes encounters a tortoise as he steps over the threshold:

He exclaims upon the abrupt meeting with the tortoise: 'A chance meeting [*symbolon*] very auspicious for me! I will not slight it'. He then consecrates the meeting by constructing the lyre.²⁸

This is a symbol of symbol. Here is Hermes as theōros-hermeios, taking up the tortoise - literally and metaphorically - as *for him*. He will not slight it since he allows himself to be *addressed* by the symbol. He determines the meaning of the unbidden omen and consecrates it by turning the symbol - literally and metaphorically - to his use.²⁹ This, and Hermes' reversing of the hooves of the sacred cattle, is the nature of the chicane.

Can we discern a conceptual relationship between the symbol's two original

²⁷ Struck (2004) p.91.

²⁸ Struck (2004) p.91. Struck can justify this translation of *symbolon* in the light of its usage with the specific meaning of 'ominous chance meeting' in Aeschylus, Artilochus, Pindar, Aristophanes and Xenophon.(see pp.91-3) As a comparison Charles Boer (1970) p.20 translates *symbolon* as sign: 'What a great sign! What a help this is for me. I won't ignore it.'

²⁹ Struck (2004) p.92 brings out a similar condensation of divinatory signifier and signified in an ambiguous passage in Aeschylus' *Agammenon*, where the symbols may be read as 'both the divine omen and the actual events they portend'.

orders of meaning, on the one hand as a token of exchange or an identity-pass, and on the other as a divinatory sign? It has been suggested that this comes down to agreement and 'coming-together', and also very plausibly that it shows two halves that are lacking until they are brought together.³⁰ It marks a covenant, an agreement sealed, between two parties. In the case of the divinatory sign this is a covenant offered - or commanded - by a god. With this possibility in mind, we may now appreciate aspects of divination as revealed in its most significant philosophical manifestation in Greek thought: the trial of Socrates.

³⁰ Struck (2004) p.78ff citing the studies of Walter Muri.

Chapter Five

Socrates and the Foundations of Divination

Socrates is a model for our understanding of divination. In the writings about him we are presented with an unparalleled instance of the union of philosophy, theology, and divination, carried to its highest possibility.

Quite apart from the force of his moral and analytical philosophy, his piety, unbending honesty, and his nobility in the face of death, have inspired curiosity and admiration for generations. Despite being occasionally censured as a pagan, he found influential apologists within Christianity, with comparisons being drawn with the figure of Christ and the manner of his death.¹ His status in Islamic culture is no less remarkable. Next to Aristotle and Plato, Socrates was the most discussed Greek philosopher in medieval Arabic literature, often being seen in the role of a prophet.² Although the assimilation of his views into Islam led to inconsistent interpretations, he was frequently revered as 'the father of all the philosophers and their master'.³

From the secure historical details, we know that as an elderly man Socrates was tried and executed in Athens in 399 BCE. The charge against him was one of impiety, specified under three counts. These were not acknowledging the gods of the

¹ Amongst the orthodox interpretations Augustine praises Socrates for his moral virtue and his philosophical contribution (*City of God* VIII ch.3). In the Patristic tradition, much depends on whether Socrates' *daimonion* is interpreted as a divine spirit and helpful, or as false and ultimately leading him to an immoral stance, this latter being the interpretation of Tertullian.(McPherran, 1996, p.4 n.8)

² Alon (1991) p.12.

³ Alon (1991) p.93.

city, introducing other, new powers (*daimonia*), and corrupting the young.⁴ He had also become notorious for his market-place philosophy, where he questioned all and sundry, poets, artisans, politicians, craftsmen, artists, in his proclaimed search for wisdom.

He left no writings with which he can be reliably credited. His student Plato was a youthful member of the Assembly in which Socrates was tried, and Plato's accounts of the trial and its surrounding circumstances, particularly in his early works *Apology*, *Euthrypo* and *Crito*, are often accepted as offering a basis for inferring the historical facts and their context. The *Apology* in particular is considered likely to give some indication, even if not exhaustively or impartially, of the major arguments presented both by the prosecution and by Socrates in the trial. However, even dialogues of the early period introduce elements that are difficult to reconcile as belonging to one thinker. Many commentators therefore take the dialogues as a whole to represent the development of Plato's own highly original philosophy. This allows that, while he is gradually leaving his mentor behind, Plato probably regards the words he puts into the mouth of his Socrates to be either consonant with, or a logical development of, the thought of his actual teacher.⁵

Whatever is the historical accuracy of the report in the *Apology*, significant

⁴ Parker (2000) pp.41-5 gives a detailed discussion of the charges, and of their religious or political implications.

⁵ For the developmental interpretation of the Platonic Socrates, see Vlastos (1992) ch.2 'Socrates *contra* Socrates in Plato'. Brickhouse & Smith (2004) p.4 n.2 outline the several interpretations possible. The 'developmentalists' take the view that there is a group of dialogues written early in Plato's career in which Socrates and his views are represented in a more or less consistent way'. The view of the early dialogues differs from later writings. Some developmentalists are also 'historicist'; that is, they claim that the earlier dialogues represent Socrates and his views in a way that is faithful to the historical original. This, broadly, is the view favoured by Brickhouse and Smith. The *Euthyphro*, *Apology* and *Crito* all belong to the group of Plato's works regarded as early or "Socratic" works, in which Socrates and his views are as true to the original as we will find in any ancient writings. The last, death, scene of *Phaedo* is generally seen as consistent with the other three early works.

themes concerning the Socratic attitude to divination may arguably be inferred from this text. Further, even if this were to be wholly Plato's construction - which seems unlikely - this itself would serve the purpose of the current analysis; instead of an impressive Socratic foundation to divination we could establish an equally impressive Platonic rendering.⁶

At the level of historical reportage, Plato's account is affirmed in some details and augmented in others through several sources, notably the writings of Xenophon, whose *Memorabilia* draw on the account given to him by Hermogenes, an intimate member of the Socratic circle.⁷ An example of a significant dimension of Socrates' approach that does not emerge in Plato is the criticism of lots as a means of selecting officials; this is reported by Xenophon and confirmed by a remark in Aristotle.⁸ For

⁶ In the demonstration of divinatory negotiation and address, the *Apology* is unique amongst Plato's works. This supports the suggestion that Plato is not developing an early version of his views in the mouth of Socrates in these texts, even if later texts do employ this rhetorical device. The early texts represent a distinct philosophical and practical orientation to divination, suggestive of an actually different original source - Socrates himself. Socrates appears practised in divination, which on all indications Plato never was.

⁷ Hermogenes does not appear in Plato's *Apology*, but is listed in *Phaedo* 59b as attending Socrates' death. Xenophon was fighting in Persia at the time of the trial (see O.J. Todd's Introduction to Xenophon's *Apology* in the Loeb edition of the *Memorabilia* pp.639-40).

⁸ Xenophon (*Memorabilia* I.ii 9-10) reports Socrates arguing against selection by lot for public office. Aristotle in like vein quotes Socrates directly; the practice 'is like using the lot to select athletes, instead of choosing those who are fit for the contest; or using the lot to select a steersman from among a ship's crew, as if we ought to take the man on whom the lot falls, and not the man who knows most about it' (*Rhetoric* II ch.20 1393b trans. W. Rhys Roberts). This must be squared with the fact that Socrates accepted at least two public offices decided by lot (see Reeve 1989, p.104). To resolve the apparent contradiction we observe that Aristotle refers to his contemporary Theodectus who mentions Socrates' faithful observance of the rites and ceremonies of the state (*Rhetoric* II ch.20 1399a); this accords with the Socratic view in *Crito* 50c-51a, concerning the duty to obey the laws of the State. A comparison may be made with Cicero, who held the office of augur while philosophically rejecting the truth-claim of augury. The device of the lot is in such instances not an oracular enquiry but an honoured ritual of state. There is also here a theological indication that a falling-out-by-chance (the lot) is not in itself divination, even where the participants hope that the god's will may be affirmed by such a falling-out; *ipso facto* divination is not sufficiently and correctly understood if taken only to be a falling-out-by-chance. Remove divinatory theōros and god (or something standing in for god, such as 'the unconscious') and divination by lots becomes a falling-out-by-chance.

the purposes of our current study, later overlays by Plato and Xenophon are fruitful in developing thematic issues of divination that first come to light in reports of the trial, provided the distinction is always borne in mind between 'historical' Socrates and his Platonic and Xenophonic renderings. Socrates continues to this day to be reinterpreted along the lines of later philosophical constructions. Where these reveal the theme of divination, then they too are relevant to our study.

Reason and Divination

Following the rational temper of the European enlightenment, the focus of intellectual interest in Socrates has settled on his supposed rejection of mythic thought and outmoded religious convention. His contribution to the development of philosophical analysis has formed the main trajectory of interpretation of the recent era.⁹ At the same time, there has been a continuing debate over the historical circumstances of his trial, and the possibility of a political motivation for the charges brought against him, under the guise of religious concern.¹⁰

In recent times there has been a renewed interest in the religious aspect of Socrates' thought, which had become neglected. This has led to a markedly polarised debate about his understanding of divination. This debate will be taken up as a testing-ground for the hermeneutic mode, and necessitates a concern with Socrates as diviner,

⁹ Until relatively recently Socrates' rational and sceptical philosophy has been emphasised at the expense of his religious understanding. McPherran (1996) p.4 describes the 'process of secular canonization that even now in some quarters portrays Socrates as a figure straight out of the enlightenment'.

¹⁰ This argument takes account of Socrates' association with unpopular individuals, Alcibiades and Critias - the former a traitor to the democracy. Socrates, although an opponent of tyranny and oligarchy, was also a critic of the democracy of Athens. It is unlikely that we can make a clear separation between religious and political elements, but there is no reason to suppose that the religious antipathy and the charges brought against him by Meletus are hypocritical, given the extraordinary authority (ie. Apollo) he lays claim to. On this debate see Smith ed.(2000) pp.13-15.

rather than Socrates as philosopher.

It must be acknowledged that a concern with divination threatens a disjuncture for any post-enlightenment train of thought, precisely because Socrates is an iconic figure for the project of philosophy. Quite apart from his significance as an influence on Plato, he shows in pure outline a method that has gone on to develop into a self-sufficient universe of logic and rationality. Yet how could the father of philosophy, the 'hero of reason', rely on a spirit-guide and the Delphic Oracle?¹¹ By taking seriously his use of divination as a mode of knowledge, the challenging possibility must be entertained that at the foundation of this rational philosophy we find divination, not just as personal whim or cultural accretion, but as a source of revelation for the entire project.

The divinatory attitude and practice of Socrates is at the very least an indigestible morsel for many modern scholars.¹² Where it might have once been outright dismissed on theological grounds, the divinatory aspect is both rationalised and obscured in modern interpretations of Socrates, sometimes as an example of his famous philosophical irony.¹³ Scholarly interpretation has shown a deep-rooted desire

¹¹ Brickhouse (2000) p.5. I concur with Bussanich (1999 pp.30-1) that even though the religious dimension of Socrates has been acknowledged by modern scholarship, this has been 'too strictly circumscribed and limited by discursive rationality', especially when it comes to supernatural elements.

¹² Brickhouse (2000) pp.80-1 points to the problem many scholars have in holding up Socrates as the 'hero of reason', martyred because he was 'constrained by nothing but reason itself'. However, quite unlike the modern rationalist for whom there is no boundary of investigation, Socrates was critical of the desire to investigate religious beliefs per se. Socrates' boundary-constituting 'negative epistemology' is close in essence to that of Kant.

¹³ Reeve (1989) p.23 cites several scholars who cannot believe that Socrates takes the oracle seriously, including Hackforth who says that '[Socrates'] interpretation of the oracle is a typical example of his accustomed irony.' In Smith ed. (2000) 'Correspondence among the authors' p.178, Woodruff suggests that Socrates' highlighting of the silence of his daimonion during the trial, demonstrating that the gods did not disapprove of his conduct, may be an example of ironic self-deprecation. On the question of Greek philosophic irony, see Vlastos (1992) especially chapter 1. Vlastos does not see Socratic irony as distancing him from piety to his gods; statements concerning Apollo, oracles and the

to avoid giving valency to divination. It has been little explored in its own right, despite its manifest centrality in the life of Socrates, and despite its validation by Plato. Where it is taken up in relation to Socrates, it is usually treated with embarrassment and in a strictly secondary relation to his philosophical method.

The Elements of Divination

Exploring the Socratic attitude to divination allows the illustration of several hermeneutic elements; Socrates is an ideal case-study, and I will enlist his help in laying out major features of a hermeneutic of divination within a quite condensed discussion, before exploring some of the wider implications for our interpretation of his philosophy. Following the traditional distinction of terms, the mode of divination represented by Socrates is natural rather than artificial, but it reveals with clarity the *theōros-hermeios* dual-unity.¹⁴

In order to be useful in any analysis of divination, I treat certain terms in a consistent manner, delineated more exactly than their common use; they therefore serve as semi-technical terms. Some have already been discussed in connection with primitive divination. Generally for omens, oracles, and all other divinatory manifestations or showings, I use the terms 'divinatory manifestation, divinatory showing', or simply 'showing', to refer to the single instance of divinatory manifestation in whatever form it appears, whether as a prophecy, an oracle, or an omen as commonly understood. Amongst further terms introduced in this section are

daimonion are in no sense deceptions.

¹⁴ The *daimonion* of Socrates is 'natural' since no further speculative and inferential interpretation is required. The oracle at Delphi is commonly seen as natural in the divine mania of the Pythia, which supplants ordinary consciousness. However, since the priestess uses lots (cleptomancy) for some enquiries (Reeve [1989], p.29) then that act of manipulation of divinatory tokens constitutes inductive divination of the simplest 'bones' order. Socrates' dream in *Crito* 44d shows inferential and symbolic interpretation, just as his statement in *Apology* 33c suggests that he was no stranger to inductive divination.

the *demarcation, provenance* and *authority* of the omen or showing (divinatory manifestation); *divinatory participation*; the *address* of the omen or showing; the *presentiment* or interpretive forestructure; and its *signification* and *resolution*. Beyond this is a teleological dimension of the omen, its *apotheosis*.¹⁵

The first interpretation of the omen is that it is an omen. This requires that the event in question shall be assigned to be an 'omen', delineated and understood as such. The generic category of divination which includes the oracle, omens, and all other forms of the divinatory showing is clearly demarcated by Socrates, and specified by reference to its divine or superhuman provenance; he introduces his famous *daimonion* (literally, daimon-thing, his warning 'inner voice') as 'a superhuman oracle or sign'.¹⁶ From the context of the rest of the *Apology*, it is clear that he regards the source of the *daimonion* as divine, and this is a claim that his accuser, Meletus, regards Socrates as making or implying.¹⁷

It was the common understanding of Greek antiquity that the gods have various means of communicating with us through divination, by dreams, oracles, omens, coincidences and chance but significant statements overheard.¹⁸ In keeping

¹⁵ *Apotheosis* - literally, deification - a taking away and setting aside as the divine. When referring to a possible teleological component in divination, I use this term as functionally and hermeneutically equivalent to the *anagoge*, a word of late Greek origin which is introduced with the Christian material in Chapter 9.

¹⁶ *Apology* 31c.

¹⁷ *Apology* 31d.

¹⁸ Dover (1994) pp.134-5. Johnston (2008) p.3 believes that in Greek and Roman antiquity 'most people practiced or witnessed some form of divination at least once every few days'. Modern culture is equally pervaded by popular forms of divination such as daily horoscopes - the major difference is that divination, marginalised in our culture, was authoritatively institutionalised in Greek and Roman civic society (cf. Johnston & Struck, 2005, p.7).

with this, it should be observed that Socrates makes no essential distinction in the source of divine revelation between his *daimonion* and other divinatory forms. He explains that his philosophical mission 'has been signified to me by oracles, dreams, and in every way in which the will of divine power was ever intimated to anyone'. The phrase 'in every way'¹⁹ affirms the unsurprising conclusion that Socrates extends the capacity to express divine will and foreknowledge to a variety of divinatory practices, as in *Crito*, when we find him using dream symbolism to indicate the day on which he is to die.²⁰ It is on the basis of this understanding that Xenophon can rebut the charge that Socrates' reliance on his *daimonion* is in some different category to the rest of divination:

He was no more bringing in anything strange than are other believers in divination, who rely on augury, oracles, coincidences and sacrifices. For these men's belief is not that the birds or the folk met by accident know what profits the inquirer, but they are the instruments by which the gods make this known; and that was Socrates' belief too.²¹

Having identified divinatory showing as divinatory showing, omen as omen, then a commonsense question follows logically and naturally, *to what* does this showing refer? In the language of semiotics, the showing is the *signifier*, that which it refers to is the *signified*. The signified is presumed to be something in the field of concern of the one receiving the showing, where 'field of concern' has the widest

¹⁹ *Apology* 33c. Reeve (1989) p.24 translates this passage: 'I have been ordered to practice this, as I say, by the god through oracles (*ek manteion*) and through dreams and in every other way that divine providence ever ordered a human being to practice anything at all'.

²⁰ *Crito* 44a,b.

²¹ Xenophon *Memorabilia* I.1.2,3. The word translated here as 'divination' is *mantikê*. The various supernatural occurrences commonly accepted by the Greeks as coming under the generic idea of divine communication and intervention are discussed in Dover (1994) pp.135-6.

possible reference to the world, and is not limited to the one interpreting or experiencing the showing. The signified may be something the interpreter is fully aware of, or unaware of prior to the showing; it may be an act or intention, an object, thing, animal, person, an idea, a doing, an undoing, or a not-doing. When the interpreter has established this *to what* of signification to his or her satisfaction, then the meaning of the showing or omen may be said to be determined. 'This is what this means...' says the interpreter. Sometimes the signification is obvious and immediately recognised; other times determination is slow and hard-won, just as every diviner will know of the frequent occasions when a divination remains elusive, and if understanding comes at all, it may only emerge after pondering and long delay.

The Divinatory Narrative

There are subtleties to our responses to divination that are difficult to categorise in a few simple definitions. A few further reflections here will however help to bring out the range of those responses. We first observe that determining the signification *closes* the divinatory showing and renders it and its interpretation into the past tense; the matter signified has been illuminated and the showing has been explained. While its interpretation is being established, it remains 'open' for interpretation. It will often be the case that the divinatory showing is not in any sense determined - we do not know what it means, even though, having demarcated it as a showing, we are bound to feel that 'it must mean something'. Eventually the open and undetermined omen, oracle or showing is discounted or simply abandoned; its time of possible relevance passes and it will soon be forgotten. If it is not forgotten, and lingers on as a puzzle, then it is still in some sense open, an ember awaiting the breath that could blow it into flame. Frequently there is a partial determination, so that while an effective preliminary signification or interpretation is arrived at, there is a sometimes uncomfortable recognition that not all that is 'meant' by the showing has yet been disclosed. Most remarkably, a showing whose meaning has been determined

may spring to life again and be re-opened, as it is 're-taken', deepened in interpretation, or even radically reinterpreted in a new or wider perspective.

The various ways in which signification and determination are arrived at, and the different ways in which the interpreter will attempt to lay out an interpretation, depending on the closed or open status of the divinatory showing, leads to a consideration of the narrative and dialogical structures inherent in divination. Divination is, after all, most commonly an event which is discussed with a client, or which is objectified into a story or statement recounted by and for the diviner. The divination is woven into the fabric of life in the telling of the interpretation. If there is no interpretation and no story there is no divination.

Anthropological accounts of divination have long been recognised for the contribution they may offer to classical studies. This has generally taken the form of a 'structuralist' interpretation (employing models of social function and authority), which tends to displace the question of divination into sociological categories, and, as Struck remarks, 'moves all too quickly away from the divinatory moment itself'.²² However, there have been recent attempts to move beyond the limitations of a previous generation's structural-functionalism. Anthropological thinking has developed the concept of the *divinatory narrative*, constructed together by diviner and enquirer in response to the omen, oracle, or other divinatory showing. This usually occurs in a process of dialogue, drawing life-events and contemporaneous concerns into a consistent interpretation thematically illuminated and sustained by the omen(s) or showing(s), and acceded to by both diviner and enquirer.²³

²² Struck (2005) p.2.

²³ see for example Peek (1991) p.203: 'Divination produces a narrative of the client's life and a correct history of the event in question'.

We need to complete this preliminary discussion by considering the other half of the equation of signification, which is *who* or *what* is using the signifiers to signify something? This is at the heart of the story told by the diviner, and it raises the question of the *provenance* of the divinatory manifestation. It is apparent in the way that Socrates and Xenophon refer to omens, oracles and other showings that for them, these manifestations are not seen separately from their supernatural provenance. By this I mean that the showing is immediately demarcated as an expression of a supernatural entity, a god, demi-god or discarnate spirit-being.

In defending his daimonion Socrates brings forward the intermediate spiritual entity of the daimon or demi-god, which he argues must entail a belief in the gods themselves. As in the popular mythology, the demigods might be the 'illegitimate sons of gods, whether by nymphs, or by other mothers'.²⁴ We might infer from this some gradation of the divine order of discarnate entities, from gods, through demi-gods, to dead heroes. However, the question of the *provenance* and *authority* of the divinatory showing (as opposed simply to its demarcation as such a showing) might be thought to be problematic. Do the omens and showings of these discarnate entities all have the same authority? Are they all to be trusted equally?

These questions of authority are immediately reasonable to the modern mind, and it seems at first to be something of a lapse in the argument of the *Apology* that it is not taken up. Yet we at this point risk a major error of interpretation resulting from a fundamentally different orientation to the spiritual and to reality itself. This might seem an exaggerated claim, but to support it a comparison can be made with an observation from anthropology concerning the primitive attitude to the universal truth of oracles, discussed in Chapter 2. Evans-Pritchard derived this conclusion from his study of the Azande, and in various shapes and forms it appears to be a constant

²⁴ *Apology* 27c,d. See also Dover (1994) pp.80-1.

observed by ethnographers.²⁵ This is the understanding that although oracles may be quite pragmatically tested one against the other, with some oracles being accorded a higher status than others, nevertheless there is a *generalised and universal truth-status granted to the realm of the oracular*, and this is *never* in doubt. This is not about packets of information or the truth of logical propositions, but the unconcealing, *alētheia*, of human being. This appears to be a common pattern both of primitive culture and of classical antiquity.²⁶ It entails a complete trust in the divine, and a recognition that the divine uses all manner of signs and omens to address us, hence the true necessity of the arts of divination. This complete trust nevertheless allows a prudent scepticism with respect to any claimed manifestation or interpretation, especially of a 'minor' oracle. This prudence is the basis of any testing and proving of oracles, one by the other, in order to make sure that we have heard the god aright.

These observations allow us to understand Socrates' absolute insistence on the goodness of the divine, which for him can never harbour deceitful motives and can never intend to mislead.²⁷ He imputes this goodness to all manifestations of divination, including dreams and omens. A significant consequence of this is that he is able to treat together in a complete narrative all such showings and omens as originating in a morally unified divine source, and brought to their fulfilment in the response of the

²⁵ Modern anthropology is well attuned to this perception. Peek suggests that in traditional African divination "truth" is in the action generated, the social reality reconstituted, and the resultant well-being of the people; it is not to be found in an abstract system or specific verifications of separate oracular pronouncements'. In traditional societies divination stands with respect to culture as its 'articulator, not merely an articulation'.(Peek, 1991, p.135).

²⁶ Anderson (1994) p.215 draws a similar comparison between the Azande observed by Evans-Pritchard and the 'thought-world' of the ancient Near-East. These worlds share two important similarities; the first is their attitudes to demons and witchcraft, and the second is their 'ubiquitous acceptability of oracle-operations as a means of regulating society.'

²⁷ Concerning the notion that 'daimones do not lie', see *Republic* 382e6 (this is cited by Reeve, 2000, p.35).

oracle at Delphi.

Address

It has already been observed from primitive divination that a major feature of the divinatory showing, testifying to its participatory nature, is that it is *addressed*. It is taken up as being 'meant for' a definite recipient, not just anyone who happens to hear of it, or anyone it is afterwards reported to. This is why it is so readily assumed to be an intentional communication, as from a god.

We should at this point discriminate between an address that is *explicit* and overtly stated; and an address that is *implicit*, where participation may appear incidental or may even be masked. Whether explicit or implicit, the address of the divinatory showing may be *private*, when it is 'for me'; or it may be *public*, in which case it is a collective showing that is 'for us', for the tribe or State, or on the grandest scale, for 'us' as humanity. In either case, it is grammatically related to the first and second person, singular or plural. It is only located in the third person (he, she or they) when it is carried, as by a diviner making divination on behalf of another. The diviner then says, this showing is 'for you', and carries it across, and the one receiving understands that this is 'for me'. In the same way we name a certain class of diviner as a *medium*, a vessel through which the spirit-communication is channelled.

The *daimonion's* Private Address

Returning to Socrates, we observe that the instances of the *daimonion* referred to in the *Apology* are private, and are explicitly and unambiguously addressed to him:

something divine and spiritual comes to me, the very thing which Meletus ridiculed in his indictment. I have had this from my childhood; it is a sort of voice that comes to me, and when it comes it always holds me back from what I am thinking of doing, but never urges me

forward.²⁸

At the cardinal point of the trial, however, divination appears in its *public* form, and we note that in Plato's account the tenor of the proceedings becomes controversial and charged. Some amongst the audience interrupt Socrates at exactly this point, which he has already suspected might happen:

And, men of Athens, do not interrupt me with noise, even if I seem to you to be boasting; for the word I speak is not mine, but the speaker to whom I shall refer it is a person of weight. For my wisdom - if it is wisdom at all - and of its nature, I will offer you the god of Delphi, as a witness.²⁹

Socrates recounts the tale of Chaerephon's visit to the Delphic Oracle. In Plato's account, the interruption in the assembly breaks exactly in the midst of this clause:

Well, once he went to Delphi and made so bold as to ask the oracle this question; and, gentlemen, don't make a disturbance at what I say; for he asked if there were anyone wiser than I. Now the Pythia replied that there was no one wiser.³⁰

Xenophon's account differs in several respects. Socrates first discusses his *daimonion* and the authority of god this grants him, which 'raised a clamour'.

²⁸ *Apology* 31c,d. (Fowler translation).

²⁹ *Apology* 20e. Jowett's translation reads: 'Here, O men of Athens, I must beg you not to interrupt me, even if I seem to say something extravagant. For the word which I will speak is not mine. I will refer you to a witness who is worthy of credit; that witness shall be the god of Delphi'.

³⁰ *Apology* 21a.

Following this he relates the tale of Chaerephon's enquiry at Delphi, made 'in the presence of many people'. The response of the oracle is less terse and decisive than it is in Plato's version: 'Apollo answered that no man was more free than I, or more just, or more prudent'. At this 'the jurors, naturally enough, made a still greater tumult'.³¹

Both of our principal commentators agree on the agitation in the assembly at this point, but let us look more closely at what is involved. Why might there be tumult or interjection here? Perhaps we could understand this as angry dissent to the extravagant hubris and arrogance being displayed by a defendant in invoking a god of the Athenians against his prosecutors. But a more precise and plausible possibility is revealed if we take account of the nature and meaning of divination, and how a public oracle would have been interpreted by some, if not many, in that assembly, in these exact circumstances. In these words of Socrates they, the members of the assembly, are directly addressed by the divine. The sceptics amongst them will not consider themselves to be so addressed, but the more traditionally pious amongst the audience, or simply those professing orthodox piety, are necessarily placed in an uncomfortable or even excruciating catch-22, a dilemma of interpretation.

The Hermeneutic Turn

This is no longer the man Socrates speaking for himself, not even a Socrates privately authorised by his daimonion or personal omens, 'for the word which I will speak is not mine'. If the word is not his, then whose word is it? Since Chaerephon's report from the Pythian priestess appears to be common knowledge, and its authority is not challenged, then for those in the audience who both 'believe in' Apollo and give

³¹ Xenophon *Socrates' Defence* 13-15, relating the report of Hermogenes. There are indications that Xenophon had a distinct agenda in explaining why Socrates welcomed his impending death, and this suggests that Xenophon's second-hand version should be treated with some caution. On the grounds for favouring elements of Plato's report in the *Apology* over that of Xenophon, see Vlastos (1992) pp.288-293.

credence to his oracle, this is undeniably *the word of Apollo*. Socrates has at this instant taken upon himself the mantle of being an intermediary of the divine, carrying the god's oracle. And if Apollo in this oracle addresses his audience collectively, then they all individually share the address; the god in this moment addresses each and every one of them who might seek to find pious Socrates guilty of impiety. Apollo challenges each of them in their piety to refute not Socrates, but Apollo. Hence the tumult.

Socrates has inverted the accusation against him into a trial of the Athenian assembly before Apollo, and the instrument of that inversion is the address to the assembly by the god through his oracle. This interpretation is borne out by the following declaration of the intention of his defence:

I am now making my defence not for my own sake, as one might imagine, but far more for yours, that you may not by condemning me err in your treatment of the gift the God gave you.³²

The eventual verdict is not simply a matter of human injustice; it is *impious*, an offence against divinity. Xenophon records Socrates' remark that 'those who were won over to do this must feel in their hearts a guilty consciousness of great impiety and iniquity'.³³

³² *Apology* 30d.

³³ Xenophon *Socrates' Defence* pp.13-15. Impiety: Greek *asebeia*; this is improper behaviour towards the gods (*eusebeia* is pious behaviour towards the gods). Momigliano (1973) p.3 confirms that by the time of Socrates, the term had a wide technical application of improper conduct, such as incorrect behaviour to the dead, to one's own parents or foreign ambassadors; or the choice of a wrong sacrifice, or felling sacred trees - 'one gathers the impression that *asebeia* was an offense against established religious customs rather than a denial of accepted dogmas'.

Revealing Ultimacy

Even without the paradigmatic example of this turning-point of the trial, Socrates' approach to divination invites us towards a significant inference concerning its ultimate possibilities. His insistence on the absolute integrity and goodness of these divine communications suggests that, if the god so chooses, divination might reveal to one capable of understanding it, something of an ultimate nature. Expressed in human purpose and conduct, individual or collective, it is fitting to locate this potential of divination within the frame of prophecy. This is the highest interpretive and teleological category, the *apotheosis* of divination, where the understanding of the recipient is drawn out of obscurity and identified with the revealed goal.³⁴ I use this term in its original religious sense here, as a 'making divine' of the subject.

Plato's account makes apparent that the god-granted nature of his mission only became fully revealed as a result of Socrates' 'long perplexity' in the struggle to interpret the Delphic oracle's response to Chaerephon.³⁵ Having finally secured his understanding, however, Socrates is filled with certainty: 'as I conceive and imagine, God orders me to fulfil the philosopher's mission of searching into myself and other men'.³⁶ Not only is this 'the command of God', it represents the god's will with respect to the people of Athens, and he believes that 'no greater good has ever happened in the state than my service to the God'.³⁷ In the *Phaedo*, Socrates announces himself to be

³⁴ This in turn is the highest degree of piety. As Vlastos (1992) p.177 observes: 'Were it not for that divine command that first reached Socrates through the report Chaerophon brought back from Delphi there is no reason to believe that he would have ever become a street-philosopher....Why should he take to the streets, forcing himself on people who have neither taste nor talent for philosophy, trying to talk them into submitting to a therapy they think they do not need?...Would Socrates have given his life to this task if his piety had not driven him to it?'

³⁵ *Apology* 21b.

³⁶ *Apology* 28e; see also 33c.

³⁷ *Apology* 30a.

'the consecrated servant of the same god [Apollo]...and..I have received from my master gifts of prophecy'.³⁸ By virtue of that consecration he is Apollo's gift to the Athenians.³⁹

The Delphic response seen in the light of theōros-hermeios

It is instructive to look back to the divinatory experience of Socrates and review this in the light of the dual-unity of theōros and hermeios. The central axis of his trial - and therefore of his life and death - is his understanding of the response given to Chaerephon by Apollo, through the oracle at Delphi. Around this axis we see that Socrates commences as theōros in respect of himself and concludes as hermeios in relation to the people of Athens. Although he is not the initial enquirer, since Chaerephon is like an ambassador, Socrates becomes theōros because he takes the response of the oracle 'as if' it is addressed to him. By this taking-up the oracle *is* addressed to him - on the hermeneutic principle of omen-interpretation we miss the mark if we follow a logical thread that says 'there was first an oracle (for Chaerephon) and later Socrates took it for himself'. We do not need to know what it is for Chaerephon; we do know what it is for Socrates. The oracle is what it is taken up to be. Socrates works to prove the oracle, and as he undertakes this work the oracle proves and tests Socrates. Proving is the interpreting of the oracle. There is not some supposed factual meaning concerning the wisdom of Socrates and existing as a propositional truth-statement, occupying a logical space independent of the consequences that flow from that statement. This is the perfect hermeneutic circle. Indeed, this oracle-narrative is the type and summation of the interpretation of all oracles in revealing the hierarchy of piety and knowledge between gods and men.

³⁸ *Phaedo* 85b. [my bracket insertion]

³⁹ *Apology* 30e.

Socrates might have responded differently. He would have been entitled to be indifferent to Chaerephon's uncalled-for enterprise. Or we might envisage him taking up the oracle but following it on his own path of enlightenment, with the silence of a hermit. Instead, he worked the oracle by testing and *proving* not just himself but his fellow Athenians, and at the apex of this proving, proclaiming the oracle. The oracle, through Socrates' ruthless *elenchus*, proves and tests all levels of the society of Athens.⁴⁰ The ritualised enactment of this proving and testing is the trial itself, where Socrates comes forward as the interpreter of the will of their god with respect to the citizens of Athens. The assembly as theōros is tasked to decide on the oracular pronouncement, whether to accept it, abominate it, or feebly give up on religion and turn aside. The movement between theōros and hermeios is the hermeneutic turn at the heart of the trial; here, as the address becomes public and the oracle is for all and not one, is the borderline where divination becomes prophecy.

Socrates' daimonion in the light of hermeios-theōros

The daimonion, Socrates' warning inner voice, is an uncommon but highly significant divinatory phenomenon. It does not readily fit the dual-unity pattern of hermeios-theōros since the account given to us suggests an unmediated knowing, presenting itself with the physiological impression of direct voice, independent of ratiocination. It does not present itself as metaphor, even if symbolism is afterwards read into it, and it bypasses interpretation with an immediacy comparable to that of bodily sensation. There is no space left to 'think about it', because it is of an order of knowledge that is usually arrived at as we are now just about to act after we have

⁴⁰ The oracle empowers the *elenchus*. This term refers to a dialectical refutation of a proposition by cross-examination, drawing out apparently corollary statements that are then shown to contradict the original or render it meaningless. We may infer that Socrates practised such questioning prior to the oracle (Reeve, 1989, pp.31-2). It appears to destroy double-thinking; more subtly, and consistent with a negative epistemology, the *elenchus* may unhook double-thinking from false positivistic claims.

become thoroughly convinced about something, and about the course of action that we will now take. As we are at the instant of doing something, we do not start thinking about doing it, since everything has been resolved at the instant of action. That is where the daimonion is. It appears to overwhelm all other consideration and move its hearer without prior thought to the decision in the very instant of action or inaction, which is why there is no space left to think about it. To wonder whether Socrates could then 'choose' to obey or reject the voice misses the point. If the thread of this discussion is valid, we come near to equating the daimonion with possession, equivalent to an ecstatic or trance state, yet with the recipient of the daimonion in full rational awareness of the situation. There is no question of rational inference, hence we are beyond the realm of inductive divination which works through the dialogical mode of speculation and realisation. The daimonion does not appear to present itself as a candidate for the duality of theōros and hermeios.

Although the daimonion appears to operate beyond or beneath the dialogical divinatory mode, it should firstly be noted that there are two parts of Plato's account which show Socrates employing this mode with respect to his daimonion. One is where he establishes a speculative distance by discussing the *non-appearance* of the voice during the period of the trial.⁴¹ He interprets this as showing that the divinity does not wish to halt the outcome to which his conduct must lead. Here Socrates is occupying the hermeios-theōros negotiation of his own divinatory understanding; his conclusion is not in the class of unmediated knowing, as granted by the daimonion, but belongs to the rational consideration of omens and oracles.

The other interpretive move on the daimonion, bringing it into the divinatory dialogue, involves Socrates' realisation that these mysterious occurrences were part of a preparation for an important task. When he finally proved the truth of the Delphic

⁴¹ *Apology* 40a-c, 41d.

Oracle, he could understand the goal to which certain of the individual instances of his daimonion had led him. It is not apparent how far this understanding is prior to the intervention of the Delphic Oracle, but by the time of the trial he has made a clear interpretation that the daimonion had saved his life by removing him from politics in preparation for his true philosophical task.⁴² This is a rational interpretation of oracles.

Accounts of Socrates' *daimonion* sometimes distinguish this particular 'daimon-thing' (the literal meaning of this term) from the concept of the *daimon*, an agency of higher intelligence midway between mortals and gods, much discussed by the neo-Platonists. Since the unmediated direct-voice phenomenon is highly specific and relatively uncommon, it is helpful to follow this naming. The concept of the daimon remains fundamental in the classical debate on divination, but by keeping the distinction we leave open the nuanced possibility that we may be dealing with a complex of phenomena rather than a single agent. A further merit of the specialised use of the term in the context of divination is that we avoid a temptation to pathologise the 'inner voice' (eg. psychosis, schizophrenia); that is, not all occurrences of the daimonion are adequately dealt with by naming them within a modern psychiatric definition of pathologies, even if there are significant parallels. Little is gained by suggesting that Socrates is schizophrenic, even if many clearly mentally ill individuals also 'hear voices'.

In making further suggestions it must be admitted that my remarks are speculative, and the risk of misinterpretation could outweigh the benefit of pursuing such an analysis. However, with this caveat acknowledged, I suggest that we may see in this uncommon event a distinctive and non-typical instance of the flash of intuitive knowing that is the intermittent privilege of *hermeios*. If so then it is a peculiar and

⁴² *Apology* 31d-e.

isolated *realisation*; its isolation means that it is usually perceived as bizarre and disruptive, since it appears to have neither an origin nor a justification in rational concern. It is bizarre because it is disconnected from theōros, and it has not been woven by conscious reflection into the pattern of the 'examined life'. Its narrowness shows in the petty and absurd nature of many of the particular instances in which it arises, showing none of the philosophical or symbolic depth that on occasion shines through inductive divination.⁴³ The daimonion itself requires further testing before it can be woven into the hearer's life - but that is not a testing by logical propositions, but a test by the god that is its (claimed) source. This is consistent with the narrative of the *Apology*, where the 'truth' of the daimonion is revealed, not in petty instances where it might be literally correct in a matter of practical information, but in being taken up and authenticated by the god of Delphi. Only then does Socrates fully grasp the truth of what he must do.

Modern accounts of the daimonion

I have never personally experienced the equivalent of the daimonion, but I am aware of a few credible instances amongst colleagues. One of these is a direct-voice case that I have studied closely. Here a communication of undeniably paranormal knowledge, exact yet in itself oddly trivial, was only later recognised to be a symbolically apt part of a significant pattern guiding conduct and expectations in a matter of important concern. The pattern was more fully brought to light to the satisfaction of parties involved through conventional astrological divination. This suggests the positive role that inductive divination, in this case astrology, may perform in embedding the unmediated and 'wild' phenomenon within a dialogical and interpretive field; this would be how one might negotiate the daimonion.⁴⁴ Whether

⁴³ *Apology* 41a - the daimonion opposes Socrates 'even on trifles'. [Jowett transl.]

⁴⁴ I regret that I can give no further details of this recent case, which is unpublished. It shows well the common pathway whereby divination is used to amplify prior divination. The individual

the enhancing of the wider pattern was the 'purpose' of this particular daimonion is a plausible question, yet for all its drama and fascination, it did not seem entirely necessary to the situation. Socrates certainly could affirm to his own satisfaction that the daimonion experienced throughout his life was necessary in propelling him to his true purpose. This culminating purpose was only fully revealed through the rational interpretation of Apollo's oracle at Delphi, at which point theōros and hermeios were in perfect union.

Modern accounts of daimonion-like phenomena occur in psychiatric literature, since hallucinations and 'voices' are a well-attested product of schizophrenia and may indicate serious mental disorder. An illuminating discussion that lifts the daimonion beyond pathology is given by Julian Jaynes in the context of his theory of 'bicameral mind'. He describes his own remarkable experience, directly related to his intellectual struggles. The event occurred while he was in his late twenties and living alone. It deserves quotation in full:

I had for about a week been studying and autistically pondering some of the problems in this book, particularly the question of what knowledge is and how we can know anything at all. My convictions and misgivings had been circling about through the sometimes precious fogs of epistemologies, finding nowhere to land. One afternoon I lay down in intellectual despair on a couch. Suddenly out of an absolute quiet, there came a firm, distinct loud voice from my upper right which said, "Include the knower in the known!" It lugged me to my feet

concerned is intelligent and balanced but also intuitive and occasionally 'psychic', but with no history of inner voices before or since. This case, where inductive divination was employed to illuminate the daimonion, follows the pattern indicated in the narrative of Socrates, that the function of the theōros negotiates and makes rational the realisations of hermeios, even in their wildest manifestations; this 'rationalisation' is, I suggest, part of the impetus of sophisticated inductive divinatory forms.

absurdly exclaiming, "Hello?" looking for whoever was in the room. The voice had had an exact location. No one was there! Not even behind the wall where I sheepishly looked. I do not take this nebulous profundity as divinely inspired, but I do think that it is similar to what was heard by those who have in the past claimed such special selection.⁴⁵

It appears from Jaynes' text that this was a pivotal event in providing substance and direction for his theory of the historical change of consciousness occurring in antiquity. The 'voice' assured him of the indubitable psychic reality of such experiences, which he suggests were common in an archaic level of the development of human consciousness: 'schizophrenic hallucinations are similar to the guidances of gods in antiquity'.⁴⁶ He therefore wove the daimonion into his life. Jaynes believes that the phenomenon is closely involved with the stress produced by decision-making, 'the pause of unknowingness'.⁴⁷ The hallucination resolves the decision for its recipient, which accords with the suggestion made above that it is misleading asking whether Socrates has anything further to decide on receipt of the daimonion. The daimonion *is* the decision, and is its own interpretation.

⁴⁵ Jaynes (1976) pp.86-7. Jaynes' embarrassment at the 'nebulous profundity' is understandable, since it seems like a banal pastiche of New Age enlightenment. However, imputing 'banality' may be the standpoint of some other supposedly objective viewpoint no longer rooted in the actual situation. By his account this was an effective truth for Jaynes, with (for him) an unquestionable provenance.

⁴⁶ Jaynes (1976) p.93. His theory has significant implications for the study of divination and deserves more attention than I am able to give it here. He suggests that divination historically takes over as a human function when the 'direct voice' of the tribal totem or god is no longer heard in 'bicameral mind'. This occurs as our mental representation of being changes from its archaic and primitive mode. Jaynes' discussion of Socrates (pp.340-1) is coloured both by his own powerful experience and by the Socratic-Platonic disjuncture of natural/artificial divination, in the supposition that the ecstasy of poets and diviners (ie. hermeios) does not coexist with rational and conscious mind (ie. theōros).

⁴⁷ Jaynes (1976) p.94.

Jaynes develops his theme with observations on the peculiar authority invested in these experiences, particularly in the case of auditory hallucinations. We find it difficult to disobey these voices. In unfortunate or apparently malevolent instances they produce a breakdown and a hideous conflict in our impulses, but otherwise we unreservedly *want* to obey. The etymology of 'obey', shared across a number of languages, is telling: from the Latin *obedire*, *ob+audire*, 'to hear facing someone'.⁴⁸ A voice heard close by has a significant power of suggestion and the hearer is compelled to give it his full attention, at least momentarily. It also carries the awesome authority of a provenance beyond our usual fallible human sources, addressing the hearer from some primordial place of knowing:

He is somehow face to face with elementary auditory powers, more real than wind or rain or fires, powers that deride and threaten and console, powers that he cannot step back from and see objectively.⁴⁹

Face to face means we are directly addressed with no mind-space between us and the oracle. Stepping-back, seeing objectively, are powers of theōros, but this we cannot do. This is why the daimonion is divination without theōros.

Socrates starts with his daimonion and works through the spectrum of divinatory possibilities in the service of divine reason, the gift of philosophy that he brings to the citizens of Athens. The union of reason and divination is integral with much of later Greek and Roman thought, although peculiarly difficult for a modern to understand. It also does not go unchallenged, as Cicero's penetrating critique shows, and it is to this that we now turn.

⁴⁸ Jaynes (1976) p.97.

⁴⁹ Jaynes (1976) p.95.

Chapter Six

Cicero and the Critique of Divination

When Apollo addresses Socrates the field of the omen becomes philosophy itself; hence we may say that classical Greek philosophy is born under the aegis of Apollo. The concern of Socrates and Plato is the care of the soul undertaken through philosophy, so we cannot say that the intention of either is to teach us about oracles. Socrates is unambiguously a diviner, but divination impels him on the philosophic quest and it is this that he strives to fulfil. Plato understands rites, respects the mysteries and knows the *daimon*, but gives no evidence of employing formal practices of divination. Just as the mysteries are an ontological given, prior to the project, so too is the oracle. Plato's concern is with the development of Socrates' work, and only obliquely with the question of divination.

In later classical and Hellenistic culture we find two major schools of thought, neo-Platonism and Stoicism, which not only know divination but bring it to the foreground as a matter of first importance. In this chapter I investigate the theme of divination, and particularly inductive divination, through its major proponents, the Stoics, and their greatest critic, Cicero. His writings, and particularly *De Divinatione*, constitute the single most important account of the philosophical debate in Greek and Roman divination.¹ Cicero includes a valuable repository of literary and historical omen-reports; further, his dialectical style, characteristic of the Academy, ensures that his forensic analysis yields both sides of the argument, so that

¹ Struck (2003) p.167. See also Struck (2000) p.111: 'Given the diffusion and endurance of their ideas, it is a curious misfortune that nearly the entire corpus of the formative figures of Stoicism - Zeno, Cleanthes, and Chrysippus - has completely perished'. With respect to Stoic divination we have to rely on Cicero to provide the case for both prosecution and defence.

we are presented with themes that a hermeneutic of divination is bound to address.² He establishes the terms of a debate that has endured across the centuries. The universal nature of the dilemma faced by the diviners is manifest, and time offers no resolution - the impossibility of the dilemma was much the same two millennia ago as it was at the time of Kant, and much the same as it is now.

Cicero's work is a masterpiece of scepticism. It was influential in Christianity, especially for Augustine, because it smoothed the demolition of an obnoxious manifestation of competing pagan religion; and it has continued to inspire the scientific critique of divination down to the present day. Cicero's opponents may plead that he simplifies and distorts, and it is true that it does not suit him to admit any subtlety in Stoicism concerning the relationship of divination, fate and soul. To the extent that he does acknowledge any philosophical subtlety, he dismisses it: 'however the Stoics turn and twist, all their shrewdness must come to naught.'³ However, his principal criticisms remain as fresh as they ever were in pulling apart crudely positive assertions about divination, and a close examination leads to the recognition that his critique is a hand-in-glove match for censures arising amongst the philosophers of the enlightenment. It is for this reason that I treat his questioning of divination as occupying much the same intellectual territory as Kant's dismissal of spirit-philosophy and denial of occult knowledge. My concern is not to take on these masters in mortal combat on behalf of divination. Rather, it is to employ Cicero as I have employed Kant, to question and thereby to reveal the interpretation of divination.

Marcus Cicero sets up his discussion in the rhetorical guise of a dialogue

² Cicero's arguments are characteristic of the New or Third Academy, representing a sceptical tradition within later Platonism, and critical of Stoic theory. It was founded by Carneades 214-129 BCE.

³ *De Divinatione* II 24 - I have used throughout the W.A. Falconer translation in the Loeb Classical Library (abbreviated as *De Div*).

with his brother Quintus. He has Quintus make the case for divination, laying out its categories and practices; Marcus (whom I shall from now on refer to as 'Cicero') then relentlessly dismantles that case. There is an irony in that as part of his duties Cicero occupies a formal post as an augur for the Roman Senate; this is no inconsistency, however, since he holds that these old rituals are no longer considered to have substance beyond their performance, and they are not intended to offer positive knowledge. They belong to the ceremony of state; they dignify the traditions of the Republic, bring discipline, sustain religious rites, and satisfy the masses.⁴

Cicero's use of the Natural-Artificial distinction

Divination is introduced in the form of prediction of future chance events; much of the philosophical debate throughout the essay concerns whether or not such future predictions are demonstrable or in principle feasible. The crucial theoretical and practical distinction between 'natural divination' and 'divination by art' is rapidly developed.⁵ The use of the word 'natural' seems strange to modern ears, given the altered states of consciousness with which these natural forms are frequently associated. The intention of the term is to distinguish practices or occurrences that arise without involving their human medium in conjecture or specialised and learned interpretation; examples would be prophetic dreams prior to conscious interpretation, and states of possession. The literary tradition has often portrayed the Pythia entering an ecstatic state when possessed by the god, and in this case the divination would be classed as natural. Socrates' *daimonion* also falls into this category. Wherever conjecture, metaphor and interpretation are required to mediate and 'make

⁴ *De Div* II 70. cf. similar discussion concerning Socrates' attitude to lots in the selection of public officials Chapter 5, n.8. This apparent holding of double standards by Cicero is rendered even more problematic by his acknowledgement - and skilful use - of portents in legal cases, and some modern commentators have joined an old tradition that sees him as cynical. The charge has been rebutted by Rasmussen (2000) as a misinterpretation of Cicero's recognition of divination, augury and portents as part of the social fabric of his society, and not a matter of 'personal belief'.

⁵ Cf. discussion on natural divination in Chapter 4 pp.112-3.

sense' of the oracle then we enter human *art*. This is the realm of artificial divination, most commonly, but not exclusively, recognised as a traditional discipline of interpretations learned by the practitioner; augury and astrology are in this category. The nature-art distinction is significant in the hermeneutics of divination since the two modes arguably employ distinct faculties and states of mind, while many philosophers, especially amongst the Platonists, will accept natural divination as valid but remain cautious or sceptical about artificial forms. Socrates and Plato set an enduring pattern by privileging divine frenzy over rational inference at divination's poetic source.

Cicero's rebuttal of both parts of divination is carefully crafted. The focus is the claim that genuine knowledge is attained in the practice of divination. He finds this to be absurd and in defiance of natural philosophy; the clarity of his demonstration finally brings Quintus to concede that the Stoic view is indeed faulty and superstitious.⁶ Having achieved this victory in the first part of his case, Cicero easily extends his conclusions to undermine evidences in favour of divination brought forward by those who do not regard it as *technē* and may be suspicious of practices of divination by art, but nevertheless link prophecy with the nature of the soul. However, before we may analyse the debate pro- and con- divination, we need to summarise the philosophy of the Stoics who are the target of this critique.

Divination and the Order of the Universe

Apart from Cicero's observations only fragments of the writings of the Greek Stoics have survived. From these evidences it may be inferred that with few exceptions these philosophers were defenders of omens and divination and considered that these phenomena stemmed naturally and logically from their conception of the universe. They held that the universe is constituted in divine unity;

⁶ *De Div* II 100.

the bond that binds the perfect interlocking order of its multiple parts is cosmic *sympathy*. Distributed throughout the whole is *pneuma*, divine breath, forming the basis of all things from the grossest to the subtlest substance. The divine breath is also divine reason, penetrating all things. Our very thoughts and the words we speak are modes of this substance.⁷

The Stoic position developed from a biological notion of breath, and it treats *pneuma*/breath as real in a substantive sense. It is misleading to equate this with modern materialist or naturalistic philosophy, since Stoicism has a definite and pious sense of the divine. Stoicism does however interpret that divinity as immanent and in substantial existence, and adopts a non-spiritist and non-spiritual orientation; the gods themselves are really-existing subtle embodiments of *pneuma*. Stoics therefore do not allow the immaterial Ideas of the Platonic school, nor do they accept the abstraction and immateriality of form of Aristotle. Incorporeal ideas such as 'human-ness' are the way we think about things in order to articulate our understanding, but their function is conceptual and heuristic and they are not 'real existents'.⁸

Since the universe operates by sympathetic correlation of all its parts, its physical relationships manifest in a strict and necessary causation, which is what is meant by fate (*heimarmene*). These causal relationships fall into patterns which are in principle accessible to our observation and are the subject of natural philosophy. For Chrysippus, the leading figure amongst the early Stoics, a causeless event is unthinkable. Where the followers of Aristotle and Epicurus point to spontaneity in Nature, the Stoics insisted that there must still be 'hidden causes' at work, otherwise we illogically posit that something can come into being from nothing.⁹ All things,

⁷ Lapidge (1978) pp.168-9.

⁸ Graeser (1978) p.81.

⁹ Stough (1978) p.205.

good or bad, virtues or vices, are causally determined by the logos of the cosmos, and there can be no force opposed to this.¹⁰

The notion of a deterministic and potentially predictable pattern operating directly in even the tiniest events of the universe is rendered invalid in the mainstream of Aristotelian philosophy, and correspondingly in the medieval conception of science. On the other hand it is resilient as an underlying theme in later popular belief and divinatory practice, and especially in astrology.¹¹

Within an all-encompassing Nature governed by causal laws, human being has a unique place. Animals have volition and consciousness, but according to the Roman Stoic Epictetus, 'God has introduced man in order to be a spectator of God and his works, and not merely a spectator but an interpreter'.¹² I suggest that once more we see the equivalent of the theōros-hermeios pair. As well as being an interpreter of divine purpose of the world, man is a student of his *own* human nature. Through scientific knowledge of the world and through his own self-knowledge, he becomes free from slavery to causes, approximating to the ideal of freedom (*eleutheria*).¹³ The madman, however, is unwilling to follow in this path and finds himself enslaved and compelled.¹⁴ There is a well-known illustration of the principles of moral freedom and slavery, attributed to Chrysippus or to Zeno, the founder of the school:

Just as a dog tied to a wagon, if it is willing to follow, follows as it is

¹⁰ Reesor (1978) p.198.

¹¹ See Chapter 10.

¹² Lloyd (1978) p.239.

¹³ Stough (1978) p.224.

¹⁴ Stough (1978) p.223.

also being pulled, making its own autonomy coincide with necessity; whereas if it is unwilling to follow, it will in any event be compelled. So it is with human beings.¹⁵

Since there is no force, good or bad, to counter logos, the wise man follows whatever God and *heimarmenē* bring. The following remark from Cleanthes illustrates pious determinism at its starkest:

Guide me, Zeus, and you, Fate, wherever I have been appointed by you. For I shall follow willingly; and if, become evil, I am unwilling I shall follow no less.¹⁶

The Technique of Divination

This, and similar statements, are usually seized upon by critics as suggesting an uncompromising fatalism. The approach has radical consequences for the interpretation of divination, especially in the suggestion that divinatory prediction of future events demonstrates the certainty of causal predetermination. Through absolute chains of causation the state of affairs at the time of the prophecy *necessitates the outcome* that is prophesied; the cause of the future event is already foreordained in the present nature of things.¹⁷

It is in this sense that divination is science. We cannot know all causes and all outcomes, but the phenomena of divination are a pattern laid down by providence to allow us to know hidden and future things that would otherwise be unavailable

¹⁵ Stough (1978) p.222. Zeno of Citium, the founder of Stoicism 334-262 BCE.

¹⁶ Stough (1978) p.224. Cleanthes 331-232 BCE. (Syntax as in the translation).

¹⁷ Botros (1985) pp.277-9. Cicero *De Fato* shows that Stoic divination proves their view of determinism: 'if the theory of divination is correct, then the potency of fate is proven.'

through the employment of our senses. Cicero describes the Stoic view covering all classes of divination:

The universe was so created that certain results would be preceded by certain signs, which are given sometimes by entrails and by birds, sometimes by lightnings, by portents, and by stars, sometimes by dreams, and sometimes by utterances of persons in a frenzy.¹⁸

These hidden connections have been established by the histories of observation and contemplation in the various traditions amongst diviners. This is the case with astrology, where, so it is claimed, the Chaldeans have over long ages perfected their knowledge of the correlation of celestial signs and the fate of men on earth.¹⁹

Certain conclusions about divinatory practice follow directly from these observations. For the Stoics artificial (inductive) methods of divination such as augury and astrology are empirically based disciplines built on communicable experience and passed down through tradition. This appears to be the sense in which Chrysippus can declare divination to be a science. It follows that the successful practice of a particular inductive divinatory form depends on two main factors. The first is the *empirical adequacy and coherence* of the particular tradition - that is, how successful it has been in tabulating, organising and theorising its study of really-existing patterns of fate. A long observational history counts for much, and the Chaldeans enjoy the reputation of having over the ages perfected their knowledge of celestial correlations. The second guarantee of successful divination is the *technical skill of the practitioner*. This is a dictum that recurs across the centuries:

And these signs do not often deceive the persons who observe them

¹⁸ *De Div* I 118.

¹⁹ *De Div* I 2.

properly. If prophecies, based on erroneous deductions and interpretations, turn out to be false, the fault is not chargeable to the signs but to the lack of skill of the interpreters.²⁰

The interpreter may be wrong but the signs themselves are true, since they are a real-existent manifestation of the unerring logos. If signs are always true then divination is true knowledge, even if on occasion the interpreter falls short. Although this is not made explicit in Cicero, I infer that on those occasions when the signs themselves may 'deceive the persons who observe them properly', then from the Stoic viewpoint this is not an error inherent in signs but a complexity that has not yet been accounted for in the tradition of practice.

It is fitting at this point to look a little more closely at what classical authors understand as 'signs and portents'. We know that for inductive divination as a category they are generally metaphorical signifiers by which the divinatory showing provides a representation of the event or entity it refers to, and Cicero gives a wide range of examples from classical literature. Some fit obvious patterns, as with lightning striking statues. Amongst less dramatic instances are the stories of portents in the infancies of Midas, king of Phrygia, and Plato. Ants filled the mouth of baby Midas with wheat while he slept, and the diviners predicted his great wealth; when the infant Plato slept in his cradle, bees settled on his lips and 'this was interpreted to mean that he would have a rare sweetness of speech'.²¹ The metaphors here are blatant, almost self-interpreting, and require no great expertise. Some metaphors are more subtle, but perfectly apt once we have heard the whole story. The Spartans desired to consult the oracle of Zeus at Dodona before battle, but before this could take place a pet ape scattered the lots in all directions: 'the priestess who had charge

²⁰ *De Div* I 119.

²¹ *De Div* I 78.

of the oracle said that the Spartans must think of safety and not of victory.²² This is an interesting example of the way in which an obvious divinatory sign may arise beyond the predetermined metaphoric field of the divination. Some signs are likely to strike us as obscure, although many of these would have appeared more obvious in their own contexts. The famous actor Roscius had a snake coil round him while he slept as a baby; 'his father referred the occurrence to the soothsayers, who replied that the boy would attain unrivalled eminence and glory.'²³ We cannot be sure of the metaphor in every case; it may be indirect rather than direct, in that it might indeed be taken as an omen prompting diviners to take further divination to see whether this portended good or ill. An unbidden omen prompting further bidding of omens is a common pattern in divination ancient and modern. Still other signs depend on unique cultural associations and initiatic divinatory forms, and will not yield their meaning to the non-initiated outsider; this is clearly the case where there are variations and downright contradictions between the signs observed in separate augural traditions.²⁴

Misplaced mystification

What emerges as a theme in the semantics of omen-reading is that it commonly involves at root a simple and even childlike use of metaphoric association; we have already seen this amply demonstrated in the examples from primitive culture. There is a close association here with poetry, and Peter Struck has shown the extent to which literary concepts of symbol and allegory in antiquity share their origin with divinatory usages.²⁵ This raises an important question of interpretation, and of the modern scholarly attitude to divination. Having made the

²² *De Div* I 76.

²³ *De Div* I 79. The snake was commonly taken as a sign of good fortune.

²⁴ *De Div* II 76.

²⁵ See Chapter 4, n.22.

significant connection with poetry, Struck nevertheless also argues that divination, or its understanding, is inherently mysterious:

Diviners, it seems, uniquely enforce a semantic system *founded and maintained* on mystification. For the art to survive, it must hide the semantic links between sign and meaning under clouds of mystery. Such links need to be situated by definition beyond the reach of the other arts, and therefore, in practice, beyond the reach of reason.²⁶

(italics in the original)

Struck arrives at this view by observing that the signs of divination are necessarily distinct from the signs employed by other areas of science, and we will review this discussion in the section that follows, acknowledging the strong understanding from antiquity, amongst diviners and their critics alike, that divination must involve a distinct order of knowledge. It is distinct in that the signs of divination, *qua* signs, are not the same signs that are used in the regular sciences attained by human industry; the semantic ranges are coextensive but not exclusive. Unlike the signs of the sciences, omens and portents are *divinely given*: all of our sources are unambiguous in agreeing on this. Struck has however conflated the *provenance* of divinatory signs - which is indeed wholly mysterious - with the *method* by which they are read. The provenance is mysterious, the method is not; it is in essence logical and open to articulation and reason, in so far as language itself is open to articulation and reason. This is a logical conclusion with which the Stoics would

²⁶ Struck (2004) p.190, who appears to be referring to all diviners and not just the Stoic theorists being challenged by Cicero. Struck has been led into a philosophical category error by Cicero's rhetorical device. Cicero, following Carneades, challenges divination as *scientific or technical* knowledge, which, as is convincingly demonstrated, it cannot be. Yet Struck has at this point ignored his own carefully researched comparison of divination with *literary interpretation*. The same opinion concerning the mystification inherent in divination, following Struck, appears in Sarah Iles Johnston (2008) p.13. This is a widespread misunderstanding amongst cultural historians who do not themselves explore or give valency to symbolic interpretation (and even less do they explore practical divination).

certainly have agreed. On the other hand, the very fact of distinguishing a divine and a non-divine provenance for two different orders of knowledge effectively cleaves reality itself into a hierarchy of two realms, or two apparent realms. Therein lies the mystery.

I have emphasised the misplaced mystification of divinatory method because it has significant consequences for the interpretation of divination amongst diviners and scholars alike. This will become apparent in Chapter 11 when we come to the vexed question of judicial astrology. For now, however, we return to consider the relationship of science and divination as understood by the Stoics.

Divination as special knowledge

We have already noted that Chrysippus is reported as treating divination as a science; however, this seems to run counter to the position given to the Stoic defence in *De Divinatione*, where Quintus establishes that divinatory knowledge is distinct from scientific knowledge. Cicero clearly regards this as a point of philosophical consequence, and he is surely correct to do so. He observes that divinatory predictions should not be confused with the observations of physics and natural causation, nor with speculations from these observations. This is especially important in our understanding of divination by art, which in some instances appears similar to empirical observation. However, divination *per se* is quite different from the farmer's predictions of weather tomorrow judged from meteorological signs of wind, sky and clouds seen today. These weather signs belong to a causal pattern of nature. In like manner, from their knowledge of the world wise men predict many things without this being the faculty of divination. Quintus cites the case of Thales of Miletus who, to prove to mocking critics that philosophers can make money should they choose to, cornered the local market in olives by accurately assessing

indications from the olive trees before they came to bloom.²⁷

The suggestion that divination involves a distinctive order of knowledge leaves it exposed to the charge that it has no true field of objects of its own, and that its patterns are inherently meaningless combinations of factors with no cause-effect relationship. The epistemic challenge that divination has no scope - that there is no 'field of omens' - has been forcefully put by Carneades, cited by Cicero. Divination is found to be 'not applicable in any case where knowledge is gained through the senses'.²⁸ The blind seer Tiresias would not be able to tell the difference between black and white. Divination does not help us in learning various skills, and we take lessons on playing the flute from a musician, not a diviner. Divination gives us no insight into planetary motions or geometry, it cannot solve problems of logic, physics, moral philosophy or government, 'nor can any field or subject matter be found over which it may exercise control'. Cicero therefore doubts whether there is any such thing as divination.

There is a much-quoted Greek verse to this effect:

"The best diviner I maintain to be
The man who guesses or conjectures best."

Now do you think that a prophet will 'conjecture' better whether a storm is at hand than a pilot? or that he will by 'conjecture' make a more accurate diagnosis than a physician, or conduct a war with more

²⁷ *De Div* I 111-2. Thales proved his astuteness by requiring only a small capital outlay to make a large return, but his achievements as an astronomer led rather confusingly to his success being attributed to astrology. However 'the significance of the story, for Cicero, lies in the *scientia* by which Thales could anticipate the predictions of the practical farmers' (Pease, 1920-4, p.300-1).

²⁸ *De Div* II 9.

skill than a general?²⁹

Quintus seems to have conceded much ground in acknowledging that divination is in a category apart from the empirical observations of physics and science. But how are we to square this understanding with the definition of divination as science imputed to Chrysippus? There is no need to suppose that Cicero misrepresents his sources. He would gain nothing by doing so since his critique would, if anything, be simpler to carry through if the Stoics fell into an elephant trap by assuming a straightforward identity between results obtained through scientific method or natural philosophy and results obtained through divination. The fact that they do not fall into such an assumption is significant in terms of our hermeneutic analysis. Although this may be far from having been explicitly resolved by the Stoic thinkers, their approach suggests a double-conception along the lines already introduced in this study, namely that 'divination involves a mode that is other than our ordinary everyday thinking, and does not proceed according to our accepted notions of common sense.'³⁰ We will return to this theme shortly.

On the limited evidence before us, the apparently divergent approaches in Quintus and Chrysippus are bridged in the following manner. We know that for the Stoics the patterns of fate revealed to us through divination are real-existents. Divination therefore has a true object of knowledge, the acquisition of which involves learning and the discipline of technical skill, and it is on this account that we may properly call it 'science'. Nevertheless, since the patterns in divination involve the intention and aid of divine beings they are in a different category when

²⁹ *De Div* II 12. The verse is from Euripides, quoted by Plutarch in the *Obsolescence of Oracles* 432c. The verse will be found in Nauck, A. *Tragicorum Graecorum Fragmenta* (Hildesheim, G. Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1964) p.674, Euripides no. 973.

³⁰ Chapter 2, p. 51.

compared with the causal laws of nature open to our senses. We have a somewhat similar issue in the medieval attribution of theology as science, with its true object of scientific knowledge being God and his works to the extent that he permits knowledge of himself. This understanding of science is conformable with Aristotelianism, and it is only since the enlightenment that the medieval equation has been rendered unthinkable.

Intelligent assent

This helps to lay the ground for a claim of fundamental importance for the Stoics, and decisive in the interpretation of divination as a special type of knowledge: the existence of gods necessitates divination, and the existence of divination proves the existence of gods. Gods have the power to know the future, and since they love and care for us, they give us signs of the future and the means to read those signs.³¹

What, then, do they intend to teach us by giving us these signs? Divination is shown as going beyond ordinary utilitarian goals and is revealed as a mode of pious relationship with the gods:

Chrysippus, indeed, defines divination in these words: 'The power to see, understand, and explain premonitory signs given to men by the gods.' 'Its duty,' he goes on to say, 'is to know in advance the disposition of the gods towards men, the manner in which that disposition is shown, and by what means the gods may be propitiated and their threatened ills averted.'³²

³¹ *De Div* I 82-3. This argument is also discussed by Cicero in *De natura deorum* 162.

³² *De Div* II 130.

A careful reading of Cicero's text at this point suggests that he has not sufficiently accounted for the significance of this definition, and it is inappropriate to his rhetorical purposes. He inserts the definition in the discussion of divination by dreams, and in the context of showing how impossible it would be to find someone with the wisdom to be a diviner, and how shallow it would make the gods if they bothered to communicate with mere superstitious fortune-tellers.³³ Cicero throughout his essay underplays the subtlety of Stoic ethics in favour of a demolition of a hard-determinist and wholly fatalistic representation of their case. A little reflection on the passage from Chrysippus shows that it does not bear this interpretation. How could the threatened ills of the gods be averted if those ills are already fated to be? What would be the point of propitiation?

Chrysippus indicates something more interesting and more profound: the concept of the *conditional oracle*, where the outcome of the oracle depends on our response to the oracle. Directly related is the possibility that the taking of an oracle itself alters the course of events, and that the gods both intend this and foresee it to be so. Lloyd-Jones and Sharples have suggested this reading of Chrysippus with respect to debates about the meaning of the oracles given to Laius and Oedipus in Sophocles' great drama.³⁴ We have already examined a definitive case of the conditional oracle for Socrates, in the Delphic Oracle's response to Chaerephon.

Tying together Stoic determinism and the conditional oracle plunges us into a seemingly impossible paradox. In what sense can the outcome of an oracle be

³³ This matches Aristotle's doubt (in *On Prophesying by Dreams*) concerning divination by dreams: 'it is absurd to combine the idea that the sender of such dreams should be God with the fact that those to whom he sends them are not the best and wisest but merely commonplace persons'(J.I.Beare translation).

³⁴ Sharples (1983) pp.166-7. Alexander of Aphrodisias, adopting an Aristotelian critique of the Stoics, 'seems guilty of failing to indicate to his readers the *positive* use that Chrysippus made of the example'. From the point of view of divination, critics have tended to give an over-simple account, to the detriment of our understanding of Stoicism.

conditional if the choice of the human actor and its outcome is *already foreseen* by the god? This is a paradox well exercised in Christian theology in the following millennium, and the answer from Stoic ethics is similar to the answer given to those who ask how freedom of human choice squares with the all-knowing God of Christianity.

The Stoic answer is that although we are fated by natural causation and cannot escape the chain of events foreseen by the god, we are not passive objects. We share self-movement with organic living beings, but unlike them our self-movement is self-known; we have a faculty of reason which allows us to understand and to *assent* to what befalls us, giving us moral responsibility for certain of our acts. The story of Medea and her terrible act of vengeance lends itself as an illustration. A whole chain of greater and lesser circumstances and human actions has led up to her act, including Jason's love and her own jealous nature; all these things are part of a chain of fate and have therefore combined to 'cause' the tragic outcome, yet only Medea is *morally responsible for* killing her own children. Chrysippus holds that assent allows us to act rather than to simply be moved, and the 'human agent by virtue of giving *his* assent makes the event that follows *his* action.'³⁵

The capacity for intelligent assent is crucial to Stoic ethics and counters the accusation that determinism strips man of his moral responsibility. This accusation is often expressed in the form of the so-called 'lazy argument' used against hard determinism - if everything is completely predestined, then I do not need to bother doing anything, and even my not-bothering has been predetermined.³⁶ The lazy argument is used extensively by Cicero to render divination absurd - if a future event

³⁵ Stough (1978) pp.218-20, showing that the Stoic position concerning the compatibility of divine foreknowledge with human freedom of choice and moral responsibility becomes a foundation of Christian ethics; the example of Medea is used as an illustration by Clement.

³⁶ The 'lazy argument' (*argos logos*) and its counter by the Stoic Chrysippus are described in Sharples (1983) p.10.

turns out in the exact way that it does as a result of chance, and yet this chance outcome is known by the gods, then that outcome is fixed and fated to be. Since there is nothing we can do about the outcome, what is the point of divination?³⁷ Knowing our fate is likely to make us miserable, and its supposed inevitability renders empty the Stoic teaching that 'every evil which is going to befall us is made lighter by means of religious rites'.³⁸ This is a significant instance where Cicero may be accused of misrepresenting his opponents, or at least of ignoring shades of opinion amongst them, since the thrust of Stoic ethics is that the *logos* places the wise man's understanding above the natural condition of being moved by external nature as if we are mere sticks and stones.³⁹ Divinatory signs that providentially indicate our fate may be intended to teach us this.

Epictetus' view that man is both spectator and interpreter of God and his works has already been referred to, together with the idea that man finds freedom and happiness by choice - running with what is required of him instead of being compelled like a dog dragged by a wagon. What ethically is required of him? It is taken for granted that he is fated to be in accord with the laws of Nature and with his own human nature; this requirement will compel him if he tries to go against it. A further accord is required, however; the accord of piety, the right relation with divinity. In the words of Chrysippus 'piety [is] knowledge/expertise that renders trustworthy precisely those people who preserve what is right towards the gods.'⁴⁰ This is the accord that is sustained in divination. It is the gift of divination, granted to us by the gods, to place us in a right relation with our fate:

³⁷ *De Div* II 20ff.

³⁸ *De Div* II 25.

³⁹ Stough (1978) p.222.

⁴⁰ Johnston (2004) p.160.

...divination enjoys a good reputation among all men on the grounds that it really comes to pass with god's help; and the satisfaction felt by the wise with whatever befalls them, since all things happen according to fate.

*Chrysippus*⁴¹

As we find with divination of any culture and era, the examples given by Quintus show a variety of divinatory phenomena covering many different human concerns, some lofty, some dubious. It is therefore acknowledged that some omens 'may be lightly regarded and even be laughed at', yet all show the existence of the gods.⁴² The scattered records we have from the early Stoics allow us to reconstruct their understanding of the wisdom of divination in its non-trivial and most noble aspect. We start with the recognition that the Stoic philosophers teach piety and moral responsibility in the face of an irrevocable order of fate. Further, they associate divination with the capacity for wisdom, which is what the gods of divination in their benevolence wish to nurture. This leads us to appreciate that the *determination* of divination (that to which any particular divination is taken to refer), reaches beyond the external foreseen event since the omen implicates the one seeking in moral choice. Assent to the divination is what is required of the *deōros*. In this light *the omen is a divine sign of moral choice* as much as it is a sign of an event. This is the meaning of the passage from Chrysippus given above.

Radical discontinuity

The distinction developed by Cicero that there is only a superficial similarity between science and divination, empirical and divinatory observation, is

⁴¹ Plutarch *On Fate* 57A.

⁴² Quintus acknowledges but defends slight omens at *De Div* I 104. It seems that this is a fair report of Stoic attitudes, since they treat all omens as having a similar ultimate provenance as truthful indications given by the gods.

fundamental in pointing to a difference in cognitive process, in logic and attitude, between the two realms. Cicero will no doubt assume that the distinction arises from faulty logic and weak philosophising amongst diviners, something that could be put right by more talking and better thinking. The very structure of the dialogue attests to this, in that Quintus is shown to be won over by sound rational arguments. Thinking and talking will help to clarify the issues, but I suggest that the difficulties both parties encounter point to a radical cleavage in understanding. Others taking up the debate on behalf of divination are only likely to be hauled safely back to common sense if from the start they are outsiders to the experience of divination, either unpracticed or as literary stooges like Quintus.

The suggestion of a radical discontinuity in understanding bears comparison with similar observations made in a very different cultural context by Evans-Pritchard, and discussed in chapter 3. His view was that the Azande, even where their empirical observations might appear to us to be proto-scientific and capable of yielding scientific knowledge, are rooted in a symbolic and magical order of understanding. This may in turn be understood in the light of Lévy-Bruhl's *participation mystique*.

We therefore see in the debate about divination different logics, two asymmetric foundations for interpretation. It is difficult to imagine how the two might come together, but the true failure on either side is not the fact of incompatibility but a lack of insight into the difference. How far some of the Stoic philosophers were aware of the subtleties of this issue is a matter of speculation that we may never resolve, but for the purposes of my discussion this does not have to be decided. Divination works for the practitioners of divination whether or not they have philosophical insight into what is meant by saying 'it works'. The suggestion put forward in describing the chicane (chapter 3) is that divination seeks a transitory relation in an instance of double-thinking. This is enacted and possibly understood by hermeios; it is witnessed and possibly understood by theōros. In this process

diviners and their clients make rational and explanatory theories about divination: 'theōros theorises'. Examples of these theories are recounted and dismissed by Cicero - how could they withstand his lawyer's skill? The fact that the theories may from one point of view be seen as contradictory, feeble or absurd does not however alter their interpretive function, which is to serve as a bridge from one side of the chasm to the other. They give the practitioner and the enquirer a sufficient explanation of the phenomena of divination to give him or her confidence, or at least the capacity to suspend doubts. The various attempts to rationalise and explain divination are necessary to the presentiment of the omen, making possible the event *as* omen. To the extent that some of these rationalisations are shaped by the experience of divination, then elements of the cognitive process involved may become apparent within them. I therefore go back into the debate between Cicero and his opponents in order to bring these shadowy elements to light.

How does divination work? Quintus insists that even if we do not know how divination works, the existence of empirical evidence of its working is sufficient. When he does speculate further, he offers explanations that are either miraculous or inconsistent with each other, as when he narrates the reports of the foreshowing by portents of Caesar's impending murder. On the day 'when he sat for the first time on a golden throne and first appeared in public in a purple robe', no heart was found in the organs of the votive ox; and there was no head to the liver of the animal sacrificed on the following day. Quintus explains that it may be 'that at the moment when the sacrifice is offered, a change in the vitals occurs and something is added or taken away.'⁴³ He offers an alternative and competing possibility of divine

⁴³ *De Div* I 119. Caesar was assassinated on the Ides of March (15th March 44 BCE) after assuming increasing dictatorial powers over the Republic and seeming to acknowledge the emblems of kingship and divinity. Various portents were recorded by Roman historians, including a specific warning that he would not survive beyond the Ides of March from the Etruscan haruspex Spurinna, referred to in the same passage. (See for example Suetonius *Life of Julius Caesar* 81). Cicero, who will have been in a position to verify the facts, does not seek to question their historicity, but he disputes their supposed significance.

prompting, 'that the choice of a sacrificial victim is guided by an intelligent force, which is diffused throughout the universe.'⁴⁴

Cicero has no difficulty in rendering such arguments absurd. They require miraculous and arbitrary agencies and relationships, and they defy all scientific knowledge:

Upon my word you Stoics surrender the very city of philosophy while defending its outworks! For, by your insistence on the truth of soothsaying, you utterly overthrow physiology. There is a head to the liver and a heart in the entrails, presto! they will vanish the very second you have sprinkled them with meal and wine! Aye, some god will snatch them away!⁴⁵

Beyond simply calling the phenomena incredible, Cicero displays a most powerful weapon in the rhetoric against divination, namely that its justification has to overthrow our secure sciences - the city of philosophy - in order to rationalise the outworks of ambiguous and uncertain beliefs and practices. This is similar in principle to the argument employed by Kant, and by the whole tradition of positivism quite apart from Kant: whether or not any individual miraculous report might seem credible, to proceed further with such windy speculations ruins the secure and hard-won understanding that our slow progress to knowledge has achieved.

Has Cicero closed his mind and his ears so that whatever is put to him he will not hear? I see no reason not to accept his statements of good faith, which means that he is in no sense an atheist, and his philosophy is pious. He wants it 'distinctly

⁴⁴ *De Div* I 118-9.

⁴⁵ *De Div* II 37.

understood' that the destruction of superstition, and especially divination, does not entail the destruction of a true religion close to Nature, acknowledging that 'the celestial order and the beauty of the universe compel me to confess that there is some excellent and eternal Being, who deserves the respect and homage of men.'⁴⁶ Further, in the spirit of the Academy, he is not *necessarily* against divination. Concerning the theoretical possibility of divine portents, he lays this requirement on Quintus:

I am not a hopeless sceptic on the subject of such warnings really being sent by the gods; however, I do not know what they are and I want to learn the actual facts from you.⁴⁷

Quintus and the Stoics cannot satisfy him, but whether or not the cases they bring forward in proof have credibility, the crucial failure is that the defenders of divination do not provide a convincing theory. Their rationalisations fall to pieces under questioning, and for Cicero that renders their philosophy untenable. Concerning the possibility of portents, 'I do not know' says Cicero. There is a parallel here with Kant's honest admission of ignorance, and with his acknowledgment that he is not against the possibility of spirit-phenomena *in principle* - indeed there is something in him that is inclined to accept them - but he finds himself unconvinced in each and every particular case.

Concerning the widespread use of divination in antiquity Cicero observes that 'in sanctioning such usages, the ancients were influenced more by actual results than convinced by reason.'⁴⁸ Being influenced by actual results - by experience -

⁴⁶ *De Div* II 148.

⁴⁷ *De Div* II 48.

⁴⁸ *De Div* I 5.

therefore comes forward as the nub of the problem. Cicero gives us the clear impression that rather than relying primarily on metaphysical premises the Stoic defence of divination is rooted in experience, or in the trusted report of the experience of others. The logic of the argument presented by Quintus does not involve building up to the theoretical or logical *possibility* of divination, but depends on the *demonstrated actuality* of divination; he does this by assembling 'an astonishing array' of cases.⁴⁹ His argument therefore claims an empirical foundation and is not speculative and theoretical. But this is precisely where Cicero challenges the Stoics with devastating effect, because Quintus cannot offer any *theory*, any rational construction, within which these supposed actual cases of true portents and divinations can be generically explained. All these cases are mere anecdotes which may be 'either true by accident, or false and fabricated through malice.'⁵⁰ Such argument 'is not becoming in a philosopher':

You ought to have employed arguments and reason to show that all your propositions were true and you ought not to have resorted to so-called occurrences - certainly not to such occurrences as are unworthy of belief.⁵¹

If the philosophical rebuttal from the sceptics does stem from a radical cleavage in understanding, then we may doubt whether any amount of facts or rationalisations could ever fill the void. Yet in the nature of philosophy the attempt is made, over and over again. This brings us to a delicate historical question concerning the manifest problems in the Stoic case. Either the Stoics were markedly thoughtless in the face of obvious and commonsense contradictions in their

⁴⁹ *De Div* II 27.

⁵⁰ *De Div* II 27.

⁵¹ *De Div* II 27.

arguments, or their thinking came from some other place than that of their critics. There is also the unattractive possibility that they were both stupid *and* coming from some other place. Given the sophistication of their ethics and philosophy, thoughtlessness is not an answer. Something in their intuitions, their experience, and their intellectual construction of that experience, brought them to their seemingly illogical and indefensible place with respect to divination. This does not mean that they could not, at key points, intuit erroneously, misinterpret experience, and become prey to Kant's 'surreptitious concepts'. But, even if we were to pin most of these failings on them, something still needs to be explained. How come they were *so* attached to divination? That becomes a valid question when we observe that it is far from obvious that Stoic cosmology, its construction of pneuma, sympathy and causation, needed to include practical divination in its remit; the theoretical construction would have been neater and simpler to manage without it. They could have left the pious backcloth of Greek culture, including its great oracles, without taking on the awkward task of justifying minor forms of inductive divination. However, since they made the relationship of gods and divination in its multiple forms central to their theology, we come back to the recognition, affirmed by our reading of Cicero, that oracles, omens and inductive divination were not secondary phenomena at the periphery but were core to Stoic understanding. In terms of the insider/outsider distinction adopted at the start of this study, divination in its manifold varieties would appear to have been a matter of *significant practical experience*. It is difficult to imagine that philosophers such as Chrysippus were not aware of all the inconsistencies that Cicero might name, and more besides; and yet he still upholds divination. This would explain why the extraordinary phenomena encountered in divination would demand a primary attention, placing pressure on their theories in order to rationalise them, rather than being something casually encountered on the way to philosophy. It is on the basis of this surmise that we are justified in using Cicero's astute probing to infer elements of the cognitive process in

divination.

White crows and the Unique Case

There is a direct affinity between the classical arguments brought by Quintus in defence of inductive divination and the mode of the 'unique case of interpretation'. We should not be thrown off the scent by the fact that he produces a large number of such cases - this is a large number of quite disparate single cases, effectively anecdotes. The logic of each of these single cases is similar. No cause is - or is likely to be - brought forward to explain why the omen is as it is. Out of whatever antecedent events the material situation of the omen has arisen, it is significant not by virtue of what has caused it, but by virtue of what it points to, on the assumption that there is a revealing divinatory (ie. 'pneumatic') relationship between the omen and that which it signifies. The relationship itself may be veiled in hidden causes but it is real, and its showing is real. The only generic factor occupying the position of theoretical explanation is the assertion that there is a (hidden) pneumatic power that renders such showings real. At this point we come to the conclusion arrived at by Kant with respect to all such debates, namely that we have an unbridgeable divide of conflicting *opinion*, beyond the scope of proof and of science.

This emerges as a deeply rooted discontinuity in the understanding of truth and knowledge itself. This is best understood if we ask Quintus to remove a large number of the uncertain cases and stay with the idea of true witness, that is, well-attested examples of divination and portents involving reliable individuals. In this case, the nature of the divide comes down to the following empirical dilemma, which would seem to reflect the Stoic position. Let a situation arise where, despite the difficulties and illogicalities, and despite the imponderables of fate and causation involved, I consider that I, like the Stoics, have a definite experience of an omen or a divination. If after due consideration I arrive at the conclusion that it is unreasonable to put this down to chance or false perception, then I am faced with the choice of

denying my experience or bracketing and putting to one side the apparent impossibilities involved.

If this occurs and I am able *and willing* to bracket logical impossibilities, then I have produced for myself the 'white crow' memorably described by William James. This was James' metaphor for psychical research to the extent that it produced even one unimpeachable piece of evidence for paranormal phenomena; there needs to be undeniably and unmistakably a single white crow in order to disprove the hypothesis that 'all crows are black'. James did indeed consider that this had been achieved, generally for psychical research but individually for him.⁵² If I have seen a white crow, and after careful consideration of various aspects of the case, including the speculative and theoretical reasons to doubt it, I nevertheless regard it as an unreasonable hypothesis that I have been mistaken, then I consider that my experience stands. The existence of the white crow is, to my satisfaction, established. Depending on the nature of the incident one single clear and dramatic instance of seeing the white crow might well suffice to satisfy me for the rest of my life, so that I will never be shaken off my certainty that there is a white crow. From my point of view, and following the description from Kant, I consider that I have *knowledge* which my sceptical opponent counters with an *opinion*. My opponent, if he is a modern scientific rationalist, will insist to the point of rudeness that only he has knowledge and I have mistaken opinion. If my opponent is Kant, he doubts my appeal to private knowledge but allows that in mysteries of the soul and fate both sides of the argument have to settle for opinion, since the matter is beyond science. He will however warn that the inability to distinguish knowledge from opinion confuses science and rational philosophy, and on this Cicero would certainly agree.

⁵² William James' white crow was the experience of sessions with the trance medium Mrs. Piper - 'What the source of this knowledge may be I know not, and *have not the glimmer of an explanatory suggestion* to make...' (Murphy ed. 1961 p.41 - my italics).

To return to the Stoics, I have made the case that their position on divination reflects 'significant practical experience', which further suggests a shared system of knowledge. In that system of knowledge, apparent illogicalities are resolved in a speculative theory involving the hidden causes of *pneuma* and the knowledge of the gods. The theory is the place where illogicalities are bracketed and put to one side. Quintus on several occasions uses the white crow argument, that the single case of divination suffices to establish its truth, and there is no doubt that this is a standard Stoic defence. There is one significant passage in Cicero's text where we gain a clear impression of how this will be understood. This is the strong argument put by Cratippus, a defender of divination who not only has *opinions* about the soul but has direct experience and therefore *knowledge* of divination. Cratippus is a Peripatetic and not a Stoic; he accepts natural divination, including dreams, and would incline to doubt about inductive forms, but his argument from experience undoubtedly reflects the Stoic attitude. Here he explains the certainty of his knowledge:

Though without eyes it is impossible to perform the act and function of sight, and though the eyes sometimes cannot perform their appointed function, yet when a person has once so employed his eyes as to see things as they are, he has a realisation of what correct vision is. Likewise, too, although without the power of divination it is impossible for the act and function of divining to exist, and though one with that power may be mistaken and may make erroneous prophecies, yet to establish the existence of divination it is enough that a single event has been so clearly foretold as to exclude the hypothesis of chance. But there are many such instances; therefore the existence of divination must be conceded.⁵³

⁵³ *De Div* I 71; II 106. Cratippus, a follower of Aristotle and tutor to Quintus; according to Cicero he accepted natural divination including dreams.

This is a unique case argument by virtue of the fact that we might find the complete power of divination in one single instance given clearly in our experience. Divination is just as securely established as is the actuality of the white crow in that one case. It follows also that any divination may be sufficient to itself, without requiring any other occurrence beyond its own determination, which is more exactly what I intend to convey by the concept of 'the unique case of interpretation'. The example also allows for the possibility of many black crows - that is, cases of divination *not* working. Black crows do not stop us being sure that we have seen the one white crow.

The metaphor of a sensory faculty, sight, is always potent, and Cicero's critique at this point seems less secure, since he is arguing from the theoretical impossibility of divination and is close to letting his argument be trumped by the actual experience of an authoritative and thoughtful witness. We may often not see, says Cratippus, and we may see imperfectly, but that says nothing against sight. The metaphor also suggests the order of certainty that we normally attribute to sensory perception. A further illuminating aspect of his remarks concerns the *sensum cernentium* happily translated by Falconer as 'realisation': 'when a person has even once employed his eyes as to see things as they are, he has a realisation of what correct vision is'.⁵⁴ In the immediately-present identity of 'realised interpretation' we encounter the certainty that distinguishes a sense of divinatory knowledge from the abstracted possibility of speculative opinion. Cicero's critique therefore cannot touch hermeios and the moment of divinatory realisation; instead he cuts away its ground by disempowering speculation and annulling the *theōros*.

⁵⁴ Qui vel semel ita est usus oculis ut vera cerneret, is habet sensum oculorum vera cernentium.

Chapter Seven

The Revealing of Divination from Plato to Plutarch

The question of provenance reveals our ultimate concern with respect to divination; there is nothing that goes beyond this question, and how we approach this concern testifies to our own attitude to divination and to the divine. Post-Kant, no modern rationalist conceives that there could be other than one respectable answer:

Whatever our ancient sources may claim about the greater powers that enabled it to work - gods, demons, the cosmos itself - divination is an utterly human art, behind which one can glimpse not only the rules that participants have developed for its engagement, but also the rules by which participants assume (or hope) that the world works.¹

Behind this statement of the utterly human are glimpsed the certain rules by which our rationalist assumes (or hopes) that the world works. It overlooks the fact that there is no finally secure basis for such an absolute assertion, and that, *pace* Kant, it is necessarily an *opinion* imagined as self-evident truth. As such it is to be set against the widely-held opinion of 'ancient sources' that divination and prophecy are indeed given by the divine. I have quoted this statement not because I disagree with it, but as a reminder of the gulf that faces us after the new thought of the European enlightenment.

Greek thought from its origins includes philosophical theology, where the All

¹ Johnston (2005) Introduction pp.10-11.

of being is named as 'the Divine' and is both the ontological foundation and the epitome of life, reason and intelligence.² Amongst classical and Hellenistic thinkers this is often the backdrop to a natural piety coupled with cool scepticism on matters of practical religion, well represented by Cicero. Where gods or an intuited divine are accepted as a reality, there is a range of opinion as to whether and how this intelligence is known by us and can be said to address us. Epicurus rejected the diviners' claim to the divine; though there were gods, they had no part in our affairs and were not in touch with us through divination.³ At the other end of the scale, the Stoics held that the gods give us omens readily and in a variety of ways, and this knowledge is attainable by wise practitioners.⁴

The Stoics represent the evolution of divination into a universal theory, showing the divine as an all-containing order communicated to us through oracles and omens, and interpreted as a science of fate.⁵ A trace of the Stoic attitude endures wherever there is divination, and especially in astrology. There is however another important stream of theory, strongly influenced by Plato; this was moderated in the Hellenistic era into a philosophically rich dialectic through the inspiration of Plutarch. The concern here is not to trace the cultural-historical question of the evolution of these theories, nor to lay out all relevant dimensions of Plutarch's thinking, but to bring significant insights from the later Platonic tradition into contemporary relevance. For the practice of divination, nowhere is this more relevant than in the question of the distinction between its *natural* and *artificial* forms.⁶

² Gadamer (1970) 'On the Divine in Early Greek Thought' pp.37,40.

³ *De Div.* I 5.

⁴ *De Div.* I 118-9.

⁵ *De Div* I 118, and Stough (1978) p.225 on Stoic fate as an 'ordered interweaving of causes.'

⁶ Introduced in Chapter 6.

Natural and Artificial as a Platonic distinction

This theoretical distinction has become firmly embedded in later interpretations. From the evidence in Cicero, defenders of divination might practice natural divination but be sceptical about the validity of the speculative and interpretive nature of artificial divination.⁷ This continues to shape discourse to the present day. It forms the initial boundary of this current study, since the hallmark of artificial divination is that it is inductive in the sense that a rational process of inference takes up the concrete details of the unique case, the particular divinatory showing in the here-and-now. A further definitive marker of artificial/inductive divination is that it always involves metaphor, in some shape or form, at the centre of interpretation.

The distinction makes immediate sense in modern divination. A Tarot reader is an otherwise unremarkable individual manipulating cards and professing to interpret something from them. The mechanism by which the cards are believed to arrange themselves is obscure, and it is easy to think the interpretation is being cooked up. Everybody can 'do it', that is, lay out cards and make some associations. With a psychic, and even more with a trance medium, the answers may still seem cooked up, but there is the hope (the presentiment) that the *special thing* will occur, with its privileged claim to truth-status. The special thing comes as a direct presentation and not simply a mental re-presentation.⁸

⁷ Cratippus is an obvious example, mentioned in *De Div* I 71, II 106 - see Chapter 6.

⁸ On the interplay between presentation and representation in divination, see Tedlock (2001) pp.191-2. There is a semantic teaser at work in 'art/artificial', at least in English, since artificial has become synonymous with non-natural manipulation or even something false - ie. a trick or *chicane*. With a person possessed this may be divine or it may be madness but it is not a *chicane*.

The distinction may not be as useful as it first appears, however. At first glance there would seem to be a self-evident association between 'natural'=inspired/realised and hermeios, 'artificial'=discursive/speculative and theōros. However, the comparison breaks down. This is because the natural-artificial designation strongly polarises and demarcates modes of divination on a *technical* means-by-which basis, while theōros-hermeios - or hermeios-theōros - is a hermeneutic description of a complementary understanding at work within *both* natural and artificial divination.

This suggestion is best examined by pushing natural divination to its extreme in direct spirit possession. Here the individual involved becomes an embodiment or a pure medium of the god, daimon, or other supernatural entity. The likelihood of a conscious rational process being engaged in the making of meaning shrinks away for the trance medium, where we have the medium-as-vessel rather than diviner-as-interpreter. There is not a translation between two realms, it is an extrusion of spirit phenomena into our realm, which may or may not make sense; the making of sense may require the assistance of an officiating priest who translates for the enquirer what it is that the possessing entity intends. In this case hermeios functions in the interpreter. We could say that we have no theōros in the possessed medium, with hermeios replaced by the temple priest. It is notable that this may be Plato's model for natural divination, at least as expressed in his late work, *Timaeus*.⁹

Cicero sweeps up both artificial and natural divination in a single logical assault, though for purposes of rhetoric he challenges artificial divination first, since it is easier to make this look ridiculous. He is not concerned with the emergence of meaning in the process of divination, which might be subject to different processes in the two modes - but with the validity of the claim to objective knowledge. His conveniently narrow initial definition of divination as the prediction of future chance

⁹ *Timaeus* 72a,b. See discussion in Chapter 4.

events makes it easy for him to show the identical logical impossibility of prediction of future chance contingencies for both forms; both rely equally on anecdote and the unique case defence. This ensures that the same arguments that defeat the Stoic acceptance of inductive divination in the reading of signs and omens must defeat others, such as some of the Platonists and Aristotelians, who might affirm the possibility of foreknowledge in dreams, visions and other natural practices.¹⁰

Divine madness

Whatever are the archaic origins of the natural-artificial distinction, its status as definition in all later discourse is closely bound up with the authority of Plato's particular understanding of 'divine madness'. There is a well known discussion of the theme in *Phaedrus*. Far from being simply an evil, there is a noble 'inspired madness':

For prophecy is a madness, and the prophetess at Delphi and the priestesses at Dodona when out of their senses have conferred great benefits on Hellas, both in public and in private life, but when in their senses few or none.¹¹

He then contrasts this power of prophetic inspiration with the 'the rational investigation of futurity, whether made by the help of birds or other signs':

in proportion as prophecy (*mantike*) is more perfect and august than augury... in the same proportion, as the ancients testify, is madness

¹⁰ *De Div* II 109. The division of divination into natural and artificial, and its overall definition as *prophetic announcement of the future* is put in the mouth of Marcus at *De Div* I 12.

¹¹ *Phaedrus* 244a,b.

superior to a sane mind, for the one is only of human, but the other of divine, origin.¹²

Plato undertakes this discussion using the figure of Socrates, and in the context of the divine inspiration compelling lovers. He gives as a third example of divine madness the poet who allows the Muses to possess him. The comparison is fruitful for divination in dispelling the idea that the gifts gained under inspiration depend on technical mastery:

But he who, having no touch of the Muses' madness in his soul, comes to the door and thinks that he will get into the temple by the help of art - he, I say, and his poetry are not admitted; the sane man disappears and is nowhere when he enters into rivalry with the madman.¹³

On the assumption that the early Socratic material in Plato may closely reflect the philosophy of the historical Socrates, then the radical interpretation equating prophecy and divine madness has probably been drawn from his teacher, as well as becoming Plato's own understanding. In the *Apology* Socrates observes that poets are their own worst commentators and critics and can hardly think sensibly about their work, since it is not by any human faculty that they have been moved:

not by wisdom do poets write poetry, but by a sort of genius and inspiration; they are like diviners or soothsayers who also say many fine things, but do not understand the meaning of them.¹⁴

¹² *Phaedrus* 244d.

¹³ *Phaedrus* 245 a.

¹⁴ *Apology* 22c. Whether or not we agree with Plato's particular view of inspiration, he strikes a chord that will be recognised by all thoughtful practitioners of divination, that they find themselves

A passage in *Ion* on a reciter of poetry once more affirms the relationship of divine madness and prophecy. Just as the poets themselves are inspired, their most gifted interpreters are joined to the author in a bond of inspiration that overwhelms ordinary consciousness:

the deity has bereft them of their senses, and uses them as ministers, along with soothsayers and godly seers; it is in order that we listeners may know that it is not they who utter these precious revelations while their mind is not within them, but that it is the god himself who speaks, and through them becomes articulate to us.¹⁵

The poet himself 'is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he is out of his senses'; in this state there is no human art to guide him and there are no rules that he can follow. Plato develops a beautiful metaphor of successive iron rings or bonds, magnetised by a magnetic stone, and clinging one to another in a chain. The divine muse is the stone that gives them all their power of attraction, the poet drawn to her is the first link in the chain, the singer of poems is the next. Drawn through him and into the enchantment of the muse is the audience, the final rings in the chain.

Applying this metaphor to divination, at least in its natural form, then we would expect that by a similar process the enquirer of oracles, the *theōros*, may be drawn out of ordinary mind and into the inspiration of the divine, and that this is the great benefit, public and private, of oracles. Such a view is consistent with what we know

suggesting things that have a meaning for the recipient far beyond the diviner's understanding. The diviner then appears more prescient and wise than he or she truly is.

¹⁵ *Ion* 535.

about the ancient interpretation of *theoria* and the mysteries. We can now see the way in which the Platonic tradition, wherever it takes up the question of divination, generally gives artificial divination inferior status. This is rooted both in Plato's psychology of inspiration and in his demarcation of divine provenance, rendering natural divination 'more perfect and august'.

The daimon and *hermeios* in Plato

Plato's understanding of divination is made more complex and more interesting by his use of the concept of the *daimon*. These intermediate spirits serve to introduce a theological gradation between mortals and gods, and they are integral not just to divination, but to the act of interpretation itself. There is an intimation of this in the word itself. In *Cratylus* Plato says that the word derives from the Attic dialect and means 'knowing'.¹⁶ It may be inferred that as the daimon engages us, or we engage the daimon, we are momentarily filled with a more-than-human knowing. In terms of the analysis adopted here, this is the function of *hermeios*, daimonically inspired in the instant of realised interpretation.

In the culminating argument of the *Symposium*, the whole of which is dedicated to the question of love, Plato goes further than in any of his other writings in describing daimonic intermediation, with profound implications for divination. In a masterpiece of allegory and logic, he lays out the theme in the words of the wise woman Diotima who teaches Socrates the nature of *Eros*, Love. She leads him gently through his own method of the elenchus to defeat his reasonable opinions while introducing her own answer. She explains that *Eros* is a great daimon, and like all daimons he occupies the place between mortal and immortal. Being neither mortal nor

¹⁶ *Cratylus* 398. Hesiod associates *daimones* with the golden race of the first men, with a more-than-human wisdom.

immortal, daimons act as the *relation or mean* between the two realms. Here is her opening description of their action:

They act as interpreters and conveyers of human things to the gods, of divine things to men. They carry the prayers and sacrifices of men, the commandments of the gods and their responses to sacrifices: occupying a place between the two, they fill up a gap and cause the whole universe to be a coherent whole. All divination takes place by their means, the art of priests, the art of sacrifices and mystical rites and incantations; in a word, all divining and magic. A god has no immediate relation with a man, all converse between men and gods, whether in a waking state or in sleep, takes place through the Daimon-kind.¹⁷

As in the passages that directly relate to the natural-artificial divide, this text is unambiguous in its distinction between ordinary conceptualisation and the spiritual mind that may grasp (or be grasped by) divination, although the complete displacement of one by the other, described in other passages quoted from Plato, is not apparent here.

Plutarch's Interpretation

Plutarch is arguably the most significant philosopher of divination in the tradition that follows Plato.¹⁸ He also disagrees with Plato on a significant aspect of

¹⁷ *Symposium* 202e (Hackforth translation).

¹⁸ See the studies of Brenk (1973,1977) for Plutarch's understanding of the daimon. The various doctrines gathered by and around Plutarch represent a complex metaphysical development of daimon-theory and providence (*pronoia*) with respect to divination that I do not attempt to develop here. I refer the reader to the study by Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum on 'The Daimon in Hellenistic Astrology' (Ph.D. thesis, Warburg Institute, University of London). Greenbaum shows the influence of Plutarch on later

the subject of divination. As a temple official at Delphi, Plutarch gives every indication of being a practitioner of divination as well as a scholar. His is the voice of the authentic insider. In several of his essays we have a philosophical treatment of the nature of oracles, suggestions relating to inductive divination, and the development of the Platonic daimon. His discussions illuminate the distinction between natural and artificial divination, both of which he accepts as valid forms. He is indebted to Plato but nevertheless exercises his own independent thought, using the dialogue form to achieve a wide-ranging debate that leaves important topics open for his readers to weigh and balance for themselves. He in effect offers a spirit-theory to explain natural divination, yet diverging from the starkly dramatised expression of divine madness characteristic of Plato. His moderation of Plato's position has significant consequences for our interpretation of hermeios, as well as for the arguments for and against an altered state of consciousness as a partial explanation for divination.

We have already noted the obscurity in the descriptions of the Pythian priestess at Delphi, frequently portrayed in the possessed mode. However, it is almost certain that this view is misleading:

it is foolish and childish in the extreme to imagine that the god himself after the manner of the ventriloquists... enters into the bodies of his prophets and prompts their utterances, employing their mouths and voices as instruments.¹⁹

This observation may be compared with the anthropological evidence that in many cases of divination involving ecstatic trance-like states there is still a

Greek astrological treatment of the daimon, especially through Vettius Valens.

¹⁹ *Def.Or* 414e. The speaker here is Lamprias; it has been suggested by Babbit amongst others that Plutarch's own opinions are voiced by this character. See Babbit's Introduction p.349.

ratiocinative function and conscious decision-making by the diviner; Evans-Pritchard observed this with the Azande witch-doctors, as discussed in Chapter 3. It may therefore be inferred that within the Plutarchian definition of natural divination there is no requirement for a complete displacement of ordinary consciousness, in which case it is likely that the human medium in some measure consciously cooperates in the production of the oracle.

The daimon theory is developed as a principal thread in a multi-layered essay entitled *On the Sign of Socrates (De Genio Socratis)*. The aspect of the debate of direct interest for us here centres on the nature of Socrates' *daimonion*, his 'warning voice'. The first contributor to the discussion, Galaxidorus, dislikes religiosity and superstitions such as divination that lead us away from our greatest gift, reason. Since he has to acknowledge that wise Socrates received divine guidance, this is presumed to be in the form of small indications and signs - sneezes and chance remarks - which belong to ordinary divination, and which he skillfully judged and allowed to tip the scales in those cases where reason could not finally decide between two equal courses of action; used in this way, divination does not offend against reason.²⁰

The main discussion is advanced by the figure of Simmias. He is described as a friend of Socrates, and is able to convey certain of the latter's ideas; he admits that Socrates had declined to answer his question about the daimonion directly, although he does record that Socrates often expressed his distrust of those claiming visual rather than auditory impressions of the divine.²¹ Other than this, we are led to understand that the views Simmias gives here are conjectural, and we presume that Plutarch's own conjectures are advanced first in the voice of this character, and then in the mysterious

²⁰ *Gen.Soc.* 581.

²¹ *Gen.Soc.* 588c.

Pythagorean stranger, Theanor.

Simmius - or Plutarch - advances a theory of the sensitivity of certain souls to the daimons, suggesting that for a pure soul the lightest touch from a divine idea produces a rational harmony manifesting immediately in understanding. We conjecture that what reached Socrates, therefore, 'was not spoken language, but the unuttered words of the daimon, making voiceless contact with his intelligence by their sense alone'.²² This would produce a phantasm or mental form of language, exactly as if a voice had spoken, and this is a phenomenon we know from our own dreams when we likewise hear voices. Simmius reminds us of the great power of an immaterial idea in the human soul, moving immediately the whole being and bones and flesh of the man, 'the instant the soul conceives a purpose in the understanding and sets its movement going for that end'.²³ 'The medium of the spoken word is like groping in the dark' where the thoughts of daimons are luminous, and 'have no need of verbs and nouns'.²⁴ Only the daimonic man, the man who has learned to listen, hears the echo, but here Plutarch returns to his reserve over divine madness, directly contradicting the Socratic and Platonic theory of the poet's divine madness:

In popular belief ...it is only in sleep that men receive inspiration from on high : and the notion that they are so influenced when awake and in full possession of their faculties is accounted strange and incredible. This is like supposing that a musician uses his lyre when the strings are slack, but does not touch or play it when it has been adjusted to a scale

²² *Gen.Soc.* 588e.

²³ *Gen.Soc.* 589a.

²⁴ *Gen.Soc.* 589b,c.

and attuned.²⁵

The Myth of Timarchus

Simmiias - or Plutarch - now reveals his understanding of Socrates' daimonion in a beautiful and extended mythic narrative of the fate of a young initiate, Timarchus.²⁶ The young man desired to learn the nature of the daimonion, and accordingly went to the underground oracular crypt of Trophonius, where it was the practice to incubate; here he had a profound and intricate cosmological vision. His soul was released into the upper air and he saw countless islands of colour turning in a musical and circular motion, and a blue sea, also turning. This appears to be a vision of stellar and planetary circuits, with the sea as the ecliptic. The earth was nowhere to be seen, but looking down he saw a black abyss filled with roars and groans and lamentations of animals and people. He was addressed by someone he could not see, a daimon who explained to him the principles of motion and unity in this cosmos, including the role of the three Fates, binding the whole together.

The daimon explains that the terrestrial daimons, of which the owner of the voice was one, work from the sphere of the Moon, under the direction of the third Fate, Lachesis, who decides the destinies of birth and decay for the world below. The Moon, the turning-point of birth, carries round souls who are constantly reborn by being thrown off into the Styx beneath. Some slip away into Hades, some swim up from below and are rescued by the Moon.²⁷ Timarchus sees many stars 'trembling about the abyss'; these, says the voice, are the daimons themselves:

²⁵ *Gen.Soc.* 589d,e.

²⁶ *Gen.Soc.* The myth of Timarchus, 590-592.

²⁷ *Gen.Soc.* 591c.

...every soul partakes of understanding: none is irrational or unintelligent. But the portion of the soul that mingles with flesh and passions suffers alteration... Not every soul mingles to the same extent: some sink entirely into the body... others mingle in part, but leave outside what is purest in them. This is not dragged in with the rest, but is like a buoy attached to the top, floating on the surface... Now the part carried submerged is called the soul, whereas the part left free from corruption is called by the multitude the understanding, who take it to be within themselves, as they take reflected objects to be in the mirrors that reflect them; but those who conceive the matter rightly call it a daimon, as being external.²⁸

Theanor responds in agreement with Simmias, but moves to bring back into view the lesser signs of inductive divination already discussed. The tiniest indications of artificial / inductive divination - such as Socrates' sneezes - can be taken as the small promptings that are sufficient to guide the best of men; for these men have been given special schooling by god just as a trainer who loves horses will nevertheless lavish care on the best of his horses. As with a good and well-trained horse or hound 'a mere casual whistle or clucking of the tongue' is all that their master needs to command them.²⁹

Theanor cites Homer for the distinction of natural and artificial divination, accepting both as valid, but with different degrees of authority: 'he calls some diviners

²⁸ *Gen.Soc.* 581 d,e. I have used 'daimon' instead of 'daemon' in the Loeb translation.

²⁹ *Gen.Soc.* 593a,b.

consulters of birds, and priests, but thinks that others indicate the future from an understanding and awareness of the actual conversation of the gods'.³⁰ The two orders nonetheless have a direct relationship with respect to their provenance, for they both show the gods:

For as outsiders perceive and recognise the intention of kings and generals from beacons and the proclamations of heralds and the blare of trumpets, whereas to confidantes and intimates it is imparted by the kings and generals themselves, so heaven consorts directly with but few, and rarely, but to the great majority gives signs, from which arises the art called divination.³¹

Theanor closes the discussion by returning to the theme of the Timarchus myth and the nature of the aid given by daimons. Some of these will be former souls who have attained perfection; they remember their own trials and do not despise the struggles of the world, so they look with pleasure and encouragement on the successes of embodied souls below.³² If we are far out in the turbulent waters they simply stand on the shore and wait for us to move toward them, but as the soul strives after countless births to reach the upper world, 'straining every nerve to reach the shore, God holds it no sin for her daimon to go to the rescue'. However, if a daimon tries to help and the soul pays no heed, 'she is forsaken by her daimon and comes to no happy end'.³³ If we follow this metaphor, then signs and omens given in divination are lines the daimon throws out to help us.

³⁰ *Gen.Soc.* 593c.

³¹ *Gen.Soc.* 595c,d.

³² *Gen.Soc.* 593 d,e.

³³ *Gen.Soc.* 594a.

We therefore arrive at some broad conclusions concerning the theory of divination in the early and middle Platonic tradition. The development represented by Carneades is sceptical, but for Plato himself and for the neo-Platonists divination is generally seen as valid. The natural-artificial divide remains definitive; artificial / inductive divination is considered to be minor in importance and does not involve direct communication with a god or daimon, and this limitation in provenance explains its reduced authority. However, direct communication with a daimon, muse, demigod or god raises a critical question about the state of mind involved. This is a gift of hermeios, but Plato suggests that this knowing creates a marked displacement in ordinary consciousness - the 'divine madness'. Plutarch gives a different emphasis, and brings out the fully rational or even supra-rational nature of the divinatory engagement. The daimon *is* true understanding, which Plato well knows, but in that case Plutarch's metaphor of the musician with his well-tuned lyre is telling; in terms of the hermeneutic approach we have adopted, hermeios has not abandoned everyday thinking and uses it to engage theōros. While it remains difficult to square this inconsistency between Plato and Plutarch, for both philosophers the divinatory engagement will be wholly-other when compared with the consciousness of the ordinary embodied soul, since few follow the path of the daimon.

Notwithstanding their significant divergences, there is a close affinity between Plato and Plutarch on the most important of all themes. In the discussion on Socrates, I termed this the apotheosis of divination, that is, its sublimation to ultimate principle. It appears that the Greek thinkers who accepted the reality of divination all share an assumption of its teleological ultimacy; this is where divination becomes theoretically a subject matter within philosophical theology, the knowing of the divine All, and practically a ritual instantiation of that same knowing. This assumption, though differently developed, underpins the Stoic love of divination just as much as it informs neo-Platonic understanding. Divination exists in its doing. It is a faculty given by god

by which we reach out to god, so it is not pure science nor a simply contemplative art; for this reason we find the theōros-hermeios pair, rather than *theoria* alone. This is Plato's radical insight in the *Symposium*, where he shows the daimon governing the *mean*, the relationship of orders.

Optative vs. Interrogative Oracles

In his discussion on the mystery of the letter 'E' inscribed at Delphi, Plutarch shows a subtlety of discrimination concerning oracles that in this specialised topic fundamentally advances the Platonic tradition.³⁴ The E appears with well-known mottoes such as 'know thyself'. The name for this letter is the diphthong EI, denoting the number five; it is the Greek word for 'if', and also the word for the second person singular of 'to be', thus meaning 'thou art'.³⁵ Characters in the dialogue advance seven different theories to explain what the E means, and Plutarch clearly wishes to bring out the merit in these opinions. This current discussion is limited to three of these theories, namely the two E='if' theories bearing on the question of conditional oracles (where the situation asked about is conditional on something that has not yet happened); and the 'thou art' theory. These three taken together locate divination in relation to desire and to ontology, the nature of Being.

We first consider the disagreement over the meaning of E='if'. Nicander, a priest at Delphi, gives the 'commonly accepted opinion' of the temple guides concerning the meaning of 'if', that it has a force that is *optative* and not simply *interrogative*. By interrogative is meant 'if-this-happens-then-what?' An example of

³⁴ Plutarch *De E Apud Delphos* transl. F. C. Babbitt ('The E at Delphi') in *Moralia V* (abbreviated as *E.Del.*).

³⁵ See Babbitt's Introduction pp.195-7. It is not suggested that any of these theories are historically correct.

the optative is a statement of desire. Nicander declares that "'If-only-I-could" is the regular expression of a wish':

It [*'IF'*] is, as the Delphians assume ...the form and figure of the consultation of the god, and it holds the first place in every question of those who consult the oracle and enquire IF they shall be victorious, IF they shall marry, IF it is to their advantage to sail the sea, IF to take up farming, IF to go abroad. But the god in his wisdom bade a long farewell to the logicians who think that nothing real comes out of the particle 'if' combined with what the consultant thinks proper to undertake, for the god conceives of all the inquiries subjoined to this as real things and welcomes them as such. And since to inquire from him as from a prophet is our individual prerogative, but to pray to him as to a god is common to all, they think that the particle contains an optative force no less than an interrogative.³⁶

There seems little doubt that Nicander is talking for Plutarch as well as for the 'Delphians'; the god in this case is Apollo, but we may read here the gods of all oracles. This interpretation has consequences for understanding divination of all kinds, natural or artificial, ancient and modern, because it is at root a definition of *determination*, that is, a declaration of what is being referred to in the divinatory showing. The Delphians therefore wish to teach us that what is being referred to in divination is not simply the thing desired (interrogative, asked about) but the *desire for the thing desired* (optative, wished for). As an act of desire, it is intimate and participatory - to enquire of the god as from a prophet is an individual relation with the oracle.

³⁶ E.Del 386c,d.

This understanding is subtle and easily missed, but once grasped in practical divination it is quite obvious. When the nature of oracles is misunderstood, the enquirer believes that a matter asked about - the benefit of travel abroad, or of taking up farming - stands as an external entity to which the enquirer is not necessarily bound. The question is posed as if he or she can take it or leave it, and treat the consultation as seeking objective information - the 'paranormal packet of information' - of one of several possible outcomes. However, according to Nicander, the god on hearing the question *knows it as attached to the being of the enquirer*: it is the being-towards of the enquirer, 'subjoined as a real thing'. It is also the implication and participation of the enquirer in the outcome of divination. At this point I will invoke the image of theōros in place of the enquirer; if theōros is truly theōros then it shows a commitment to the oracle so that what is asked about is truly desired. The authority is sought through the test of this desire. Otherwise, why would theōros have undertaken the pilgrimage?

This last observation closes the circle with the records we have from Delphi about the nature of the questions put to the god. As Fontenrose records,³⁷ three-quarters of all questions concern *res divinae*, religious law, and the characteristic form of the question is 'not 'what will happen...' but 'is the god willing that...' Put in the 'if' form, this becomes 'if I/we were to do this, will the god approve and assist'. This shows what is meant by subjoining the real thing to the 'if'. This requires a 'real thing', something theōros wishes for and proposes to do, to be brought before the god. It is in this way that submission to the oracle tests and proves what is brought before it. A merely speculative possibility, where 'this' or 'that' can be chosen indifferently, is not ready to be proved.

³⁷ Fontenrose (1978) p.26ff.

Another theme worth developing from this rich text concerns the reference to the individual nature of the approach to the god: 'since to inquire from him as from a prophet is our individual prerogative, but to pray to him as a god is common to all'.³⁸ To enquire 'as from a prophet' indicates a foreshortening of the function of hermeios into the god himself, which is the unresolved ambiguity historically observed in the role of the Pythia - to what extent does she require a further designated intermediary, the hermeios, to interpret her? The weight of Nicander's comment bears on the role of the *theōros*, however. We collectively worship the god, and appeal to him for the good things he can give us, but it is the god's individual response to us - his *address* - that we seek in divination, and that is our individual right. Divination is the act whereby the god addresses the *theōros* who intimately seeks him. Since this is a singular prerogative, requiring the intelligent and knowledgeable assent of the *theōros*, I interpret the logic of Plutarch's Delphians as grounded in the *symbol*, that is the individual covenant granted to the *theōros* in the unique factual worldly situation from which the enquirer has enquired. The covenant is once-only in the divination in which it is granted, and I therefore give to its understanding the hermeneutic designation of the 'unique case of interpretation'.

Apollo, says Nicander, has bid 'a long farewell to the logicians who think that nothing real comes out of the particle "if".' This rough treatment sparks a response from Theon, who defends logic and offers a Stoic view of the conditional oracle. There is every reason to suppose that while Plutarch may not agree overall with this approach, he wishes us to recognise the merit of certain of its arguments. The core argument is that Apollo through his oracles inspires men to logical thinking, and the copulative 'if' is at the heart of logic: 'if this, then that follows'. The oracle teaches us the logic of consequences, and in a god, this includes future consequences:

³⁸

E.Del 386c,d.

The god, moreover, is a prophet, and the prophetic art concerns the future that is to result from things present and past. For there is nothing of which either the origin is without cause or the foreknowledge thereof without reason.³⁹

This is the Stoic view of the absolute chain of Fate (*heimarmenē*), known to the god, and by which all things past, present, and future are bound together. Fate is governed by reason (*logos*), and this is what the god teaches us. There is an intriguing legend told by Plutarch that suggests this intention of the gods. In 379 BCE the Delians were told by the oracle that their present troubles, and those of the Greeks, would end if they doubled the size of the altar at Delos. Not only did they not understand this response, they failed absurdly in constructing the altar, and called on Plato for help. He upbraided them for their ignorance, and told them to consult Eudoxus for the method of estimating the necessary proportions using the principles of geometry. But this was not all.

They were not ...to suppose that it was this the god desired, but rather that he was ordering the entire Greek nation to give up war and its miseries and cultivate the Muses, and by calming their passions through the practice of discussion and study of mathematics, so to live with one another that their relationships should be not injurious, but profitable.⁴⁰

This legend of oracles suggests their layered intentionality, a *telos* at work beyond the initial understanding of the participants. It is in this way that oracles show the god's care in nurturing right-thinking and a love of wisdom in mankind.

³⁹ *E.Del.* 387b.

⁴⁰ *E.Del.* 387e.

Part Four

Judeo-Christian Revelation

Chapter Eight

Prophecy and Provenance

Ancient Greek and Hellenistic thought established the terms of our European heritage of divination, locating its possibility in an embodiment of spirit-philosophy. Divination has always been a companion of practical philosophy or practical religion, and it is something that people, learned and unlearned alike, *do* in order to bring wisdom and benefit into their affairs. Its liberality of scope as well as its practicality renders it suspect to the philosophic mind that privileges high learning and abstraction as the guarantors of truth; much of folk divination appears crass, and what passes as its theory seems thoughtless and naive. But more dangerously it explicitly depends upon supernatural agency or entities, so that quite apart from offending the rationalist with its leap of inexplicable faith it occupies territory claimed by competing religious conceptions. This has certainly been the case with the troublesome history of divination in Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

The struggle over divination is often put down to the fact that the great religions are monotheistic and transcendent, where divination encourages either multiple divinities or pantheism. Although this defines one of the battle lines on which paganism and Christianity fought, this argument is neither hermeneutically nor theologically adequate, since it does not get to the root of the question that religion puts to divination. This is not simply a case of diviners historically being unable or unwilling to explore the implications of their practice, since there is an active distancing, a resiling, undertaken within Christianity by the Church Fathers

and the theologians as part of the struggle against the pagans. Both sects, religious and divinatory, therefore suffer a sleight-of-thought whereby prophecy and revelation - definitive for the great religions - is seen as other than divination, instead of sharing ultimate ground. As with so much of paganism, medieval Christianity encompassed elements of the divinatory into its own understanding,¹ but the net effect was to suppress divination as a valid mode of practice.

The reader might be led at this point to assume that in defence of divination and other occult practices I am setting the scene for a New Age and neo-pagan complaint against Christianity, but that is not my intention. My main focus is the relationship divination has with the Judeo-Christian tradition. The contours of this relationship were established long before Christ in Israelite religion and its prophetic tradition, which is a theme of this chapter. After the time of the leading neo-Platonists through to Iamblichus, although divinatory practices survived in chinks and crannies, and apart from the significant exception of astrology, the philosophical defence of inductive divination had become implausible in the face of the challenge thrown down by Christianity. This concerns the *why* and what-for of divination, which in turn resolves into the question of its provenance. This remains as relevant for contemporary divination and its relationship with religion as it was for the middle ages.

This requires a closer look at what is primary for divination, the 'why' of its practice. Theōros seeks a response from a source of knowing that is other-than theōros, with hermeios as mediator. The physical means employed will give clear evidence as to the external form of the process (e.g. whether the mode of divination is natural or artificial, whether we intend to consult Zeus or the *I Ching*), but these physical means do not govern the process by which meaning is derived nor do they

¹ Flint (1991) pp.157ff.

authenticate the source of that meaning; hence the subsidiary nature of the 'how' question. Since theōros is responsible for what theōros brings and takes away, the parties involved employ appropriate ritual to express right attitude and aid the strongest possible presentiment for diviner and enquirer alike; however, how the oracle responds is not in anyone's hands.

The 'how' question threatens to distract us. Plutarch put the matter pithily in the essay *On the Sign of Socrates*. Challenged on the issue of whether Socrates took heed of mere sneezes as omens, he has practical-minded Galaxidorus give this response:

I, on the contrary, should have been astonished if a master of dialectic and the use of words, like Socrates, had spoken of receiving intimations not from 'Heaven' but from the 'Sneeze': it is as if a man should say that the arrow wounded him, and not the archer with the arrow... the sign used by the power that signals is an instrument like any other.²

The 'how' question is therefore subsumed in the 'why' and 'to what' of the divinatory source, that is, the *provenance* of the divination. This is borne out when we come to the Biblical treatment of divination, which cannot otherwise be properly understood; this requires an interpretation that runs counter to a common tendency to classify divinatory methods by generic similarity of external form.³ It also entails taking a middle course between the demands of modern religio-historical scholarship

² *Gen.Soc.* 582c.

³ Porter (1981) p.194. Concerning the various practices of divination recorded in the Bible, he suggests that 'the modern scholar ...sees them as generically similar, but this is not the standpoint of the Bible.' Classification by generic similarity of method follows the 'how' question, not the 'why' and 'to-what.'

and traditional theology.⁴

The Witch of Endor

The Biblical account of an early period suggests that some modes of divination were legitimated, but others were not, and this was established in the legal code.⁵ An interesting case for our analysis comes from the story of King Saul and his consultation of the woman at the pit, better known as 'the witch of Endor' (I Samuel 28:3-25).⁶ We can be sure that when these texts were collated in something like the form we now know them, this was a theologically acceptable description of history, detailing the recalcitrant behaviour of the first king of Israel. Most scholars hold that the redaction of the ancient material is associated with the writing of Deuteronomy, the fifth book of the Old Testament (or Hebrew Testament), in the late 7th century BCE, together with post-Exile insertions.⁷ These writings establish the theology of 'Biblical Yahwism' that later times understand to be the authentic Hebrew tradition.

This event dates to around 1000 BCE. King Saul, his rule and life threatened by the Philistine army, enquired of Yahweh by all legitimate means and was given no answer, 'neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets'. Urim refers to the Urim and Thummim, discussed below. Saul had already in his reign 'put away those

⁴ Fohrer (1972) pp.21-2 discusses the tension between these approaches. He acknowledges the limitations of critical-historical methods in deriving any sense of the 'unique nature of Christianity and its God', which is a theological concern. Concerning the relationship of divination to religion, this is equally a *theological* debate. In that case a critical-historical or cultural-historical approach is inadequate because self-understandings by Jews and Christians of their own theology, and self-understandings by diviners of the meaning of their own practice, are integral to revealing the project of divination in western culture.

⁵ Porter (1981) p.194.

⁶ Jeffers (1996) p.133ff. Also Porter (1981) p.194.

⁷ von Rad (1962) vol.I p.71. The title of 'Old Testament' entails a theological claim by Christianity in its interpretation of the Hebrew canon, but contemporary non-Jewish scholars retain the name while being sensitive to the connotations (eg. von Rad, Jeffers).

that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land', indicating that these were not an uncommon feature in Israelite culture. He was in despair for guidance, and in a bitter irony he breached his own laws and sought a necromancer to call up his deceased counsellor, the prophet Samuel. The spirit grumbled about being disturbed and delivered a prophecy that Yahweh would fulfil his earlier threat to overthrow the King, which miserable fate shortly occurred at the hands of the Philistines.

There is sufficient detail to warrant an attempt to recreate aspects of the scene. Even if some details are legendary amplifications, we would at least gain a view from the later tradition about this unusual possibility of divination. In this account we see King Saul as theōros, the enquirer. Hermeios takes on a double manifestation in the woman *and* the spirit, since the spirit itself was required to be a prophet, just as Samuel was in life. Saul was in disguise; he asked the woman to call up Samuel. On calling up the ghost of Samuel, she 'cried with a loud voice' that she knew the enquirer was king Saul. We cannot tell whether she has inferred or subliminally registered his identity from clues in the situation and from Saul's words, or whether she has been supernaturally informed. Saul himself did not see the spirit: 'what sawest thou?', he asks of the medium. She described the figure and Saul knew this must be Samuel and bowed down. The conversation that followed appears to have been between Samuel and Saul, and is reported as if they were speaking, but there is no reason to suppose that the woman was not still intermediating, possibly speaking in the voice of the spirit. Had the spirit appeared as an auditory and visual phantasm *to Saul* then it is more likely than not that such a dramatic detail would have remained, correctly reported, in the narrative. The probability is that the woman spoke the prophecy from Samuel.⁸

⁸ Porter (1981) p.204 suggests that this passage 'shows that a person with the requisite power was considered to be able to bring up the dead in visible form and to force them to speak audibly and foretell the future', but I do not consider that the text demands such a strong interpretation, or that the spirit was *visible to Saul*. It may be argued that Saul had originally been given a capacity to prophesy following his anointing as king by Samuel, and had been filled with god's spirit on more than one

Where does the prophecy come from? Usually in necromancy the spirit contacted is the divinatory source, but in this singular situation Yahweh is that-from-which it comes, which is why there is no comparison with a modern spiritualist seance. Here the god and not spirit-Samuel is the provenance of divine communication, just as Yahweh has made known his commands through the prophet Samuel in his life. This is why King Saul as theōros *must* bow down. He does not bow to a ghost but to the address by Yahweh. His bowing confirms what the whole report suggests of the theōros-hermeios relation. Yahweh can speak through any form he may choose, although the ritual codes concerning the covenant with Yahweh ensure that theōros will not ordinarily (and 'ought not to') seek an oracle in this terrible way, sealing the enquirer's illegitimacy and his and the Israelite's doom. We observe once more that the mode employed to make divination does not have any relationship with its provenance, and it therefore offers no guide to its discrimination. What matters for the Israelites and the editors of the sacred texts is the certainty that this is indeed Yahweh who responds.

Urim and Thummim in the Covenant

Saul's breach of the covenant has already been indicated in the failure of Urim and Thummim. Direct reports of inductive divination are often veiled in the Old Testament, since in its dominant tradition 'many of the religious institutions and practices have been purged of the divinatory associations which ...we may justifiably suspect they once possessed.'⁹ Perhaps the most significant of all such institutions is that of the Urim and Thummim, which became for later tradition non-divinatory

occasion (I Samuel 9-12); but that need not include prophetic *vision* of a phantasm. The essentials of this incident are not however altered, either way.

⁹ Porter (1981) p.194.

symbols of divine justice.¹⁰ However, for the early Israelites they were a divinatory device by which Yahweh actively dispensed his justice or gave his guidance. The following details come from Ann Jeffers' comprehensive study of divination in the ancient Near East.¹¹ The origin and etymologies of the Urim and Thummim are obscure, as are the details of their substance or appearance and their mode of operation. We do know that as well as a simple yes or no, they were able to provide a non-answer and a choice between alternatives. Their size can be deduced from the pocket or breast-plate in which they were carried; this was about twelve inches square and was fastened permanently to the high priest's breast. The high priest used them, so we presume the enquiry would have to be made through him; however, the example that follows shows the king, once again the hapless Saul, making a decision concerning the form of the response.

The first book of Samuel includes an illuminating example of the use of Urim and Thummim in a time of war. Saul's son Jonathan, aided by omens, had already achieved success in the war against the Philistines. Faced with an urgent decision concerning further military action Saul accepted the high priest's advice that it was necessary to divine. However, Yahweh remained silent: the oracle refused to give an indication. This was doubtless humiliating and undermined the king's sacred authority. Despite the dismay of the other Israelites he ordered a trial by divination to reveal the transgression that was presumed to have created divine offence:

Therefore Saul said: 'O Lord, God of Israel, why hast thou not answered thy servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan, my son, O Lord God of Israel, give Urim; but if this guilt is in thy people

¹⁰ Van Dam (1997) gives a comprehensive survey of scholarship on Urim and Thummim and traces the history of their allegorical interpretation, characteristic of late Jewish and Christian attitudes until the Reformation.

¹¹ Jeffers (1996) pp.209-215.

Israel, give Thummim'. And Jonathan and Saul were taken, and the people escaped.

Saul requested that the lots be thrown a second time (the sense of a 'throw' is indicated)¹² in order to specify further the source of guilt. This second throw pointed to Jonathan who admitted the transgression, which was his unwitting breach of a rash and unnecessary war prohibition made under oath by the king. However, Jonathan had already prevailed against Israel's enemies, aided by omens from God. Given these circumstances, the people demanded that Jonathan should not be sacrificed.¹³

Noteworthy here is the common practice of building one divination on another, establishing a dialogue with the god within the unique context of the enquiry. There is no evidence to suggest that the Urim and Thummim were other than elementary in procedure and self-evident in interpretation, especially when required to indicate a straight choice or a yes-no answer.¹⁴ If this surmise is correct then Urim and Thummim may be located at the far end of the cognitive continuum amongst the simplest examples of 'bones', no more complicated in external form than the Azande Poison Oracle. A possible parallel between these two oracles is that Saul, perhaps by virtue of his kingship, appears to be free to choose the format of the divinatory response in advance and in an arbitrary manner. Saul says 'I give Urim to this outcome, Thummim to the alternative'; just as in the Poison Oracle, 'I give "chicken live" to this outcome, "chicken die" to the alternative', with no special

¹² I Samuel 14:41 (amended text: see Jeffers, 1996, p.214).

¹³ Jeffers (1996) p.215; see p.212 for casting/throwing words used for lots, including the Urim and Thummim.

¹⁴ I Samuel:14 42-5.

symbolism involved. This remains no more than a speculation, since we have no secure indication from Biblical sources one way or the other.¹⁵

These simple methods of divination, allowing public accessibility with little special knowledge, share in common a characteristic of assimilating the role of hermeios as interpreter within theōros as enquirer. Various individuals, if not all, assembled before Saul are likely to have been able to interpret the meaning for themselves. In this particular case, because it directly concerns them, they all partake as theōros. The comparison with the Poison Oracle holds in another important respect, namely that its authority is enhanced rather than lessened by its public nature and its simplicity; the life and death of a man, and even the integrity of the kingdom, depend on the public acknowledgment of a casting of lots.

Theōros remains responsible for what is brought and done: here theōros is Saul, but also the people for whom he speaks as king. The Israelites turn to their god in a desperate and confused state, and the function of divination is to resolve the dangerous state of conflicted intentions by referring these to divine authority. As theōros, Saul must decide his action following the oracle - the oracle determines the transgression because that is what theōros has asked it to do - but the acceptance of the divinatory judgment followed by the decision that Jonathan shall not die belongs to Saul and to the Israelite chiefs who in effect threaten the king not to harm him.

It hardly needs to be remarked that as with Socrates and the Sneeze, the Israelites do not have a god called Urim, yet they know that Yahweh will be as fully

¹⁵ See Chapter 2. Urim and Thummim resembles the poison oracle in being a binary non-symbolic form, in the terminology I have adopted. Following the example of the Poison Oracle, note that a simple binary yes/no cast of lots can yield further answers such as 'no comment' if there is a pre-established procedure by which the throw is repeated within the same ritual - for example if urim had to come up twice out of two casts in succession before the result could be declared 'urim'. Repeat performance to validate simple binary oracles is recorded from comparable Mesopotamian oracles (Van Dam, 1997, pp.42ff.).

in the lots as a man is in his speech. The identification of the speaking of Yahweh with Urim and Thummim exemplifies Lévy-Bruhl's *participation mystique*, and the Israelites are implicated in the same participation in hearing and obeying (*ob+audire*).¹⁶ For the fate of a man, a king and a people to hang on the casting of lots can only occur with the strongest possible forestructure or presentiment of interpretation in the collective imagination, demarcated ritually and precisely. Thus the participation of the *theōros* is 'belief' continually nurtured by collective ritual observance, prayer and divination, embodied and made truth in speech and action.

The ruinous silence from Yahweh foreshadows the later alienation of Saul, culminating in necromancy and doom. This alerts us to the overarching context of these oracles in the sacred *covenant* granted to the Israelites, which Saul failed to truly honour. It is here that we determine the role of the high priest. He has no obvious interpretive function in the divination; a mediating role no doubt remains a possibility if some untoward dilemma, dispute or extraneous signification were to arise. However, by being in charge of Urim and Thummim his primary function is one of the *ritual guarantee of provenance*, which is the covenant of Yahweh and his people. He defends and 'holds' the covenant. He therefore authorises the divination and sustains the channel of communication between the people and their god.

The meaning of the covenant is not theologically and historically settled until the Deuteronomic redaction; nevertheless the traditions establishing a binding law-giving relationship between the one god Yahweh and Israel are of considerable antiquity and cannot be put down to a later literary tradition.¹⁷ In that case the

¹⁶ See Chapter 5.

¹⁷ von Rad (1962) p.132, discusses the many comparisons in the Hebrew Bible with Hittite covenants with gods from the 14th and 13th centuries BCE: 'there is now no doubt that the place of the "theological" conception of the covenant in Israel's cultic life was certain solemn ceremonies which must have constituted the climaxes of the religious life'.

incidents recorded in I Samuel and in other books of the Old Testament identify the covenant as the ritual field for all legitimate divinatory invocations, inductive as well as directly inspired. In particular, Urim and Thummim emerge as an authoritative inductive-divinatory expression of the covenant granted by Yahweh: their use is a symbol that 'proves' the covenant.

Hence we arrive at a theological and hermeneutic concord with respect to the legitimation of divinatory practices in the Old Testament: it is a statement of 'why' and 'to-what' and not 'how', defining divination by provenance and not by technical means. Those practices alone are legitimate that have an explicit foundation in the evolving relationship of the children of Israel and their one god, Yahweh. The evolving relationship with Yahweh entails the gradual unfolding in history of his destiny for his chosen people, revealed in divination and prophecy. For the Israelites, and therefore for the Old Testament, the covenant with Yahweh is the field of legitimate divination.

The Proscription in Deuteronomy

This raises a question concerning the often-cited proscription uttered by Moses in Deuteronomy 18:9-12. It is commonly assumed to be a definitive rebuttal of all practices of divination:

When thou art come into the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee, thou shall not learn to do after the abominations of those nations. There shall not be found among you any one that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, or that useth divination, or an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch, or a charmer or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer. For all

that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord.

The list of terms suggests the existence of a range of technically differentiated and specialist practices of magic and divination well-known to the early Israelites and associated with their neighbours, especially the Canaanites.¹⁸ Quite apart from the problem of reconstituting the exact meaning of these terms and the nature of the practices they refer to in their original context,¹⁹ the internal evidence of the Old Testament leads to the following obvious conclusion: the mention of 'divination' cannot be interpreted along the lines of the generic definition given by any modern secular analysis. This is because the word does not refer to all of what we now term 'divination', but only to illegitimate (uncovenanted) divination associated with foreign and polluting religious practices.²⁰ The pollution occurs because these practices depend on spirits or gods other than Yahweh. This is made clear in Gideon Bohak's history of Jewish magical practices in the post-exile period. Concerning the statement in Deuteronomy, he observes:

...the prohibitions here are not so much on certain *practices* as on certain *practitioners*, who are presented as the exact opposite of the God-sent prophet. To him one may listen, to them one may not. This is an extremely important observation, for it seems that neither magic nor divination are forbidden *per se*.²¹

¹⁸ Jeffers (1996) p.16.

¹⁹ Bohak (2008) p.15: 'most of these terms admit of no certain translation'. For this reason he advocates transliteration rather than the attempt at translation.

²⁰ Porter (1981) p.194: '..the Old Testament has its own kind of classification and its own kind of rationale with respect to the divinatory and oracular...'

²¹ Bohak (2008) p.14 suggests that this pattern, condemning the practitioner and not the practice, is the norm throughout the Pentateuch.

The defining intention of the diviner is to reach the spirit-source or the divine-other that is the provenance of the oracle; there may be various means 'how' this can be done, leading to technical distinctions between different means, but no one of these illuminates the ground of the practitioner's practice. The legitimacy of a practice is first determined by its god. The Deuteronomic editors of the Old Testament, thorough in their desire to purify the worship of Yahweh, are concerned to reveal his historical covenant rather than to discriminate against earlier divinatory forms deemed to be legitimate by the proper religious authority of the time. With our quite different imagination of the divine and of divination, we easily misread their intentions.

Divination and the Prophets

The textual evidence of the Old Testament points to an early assimilation of legitimated omen-reading, dream and vision interpretation, and inductive divination, into the cult of Yahweh, coupled with a purging of foreign 'polluting' elements. In the course of the 9th century BCE the prophets began to take over the primary oracular function from the priests, a role that they fulfilled until the exile of the 6th century BCE.²² This primary function is to the highest degree divination, since the prophet is a direct channel of communication, understood to speak from Yahweh to the whole people concerning his covenant with them. It is appropriate to reserve the strong term 'prophecy' for this function of divination in that its claim to authority renders a whole nation or tribe as theōros. As theōros they cannot decide not to hear him. They are bound to respond, either to accept or to reject him as a 'false prophet', with no half-way house.

There are many examples of Old Testament prophecy that show the character

²² Porter (1981) p.193f.

of spontaneous natural non-inductive divination; in this mode the prophet occupies a position at or near the 'spirits' end of the cognitive continuum. The Hebrew for prophet, *nahbi*, has a verb form that means 'wild uncontrolled physical behaviour', such as is characteristic of Arab dervishes;²³ it is not necessarily connected with divination, and could occur as a feat of military prowess. Ecstasy might then be 'viewed as possession by the spirit of Yahweh, which changed a person's whole being, replacing him, in a sense, by the deity himself.'²⁴

However, even where the Biblical account suggests some type of possession it is likely to be an oversimplification to assume in all cases 'change in the whole being', as if there is always complete displacement of the prophet's own sense of individuality. We discover the same ambiguity in Greek descriptions of the Pythia and of *mantikē*; where Plato offers an image of 'divine madness' others stress the sanity and conscious awareness of the prophet. Although the out-of-one's-mind connotation cannot be argued away, prophets clearly vary in their methods, and any one prophet might show different manifestations at different times.

Gideon and the spectrum of divination

The evidence suggests that much of Old Testament prophecy involved the whole spectrum of the cognitive continuum, with inductive divination intermixed with visionary, inspirational and possessed modes. The story of Gideon (Judges 6:36-40) is a remarkable demonstration of this mix, showing a continuing divinatory dialogue between man and god. He was visited by 'an angel of the Lord, face to face' who instructed him to destroy the altar of Baal. Following this 'the Spirit of the Lord'

²³ Porter (1981) p.208. Jeffers (1996) pp.81-95 extensively discusses the term *nahbi*, showing its application to a wide variety of divinatory, prophetic, magical and healing powers. She sees the *nabi* as a continuation of the equivalent of the shaman of pre-Israelite times.

²⁴ Porter (1981) p.208f.

came upon him, in the inspiration that he must lead his nation against oppression by the Midianites. Yet he had doubt:

And Gideon said unto God, if thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said, behold I will put a fleece of wool on the floor; and if the dew be on the fleece only, and it be dry upon all the earth beside, then I shall know that thou wilt save Israel by mine hand, as thou hast said. And it was so: for he rose up early on the morrow, and thrust the fleece together, and wringed the dew out of the fleece, a bowl full of water.

He 'proved' the divination by a further trial:

And Gideon said unto God, let not thine anger be hot against me, and I will speak but this once: let me prove, I pray thee, but this once with the fleece, and upon all the ground let there be dew. And God did so that night: for it was dry upon the fleece only, and there was dew on all the ground.

Here is a case where inductive divination is employed to test and prove prophetic inspiration - 'the spirit of the lord' - which still left him in doubt. This is the rational process of making a vital decision, requiring further judgment by divination before it is resolved. Gideon is *hermeios* and *theōros* in his own cause here, and because this is impetration, a bidding of god's response, he in advance sets the terms under which the response will occur. He must then as *theōros assent* to the divinatory decision that his prior inspiration truly was the command of god. The unique case of this divination is understood in the context of a field of divine manifestation and dialogue guaranteeing its presentiment; the broadest and all-containing field is the

covenant of Yahweh with Israel, which Gideon is called upon to fulfil.²⁵

There is no need to think that the incident depends on paranormal phenomena in the physical realm, since a modern rationalist interpretation will explain this as likely to be the result of micro-meteorological variations over two nights, or of variations in the temperature of the fleece. We may presume that Gideon does not care *how* this could be, he will be concerned only *that* it is. This stands as a typical example of the simplest type of inductive divination, matching what has already been suggested in relation to Urim and Thummim, that binary forms of the 'bones' frequently employ symbolically neutral signs: dew or not-dew means nothing in itself. Equally typical of this simple form is the multiple cast or placing in order to test the validity of a divination - this is not a naive statistical trial, but the 'say again?' of conversation, the check to make sure you have truly heard the other party, and they have understood you.

Second-sight and divining 'by the head'

Sikhumbana's tripartite classification discussed earlier in this study suggests three main modes of divination, namely by spirits, by bones, and by the head. Placing this classification along the cognitive continuum puts spirits and bones at either end of the spectrum with 'divining by the head' in a middle category. Both the experience of diviners and the evidence of their practices suggest a middle range of spontaneous imagination that is private and inspired, entering a distinctly 'altered state', yet consciously self-aware and not possessed. In many individual instances it

²⁵ This is a good example of an extended divinatory dialogue involving several different modes along the cognitive continuum. The Lord speaks to Gideon throughout Judges 6. Gideon demands a sign at 6:17, leading to a miraculous manifestation of the angel at 6:20-22, following which he is fearful, and the Lord reassures him. The Lord speaks to him at 6:25-6 to command him to destroy the altar of Baal and set up an altar to the Lord in its place. Gideon is divinely inspired with a sense of mission on behalf of the Israelites at 6:34, but requires its proving in the divination of the fleece. The divination of the fleece appears to be no less authoritative than any other part of the series.

undoubtedly plays a crucial supporting role alongside spirits and bones in giving birth to divinatory meaning. It shares with the spirits a provenance wholly through the person of the diviner as hermeios; since its internal logic is part of the diviner's own imagination ('in the head') and not in the objective and public symbolism of the bones, theōros can only listen to the diviner's advice and take it or leave it.

Investigation of their own divinations by the few experienced diviners capable of honest self-analysis would be the most fruitful way of exploring divining by the head, but short of this possibly unattainable ideal there are divinatory practices that even from the outsider's viewpoint suggest the operation of this mode. It is common amongst many spiritualist mediums, psychics and clairvoyants who otherwise do not manifest signs of possession. Most obviously if the diviner simply responds to enquiry from the diviner's own spontaneous associations in the situation, then to the extent that this is indeed divination, it is divining by the head. The qualifier is important, since trust readily drains away in the absence of communicable realisation, convincing marks of possession, or the objective ritual of the bones. When theōros no longer grants authority to hermeios the presentiment of the divination is lost and a downward spiral ensues; the enquirer politely withdraws from taking the proceedings seriously, while the diviner's speculative interpretation reaches a nadir in arbitrary associations and personal opinion.

In 'divining with the head' the diviner employs some hunch, image or perception and interprets this directly for the enquirer. This might be purely internal to the diviner's consciousness, or it might be something presented through a body movement such as a tingling in the ears, or sensation in a limb; or it might be a sense impression, usually visual or auditory, from which he or she makes an association and therefore an interpretation.²⁶ For the current analysis, I bring into the 'head'

²⁶ Sensation in the limbs is a common form of divinatory sign, as in the practices of the Highland Maya studied by Barbara Tedlock (1992). It is not material to the current discussion

category bidden private omens, that is, signs that belong to the diviner alone as meaningful, and that he or she either reveals or has sought out in order to make the divination. These are omens, bidden or unbidden, that have no shared or public recognition, but which instantaneously serve to express a revelation given to the diviner. The omens themselves are not taken away to be discussed - it is the revelation that counts. The key to this mode of divination is that the association is *spontaneous and realised* at the instant it is taken up, while neither its logic nor its presentation - whether internal or objective - may be obvious to anyone else, including an enquirer.

J.R. Porter's study of the Old Testament prophets suggests that this mode of divinatory association may have been a common feature in their revelations, and my comments here draw extensively on his observations. Porter first gives an illustration of the method as employed by a Bedouin diviner, succinctly recorded in a 10th century CE Arabic text: 'he glanced at the first object on which his eye fell and he extracted from thence a notion which he applied to the matter about which he was to give a decision'.²⁷ Porter suggests that 'a considerable number' of prophecies in the Old Testament conform to this pattern. The visions of Amos are typical in showing the prophetic use of metaphor. Here are two of five such visions:

Thus he shewed me: and behold, the Lord stood upon a wall made by a plumbline, with a plumbline in his hand. And the Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, a plumbline. Then said the

whether or not Sikhumbana would have classed all the phenomena I mention in this section as equally 'in the head'; I have taken the principle of non-rational spontaneous privately-meaningful association as the defining element here. It is possible that Socrates' sneezes could be categorised in this way. However we may name the various examples mentioned, they fall somewhere in the middle of the cognitive continuum, and it is their relative status with respect to the poles of inspired/possessed and inductive divination that is of relevance in the current analysis.

²⁷ Porter (1981) p.199.

Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel:
I will not again pass by them any more...

Thus hath the Lord God shewed unto me: and behold a basket of
summer fruit. Then said the Lord unto me, The end is come upon my
people of Israel; I will not again pass by them any more..

*(lit: 'the time is ripe for my people Israel').*²⁸

These visions appear to spontaneously seize upon the literal seeing of a plumb-line, or perhaps a straight wall; and the sight of a basket of ripe fruit. What the Lord says is what is directly known by the prophet in a powerful instance of *realised interpretation* - there is no intermediating step of speculation. This is a more-than-real momentary identity between two realms, fusing literal and metaphoric vision in a unique revelation.

Even more remarkable for our purposes is the narrative of Balaam in Numbers 24; he is a diviner, and not an Israelite, but his prophecy is undoubtedly approved in this account, which is prefaced by the phrase 'he did not go and seek omens as before'.²⁹ He first sees the various Israelite tribes camped their tents in the desert; this is literal and ordinary vision. This 'immediately turns into second-sight', of which Balaam offers the following remarkable description:

The oracle of Balaam son of Beor,
The oracle of the man whose sight is clear,
the oracle of him who hears the words of God,
who with staring eyes sees in a trance

²⁸ Porter (1981) pp.200-1 translating Amos 7:7,8 and 8:1,2.

²⁹ The meaning here is ambiguous - see Jeffers (1996) p.77.

the vision from the Almighty.

Then follows the oracle:

How goodly are your tents, O Jacob,
your dwelling places, Israel,
like long rows of palms,
like gardens by a river,
like aloes planted by Yahweh,
like cedars beside the water!³⁰

This fits the pattern of the Bedouin diviner, discussed earlier. It is in verse, a characteristic of pre-Islamic Arab divination. We note that the manifestation appears to be unbidden, rather than bidden - the vision has been brought upon Balaam. There is also a profound alteration in consciousness, with a metaphor at the root of the vision, This is the word-play between the Hebrew 'tents' (*ohalim*) and 'aloes' (*halim*) which look and sound very similar. Porter is in my view right to name this vision, like those of Amos, as examples of *second sight* - the phrase is apt since an element of ordinary literal perception has been seized to create an oracle in metaphor. This therefore presents itself as inspired induction. As remarked upon earlier in relation to realisation, the essence of oracular induction is the bi-presencing and dual-unity of the *participation mystique* whereby a non-literal and spirit-like understanding is momentarily fused in literal reality. Realisation here manifests in a surreal experience, communicated poetically.

The Christian proscription

The ground on which the early Christian Church makes its stand against

³⁰ Numbers 24:3-6; translated by Porter (1981) pp.199-201.

pagan divination is that of the daimon - or to express the sense of this more accurately, the *demon*. Hellenistic thought on the subject of divination, as represented by Plutarch and the neo-Platonists, had already established the close relationship of daimons with divination, and located these as intermediaries between mortals and the gods. Plato himself, in the *Symposium*, makes clear the intermediary role of the daimon in rites and divination. However, this subtlety and gradation of provenance proves to be the weakest element when challenged by the new religion. Two elements come together to work against daimons. The first is that they are considered to have intentions towards mortals that are erratic, if not completely hostile. For pagan and Christian alike in the early centuries CE, general opinion tended to ascribe misfortunes of all sorts to 'evil spirits'. God himself uses the demons to punish the impure by unleashing these spirits on them.³¹

The second element goes together with this and is theologically decisive. Since the daimons are intermediary, despite their immortality they are subject to passion and guilt, and on that account they cannot be true guides. Augustine refers to Plato's statement that 'gods never mix with men'.³² The pagan will try to solicit god through the imperfect daimon; but at the heart of Christian doctrine, Christ is the incarnation of God in the corruptible body of man, and therefore 'the only sufficient mediator'.³³ Conversely, the corruptible *nature* of daimons - swayed by the whole range of passions known to man - means that '[they] are incapable of mediating between mankind and the God'.³⁴

³¹ Brown (2004) p.28. Origen in *Contra Celsus* I:32, also VIII:32, observes that the demons bring plagues, famines, storms and other bad things.

³² *Symposium* 203a.

³³ Augustine *City of God* IX:17. (Knowles transl., 1972).

³⁴ *City of God* VIII:18.

Prior to Christ, intermediation occurred only through the rites and holy divinations of Israelites, or later through the prophets chosen by God. The role of the Old Testament prophets was none other than to confirm the Covenant of God with his people, and it is this Covenant that, according to the Christians, passed to the New Law. In that passing Old Testament prophecy, like the whole Covenant with the Israelites as recorded in scripture, is reinterpreted as prefiguring the coming of Jesus Christ.

Augustine takes the question of the daimon into the heart of divinatory interpretation. Divination is condemned as a whole as intercourse with daimons. His scathing attack on astrology is conducted on both rational-scientific (Ciceronian) and theological grounds, thus blocking two separate streams of the astrological imagination, the natural-philosophical and the spiritual. Augustine creates a winning combination that makes this the most influential critique of the subject in two thousand years. Astrology is spurious, it is not true science, yet astrologers sometimes hit the mark:

One has some justification for supposing that when astrologers give replies that are surprisingly true, they are inspired, in some mysterious way, by spirits, but spirits of evil, whose concern is to instil and confirm in mens' minds those false and baneful notions about 'astral destiny'.³⁵

Inspiration by the spirit may taken as identical with *realisation of the symbol* in hermeios, the *en-theos* moment of interpretation in inductive divination. Astrology, like all forms of divination, does have the occasional capacity to be surprisingly true,

³⁵ *City of God* V:7. (1972).

which Augustine knows from his own experience. Yet from what prompting and within whose provenance?

When we examine these propositions concerning intermediation with the divine, the transmission from the Old Law to the New Law is reflected in a proscription regarding divination that is identical between Old and New in terms of *provenance*. Only divine communication that is directly from God is true divination - all else is polluted. To quote Origen in condemning omens and augury:

For the knowledge of the future the true God uses neither irrational animals nor ordinary men, but the most sacred and holy human souls whom He inspires and makes prophets.³⁶

The Christianity of the Church Fathers therefore carries divination-as-prophecy through to its apotheosis, the ultimate intention of Deity.

The Star of Bethlehem

Cicero believes the philosopher should have nothing to do with a heaping up of fabulous anecdotes. According to him, nothing can be learned from the unique case of apparently miraculous phenomena, nor from gathering a representative set of unique cases. The modern predilection for statistical analysis should not deceive us that it can offer anything more; it is equally destructive, since all defining differences are obliterated bar the ones under artificial extraction.

Compared with Cicero, Kant's position with respect to ghost-stories and the

³⁶ Origen *Contra Celsum* VIII:32. As the previous discussion has shown, Origen's approach does not wholly match the reports in the Old Testament with regard to inductive divination; quite apart from Urim and Thummim the ancient Israelites did observe omens and Gideon used a fleece. The question of ultimate provenance is not otherwise in doubt.

like is more subtle but somewhat counter-intuitive. He acknowledges that although he would challenge each unique case put to him, he is inclined to accord their totality an indeterminate and scientifically unworkable possibility of being true, on the intuition that it is truer for the human spirit to allow that there is 'something there' than it is to apply a dogmatic negative.³⁷ My view is that the materials of divination may be scientifically indeterminate (agreeing with Kant); they are however open to philosophical inquiry, yet *only* as each unique case, or as several unique cases compared (disagreeing with Kant). These observations serve the Old Testament materials we have discussed by virtue of the obvious consistencies of the reports of divination, even when shaped by a later commentary tradition, and by the comparisons that have been drawn with anthropological and other historical sources.

The Star of Bethlehem, unique though it is, is no less approachable. For Christians it is a symbol of the culmination of the Hebrew prophecies; on the cusp of Judaism and Christianity, the star for the birth of Christ is momentous, while its interpretation and consequence appears to be an unparalleled achievement of inductive divination.

Here is the account of the star and the magi in Matthew 2:

1. Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying
2. 'Where is he who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him.'
3. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him;

³⁷ Kant *Dreams* 2:349-50.

4. and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.
5. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judaea: for so it is written by the prophet:
6. "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah: for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel."
7. Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared;
8. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.'
9. When they had heard the king, they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was.
10. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy;
11. and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold, and frankincense, and myrrh.
12. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.³⁸

This whole account is disputed at its most significant points.³⁹ A reasonable line is to

³⁸ Revised Standard Version.

³⁹ A survey of modern opinions would start with Kepler's influential determination of the Star as a nova coincident with a triple Jupiter-Saturn conjunction of 6/7 BCE. Major studies by astronomers taking account of modern Biblical and historical scholarship are those of David Hughes (1979), following Kepler on the 6/7 BCE Jupiter-Saturn argument - see especially ch.10 (Hughes does not follow Kepler on the nova); and Simon Molnar (1999) who posits a double occultation of Jupiter by the Moon in Aries in 6 BCE. My own discussion takes Hughes' thesis as a basis.

acknowledge that while there is nothing that is secure about the story from the point of view of modern historical scholarship, there are sufficient indications in it that have the ring of unselfconscious and non-manipulated authenticity; even if they have been compounded from several different records, these indications arguably both record and *typify* various directly interpreted divinatory phenomena known to the gospel authors. This allows the narrative to be used to bring out some considerations about the nature of divination. It follows that suggestions that arise from the study of divination, even where they are speculative as in this case, must come into the account where omens are involved in historical narratives.

It is easy in our modern secular age to lose sight of the revelatory and theological magnitude of such an omen. It is in the highest category of *prophecy* in that its address is understood initially to be to a whole people, Israel, and in Christianity an address to the whole world. It is in the *most rare class of omen* in being a prophecy about its own ultimate provenance. Most omens and oracles are about things of the world, or of divine injunctions upon the people; this is the case with the oracles received by Socrates, and those referred to by Plutarch. The Star of Bethlehem, however, is a showing of the incarnation of deity itself. It is therefore completely in the lineage of the Old Testament prophecies, since these equally are characterised by the identical revelatory *telos*, revealing the covenant of the God who is their source, but it also transcends them by showing their fulfilment.

For the Christian the star became the sign for the greater covenant, showing that in its first manifest address and outworking there was concealed a further destiny. Unrealised at the time of its original interpretation, Israel becomes for the Christian the symbol of the whole of humanity - or so Christian doctrine teaches us. Now, if there 'really' was a Star of Bethlehem and its details were faithfully recorded in Matthew, who or what can ever be the arbiter of the truth of such interpretations? To even contemplate a truth test for this order of omen - as indeed for any omen - is

not to understand that its truth is what it becomes. This truth is not a state of affairs that can be laid down as a set of propositions and tested out apart from or before the project of interpretation. Like all omens it demands assent and projects itself forward to the teleological provenance of an unknown future.

It is for these reasons that, adapting the tradition of Biblical hermeneutics, I take the Star of Bethlehem as showing the 'type' of the omen. Given the ultimacy of its reference it is an omen that reveals the nature of omens - there cannot be a higher order of omen. We are told this by the name of its festival, which is *Epiphany*; the root of the Greek word is *phanos*, shining or appearing. The prefix *epi* (upon, to, besides) gives a distinct emphasis, so that *epiphanos* comes to mean 'showing-forth'. The epiphany is therefore not an effect produced at the end of a causal relation, nor is it a thing in itself; like all omens it shows something else while being in participation with that which it shows. This is a reminder of the distinctive nature of omens from the point of view of phenomenology - they are distinct from all other phenomena, captured by the word 'epiphany'.

The festival of Epiphany is celebrated twelve days after Christmas, and is considered a more important occasion than Christmas itself, second only to Easter in the Christian calendar. It also celebrates two other events which show-forth divinity as divinity. Historically the earliest celebration, and still the prominent theme on this day in the Eastern Church, is that of the baptism of Jesus. What is shown-forth and made manifest is Jesus as the Son of God. This is the event that John the Baptist, 'the one who comes before', has already announced. The third event celebrated at Epiphany is the first miracle of Jesus, when he turned the water into wine at the marriage-feast of Cana: 'This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory; and his disciples believed in him.'(John 2.11)

Prophecy and Chronology

The magi or astrologer-priests who make the omen what it is were members of an ancient priestly caste that had assimilated itself into an influential position in Persia and in its dominant religion of Zoroastrianism.⁴⁰ They were respected for their scholarship, their science, and their mastery of astrology and oneiromancy. Zoroastrianism has a foundation of transcendent spirituality that makes it broadly compatible with Jewish religion, and the myths and prophecies of the Jews were known throughout the middle east.⁴¹

Hughes argues that in the footsteps of Kepler's discoveries, the weight of historical research favours an objective astronomical basis to the gospel account in the relatively unusual triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BCE, falling in the watery zodiac sign of Pisces. These two outermost of the visible planets join every twenty years, usually forming a single contact, and for around two hundred years at a time successive conjunctions pass round the same zodiacal element of fire, earth, air or water. The 7 BCE triple conjunction occurred during the century of a transition phase for the whole cycle of conjunctions, as the series began to 'mutate' or change, from water back to fire.

In favour of the Jupiter-Saturn argument it should be observed that throughout the history of astrology these two slow-moving bodies, named 'chronocrators' or markers of time, have been accorded the status of showing cultural and religious epochs. Jupiter from antiquity was seen as king of the planetary gods, and he has the dignity of rulership in the sign Pisces; Saturn was known as a significator of the Jews and of their god Yahweh, hence in the coming together of

⁴⁰ Hughes (1979) pp.30-1.

⁴¹ Hughes (1979) pp34-5.

these planets we may infer the symbolism, 'king - or messiah - of the Jews'.⁴²

On the issue of the year of birth of Jesus, Matthew's text allows the inference that he may already have been an infant in his first or second year when the magi arrived. Jesus was born in the reign of Herod the Great, and the balance of indications is that this tyrant died in 4 BCE. The Jupiter-Saturn timing therefore suggests a possible birth of Jesus in 8 or 7 BCE. The traditional date of 1 CE, fixed 500 years later, does not match the available historical evidence.⁴³

The details, sparse though they are, are sufficient to justify the analysis of the Star of Bethlehem as *omen* rather than as *miraculous showing*, which latter is the orthodox Christian interpretation.⁴⁴ Even on the most superficial reading of Matthew, the notion of a supernatural bright star unnecessarily strains the literal import of the text - why did only the magi see it? Whatever the star was, it made no impact on anybody except the magi, whose special knowledge, expectations and intentions were the precondition for the metaphoric move of inductive divination, the transfer of perception that 'sees' or knows event *as* omen.

Epiphany and Address

The essential nature of the omen is that it an *address*, since there has to be someone *for whom* the omen is an omen. Only by taking account of the address of the omen can we describe what is involved. The address depends on the *presentiment* of the omen, residing in the tradition, learning and expectation of the magi. This requires the coming together of various preconditions. If the magi were

⁴² Hughes (1979) pp.186-7 discusses the legends prevalent amongst the Jews recognising Saturn as the star of Yahweh, and Jupiter the star of the Messiah.

⁴³ Hughes (1979) p.70.

⁴⁴ This interpretation is found in Origen in the 3rd century - see Hughes (1979) p.195.

not astrologers there would have been for them no ominous star. If the magi were not bound as priests to the service of the divine, and had no knowledge of the traditions of the Jews, there would have been no calling for them to follow the star and reveal its meaning to the Jews. For these preconditions we need to add the suffix 'for them', because fundamental to the definition of the omen is that it is framed in the second person, *for someone to whom* it is addressed; without the 'for them' there is no omen. From the point of view of theology, God does not waste his time calling to people who are not there and cannot hear. For the astronomer there does indeed occur a triple conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in 7 BCE, and that remains a literal fact. However, if the magi do not fulfil its presentiment, then there is only that non-ominous astronomical fact, and no Star of Bethlehem.

The compound omen

Matthew's description suggests a feature that is characteristic of many significant omens, which is that despite a common tendency to both simplify and dramatise in our reportage of them, they are often not single one-off events, simply seen and simply accepted. Even on the report we have, the presentiment in the star of Bethlehem involves a complex of related events in a developmental sequence, with two distinct initial stages. The magi come to Jerusalem to begin their enquiry, since they 'have seen his star in the east, and have come to worship him'. The omen has been partially revealed to them, through their astrology and their general understanding of Jewish prophecy. There is every reason to imagine that the magi must have received other signs, perhaps by dreams, to provide an appropriate context. For a matter of such momentous importance, demanding such efforts, other preparatory signs would be essential. However significant the single event – the star – may seem to be in the historical account, as omen it demands a 'field' of meaning, requiring confirmation and development.

The magi are not able to go straight to Bethlehem. A council of the chief priests and scribes is called by Herod to establish the likely circumstances of a fulfilment of the messianic tradition. It is these elders who determine where the birth may be expected, quoting Micah 5.2. There is evidence of inquiry and discussion at this stage, and we may infer that the magi were closely questioned about the nature of their observations. We enter a phase of the negotiation of the omen, the discourse to more fully establish the omen. Herod, with his own perverted motive, wishes to establish clues concerning the dating of the birth, a discovery that would soon yield fateful consequences in the slaughter of infants aged two or under in Bethlehem and its environs. Herod sends the magi on their way to Bethlehem, asking them to inform him when they find the child 'that I may come and worship him, too.' It is here that we encounter the intriguing second stage of the omen: 'and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was.'

The description of the star going before the magi and standing over Bethlehem raises difficulties in interpretation that may never be definitively resolved. There is no obvious astronomical phenomenon that literally matches Matthew's words, although it has been suggested that this is a reference to the nocturnal passage of the conjunction across the sky and culminating towards the south, given that Bethlehem lies south of Jerusalem. One option to cut through all further debate is to revert to the 'miraculous showing' argument, that this is a supernatural sign. But this is no more satisfactory here than it is as an explanation of the sighting that inspired the quest; once again we ask, how come only the magi saw it? The plausible explanation is that we are dealing with a *non-specialist description of technical astrological observations*, written at least a generation after the events it records.

An aspect of ancient astrology that was accorded great significance by the Babylonians, and therefore by the magi, concerns the observation of the risings and settings of the planets during the course of the year. For part of the year, a planet will be invisible, masked by the overwhelming light of the daytime sun. The heliacal rising of a planet or star occurs one dawn when for an instant its light flashes out and it is glimpsed the first time as a morning star; each successive morning the planet or star shows higher and higher above the horizon, rising earlier and earlier in the pre-dawn sky. This moment of first sighting of a planet was of ritual significance, because it represented the return of the planetary deity. An equivalent moment of ritual import later in the year was the acronychal rising, where the planet or star appears for the first time on the eastern horizon as an evening star, a little after the sun has set to the west. In 7 BCE on or around 15th September, after a sojourn in the realm of the unseen, Jupiter and Saturn will have reappeared on the same day as evening stars together, within 1 degree of each other at their joint acronychal rising.⁴⁵ The exceptional coincidence of a closely paired rising of Jupiter and Saturn makes this phenomenon a prime candidate for the second showing, worthy of the highest degree of celebration: 'when they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy'.

It is not my intention to pursue the case for one or other of the astronomical arguments. The theme I wish to address is equally served by several variants of non-miraculous observation, as for instance the possibility that the 15th September acronychal rising was the first significant sighting by the magi, and not the second, or that one or other of these sightings was a heliacal rising of Saturn or Jupiter, or possibly the exact conjunction in longitude of these planets. The significance of the historical account for our present discussion lies in the unique glimpse Matthew's gospel may afford into the meaning that the event takes on for its participants, and

⁴⁵ See Hughes (1979) esp. ch.6 for a detailed exposition of the astronomy of heliacal and acronychal risings, including the special circumstances of 7 BCE.

the structure and fulfilment of the omen's presentiment.

The development of events in the gospel allows a speculation on the status of the meeting with the chief priests and scribes. It appears that these worthies take up the omen, in the sense that they are at the point of moving from *wondering at* the omen to a possibly ambiguous acceptance and *assent*. There is therefore a structure of collective recognition here similar to that formalised in the function of the Roman Senate on receiving the report of the augurs. In the act of approbation the elders take up the omen as being *for them*, woven into the presentiment of their prophetic tradition. They become, whether they would have wished it or not, responsible for its enactment and fulfilment, just as much as the magi. Theologically, the god of Israel now speaks directly through the omen to his own people.

It should however be noted that there are two different streams of presentiment fusing together here; while both take their authority back to messianic prophecies, nevertheless the astrology of the magi may be poorly recognised by the elders. In this case although responsibility for the omen may have been adopted collectively, the elders do not require to 'see' the omen in the same way that the magi 'see' it. The interpretation is given over to the omen-experts, the magi, much as the Roman senate held final responsibility even while the interpretation of omens is in the hands of the augurs.⁴⁶ This comparison brings out the point that for a collective omen, whether simple or compound, we will expect there to be more than one point of reference, so that it is taken up variously by different participants.

Responsibility

We now return to an interesting detail in Matthew, which is the report of the

⁴⁶ North (1990) p.54.

joy of the magi. This occurs not at the outcome of the omen in the locating of Jesus, but significantly at the second stage of the omen, when the star is sighted anew. There is no evidence from the text to lead us to assume that this is an unexpected occurrence, and everything we know about these priests and their practice of astrology assures us otherwise. The fact that the magi could predict the relevant astronomical phenomenon and its date in advance does not alter the ritual import of the phenomenon and the celebration of its manifestation. By this stage of their quest, following the approbation of the Jewish elders and the injunction of Herod, their participation in the unfolding of prophecy is nearing its goal. We may infer from Matthew that with the second sighting the magi too have moved beyond wondering-at; after what they have agreed with the elders they now truly *know* that what has been prefigured is about to be true; there can be no doubt about the marked affectivity of such *gnosis*, which is commonly experienced in powerful omens. The presentiment moves from latency to potency, passing from the realm of faith, hope and rational speculation into *realisation* - hence 'great joy'.

In the story of the magi we can trace the outline of a definitive feature of the omen, which is the act of response that takes it up and *realises* it. It would be a pointless event if the magi were to somehow abstractly or rationally understand the allegory of the star, and agree amongst themselves that it probably referred to the coming Messiah, without then being moved to pilgrimage. The star of Bethlehem would not have amounted to much if the magi had stayed put in Babylon. What is it to be moved by something, other than to actually do something and take definite action in response? It is a universal phenomenon of the omen that it is immediately recognised as a call, an address, to and for the one who receives it, and the call is a call to act. The turn of intentionality in response to the omen realises the omen, and begins to fulfil its showing.

This is an appropriate point at which to introduce the concept of *tropology*,

which is the moral power of a teaching or manifestation to turn conduct towards an end-goal. It is a deeper sense of the *allegory* of the divinatorial showing, where that showing comes to signify the conduct of participants as well as the objective context. The tropological component of the omen is at the heart of its meaning, for it is here that we decide, one way or the other, how we will turn, and whether we accept or deny what has been shown to us. This comes back to a significant point of definition, since according to the theme of this study, we cannot truly call an omen that which is not being completed, that is, where its meaning is not being taken up towards its fulfilment. This is difficult to grasp only if we revert to a simply literal definition of what an omen is. A little reflection will soon show the blind alley the literal approach leads us into, when for instance we would have to say that the heavens are producing continual and innumerable astrological omens like the star of Bethlehem, only no-one happens to have noticed them. The 'noticing' *is* what makes omen-as-omen, and we come back yet again to the observation that omen is not a thing that happens to be interpreted - it is itself an interpretation.

Since there is always the possibility of reinterpretation by those who take themselves to be addressed by the omen, it is necessarily possible to realise it and respond to it and yet to still fall short of the meaning that it eventually takes on. There is a dramatic dimension to the gospel account which gives an archetypal image of what is meant by response and responsibility in the face of the omen. The magi's arrival in Jerusalem presented the non-Jewish king Herod and the Jews he ruled over with a dreadful dilemma. The star did not need to be literally seen and astrologically understood by everyone involved for it still to be an omen; the impressive authority of the magi and the details of their report are themselves the fabric and condition of the showing of the star. At this point all hearing of it are called upon to respond. We infer from Matthew that the elders took the report very seriously, confirming it in the light of the prophecy from Micah. Herod's response shows that he certainly took it seriously, but he takes an abhorrent step by reading it

at its lowest possible level, as a threat to his own dynastic authority. Herod, obsessed with temporal power, wholly misunderstands the order of the omen, and that to which it would come to refer.

Like every other participant, Herod is offered the chance to participate in the omen and its fulfilment. The omen is for him and to him as it is for everyone who receives and knows it. Herod says to the magi, 'bring me word, that I too may come and worship him'. There is no pre-ordained fate upon Herod. It is his free choice not to receive the omen, and instead he seeks to destroy it. The slaughter of the innocents that follows creates the first Christian martyrs, victims of a *diabolic* act. It can properly be called diabolic because it goes entirely beyond moral weakness and a feeble failure to take up an omen: it is an abomination, an attempt to sunder the omen from its purpose. If the *symbolic* is the full work and completion of the omen, then the *diabolic* is the impious execration of the omen. Whether this is historical fact or religious myth, Matthew's narrative reveals the tropological dimension of the omen.

The Star of Bethlehem is an archetypal image of the omen, but extraordinary though it is, its field of meaning and the steps in its interpretation and fulfilment bear comparison with all other omens. The concepts of the presentiment of the omen and the primacy of interpretation - that an omen is such only by virtue of being *interpreted* as such - appear valid across all forms. Equally definitive is meant-ness and address, in the meaning the omen takes on for the one addressed. The fulfilment of the mysterious or divine Other is, from our temporal perspective, cast into the unknown future. It is always not-yet-fulfilled, drawing those addressed forward, or inducing them to change their conduct. Here is the turn, the *trope*, the essentially

forward-looking movement in even the humblest omen.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ *Trope*: (from *tropos*, turn) This term is commonly used simply to refer to a figure or metaphor. Following the model of Christian hermeneutics I give this a more exact meaning when describing divination, as the figure of a moral turn, or of a turn of intention. See Chapter 9 on 'tropology'.

Chapter Nine

Analogue for Divination from Late Medieval Hermeneutics

From its origins Christianity has been bound to negotiate the paradox of reason and revelation, and comparisons between its supernatural elements and the primitive's mode of thinking have struck commentators as undeniable. Such comparisons are often made at the expense of developed religion, as if its doctrines are futile remnants of primitive superstition; however, regressive interpretations risk degrading all parties in the comparison. An obvious reference in Christianity is the Trinity, the doctrine of God Three-in-One, which is an a-categorical and non-enumerative knowing that 'one is not a number';¹ while the mystery of the Eucharist, with wine and bread as blood and body of Christ, parallels the participatory bi-presence and consubstantiality that is so thoroughly delineated by Lévy-Bruhl.²

In the light of these observations, and in the light of the role of prophecy as an

¹ Scott Littleton (Lévy-Bruhl, 1985, Introduction p.xliv) makes the comparison. The non-categorical nature of the Trinitarian doctrine is well understood in patristic and medieval theology, even in its most rationalistic modes, since there is a root distinction between revealed and scientific theology. Arguments in favour of the Trinity do not count as demonstrations in terms of Aristotle's logic; Duns Scotus observes that 'so far as epistemic knowledge of the simple fact is concerned, no one can acquire such knowledge of the divine trinity in the present life by natural means' (God and Creatures 14:34 p.323); see also Cross (2005) p.293.

² Lévy-Bruhl's description of bi- and multi-presence in primitive mentality may be compared with the scholastic designation of 'forms prior in nature to ubeity' (ubeity = place-ness: Duns Scotus, God and Creatures 10:42 p.248-9; see also Glossary). *Consubstantiation* is an exact term in theological debate about the Trinity, as well as being an interpretation of the Eucharist, and we may wonder whether Lévy-Bruhl nods to Christian doctrine by his use of the concept. The definition goes back to Tertullian. It is employed by commentators (but not by Lutherans) to describe the interpretation of the Eucharist by Luther. Whether this latter understanding is more or less absolutely participatory than Catholic doctrinal *transubstantiation* is one of those debates where abstractive logic readily confounds the phenomenon. For Catholic and Protestant alike, Christ is the defining *participation mystique*.

ultimate expression of divination, then it should not surprise us to find in medieval Christianity insights relevant to the subtle reaches of divination. With its summation in Thomas Aquinas, scholastic philosophy is the high-end of abstraction in service to revelation, nourished in the *pietas* and religious practice of its doctors. This unified divine reality finds a natural home for logic and science and yet reveals in its midst God, grace, and the knowledge of angels. It also offers a true place for its cosmological expression in astrology, despite Augustine's censure.³ This fertile spiritual-intellectual soil provides two complementary models which together provide an analogy for divination, and therefore a means to understand it. The discussion of these models moves beyond the doctrinal bounds of Christianity, in the same way that theological thought has always overflowed its boundaries in a much wider influence in culture.

I will first take a lead from the Duns Scotus, who shows us the way to a radical interpretation of the divinatory unique case.⁴ This analogy becomes possible in the realignment of scholasticism achieved by Duns Scotus at the end of the thirteenth and opening of the fourteenth century. Duns Scotus has no interest in practical divination, so for our purposes his teachings are relevant in so far as they bear on the nature of mind and cognition. His special significance for the question of divination lies in a facet of his philosophical theology, namely the complementarity of intuitive and

³ Literature in the late medieval period provides good evidence for the integration at all levels of society of astrological-cosmological symbolism, which is not necessarily judicial. Non-predictive judicial astrology is explicit in Dante, who mentions his own ascending sign of Gemini as the signifier for his literary gift (*Paradiso* V 97-100). This recognition of horoscopy and planetary influence should be set against his placing in Hell of astrologers who attempted to see into the future; this includes Guido Bonatti. (*Inferno* XX) Chaucer employs considerable technical astrological (as well as astronomical) knowledge in his allegories, so the integration of astrological symbolism is pronounced. However the balance of evidence is that Chaucer was sceptical about judicial astrology ie. judgments from horoscopes (see Wood, 1970, and p.16 for specific statement; also the comprehensive study by North, 1988, esp. ch.5).

⁴ The discussion on Duns Scotus in this chapter has been published in Cornelius (2007).

abstractive cognition, working together as powers of the intellect.

The 'unique case' has been a principal theme of preceding chapters, as the axis around which divinatory interpretation turns. I suggest that the doctrine first clearly expressed by Duns Scotus, that of a metaphysics of the *absolutely* unique nature of each individual human soul, allows an analysis of questions of cognition and interpretation that have concerned us up to now. This justifies a consideration within the terms of hermeneutics, that is, how meaning is derived in divinatory interpretation. I do not take up here the larger metaphysical issues involved.⁵

From a formulation first clearly articulated within anthropology it has been suggested that astrology and divination involve a movement across a *cognitive continuum*, demarcated at its poles by intuitive and abstractive modes of cognition. The abstractive mode is characteristic of our tradition of logic and underpins the organisation and validation of what we have come to define as scientific knowledge. To the extent that divinatory knowledge is empirically revealed in the irreducible and particular unique case of interpretation, then the privileging of abstraction - or a particular form of abstraction - has eclipsed our understanding of divination. Obscured by its ambiguous epistemological status, its domain unrecognised, divination eventually found itself expelled from both logic and science.

In line with the tradition of Aristotle and the scholastics, Duns Scotus understands intellectual abstraction to be our common mode of knowledge and the basis of science. Material entities are known through their immaterial essence, which is the *quidditas* or 'whatness' of their species. This is the horseyness of a horse, the

⁵ 'Synchronic contingency' appears to be a fruitful starting point for the description of divinatory contingency, especially in astrology. The concept is at the heart of Duns Scotus' theology and his radical departure from Aristotelian and ancient metaphysics. See Duns Scotus (1994) pp.23-6; also Sylwanowicz (1996).

human-ness and distinctive human rationality of a person, the animal rationality of an animal, the redness of the colour red. The essences are therefore universal categories by which we know the species of any and all things in creation. In the sphere of thought we encounter the universals in abstract concepts such as Love, or Justice, which are known - or remembered - in the soul. The argument for this understanding is compelling. We never 'see' Justice per se, it eludes definition and takes on different appearances in different cultures, yet every person, even a small child, recognises an act of gross *injustice*.

An enduring question in philosophy concerns the exact nature of these essences, and indeed whether they have reality at all. Staying within the 'moderate realist' frame of scholasticism, one feature to be noted about abstractive intellect is that its knowledge is indirect and it has no material immediacy; this is why we can be misled by incorrect abstractions from sensory data. Yet for Duns Scotus it is unfitting that the higher mode of intellect, beyond the bondage of the senses, should not be equally capable of an immediacy of knowing granted to the physical senses. In an interpretation that departs from Aquinas, he suggests that coeval with abstractive cognition is another and distinct mode, that of *intuitive cognition*. This grasps its object and knows with certainty the being-ness of 'the thing in its own existence'. Duns Scotus states that the intuitive act 'must include in itself a real and actual relation to the object itself'.⁶ Ingham and Dreyer, in their introduction to his philosophy, summarise this mode as follows:

it is an act whose immediacy dispenses with the need for any mental *species*. It is a type of existential immediacy...Unlike the act of abstraction, the act of intuition is accompanied by the certainty of the

⁶ Duns Scotus, *God and Creatures* 13:33-4, p292.

object's existence.⁷

This intuitive act is not in any sense counter to discursive and abstractive reasoning; these functions of intellect are true complements.

To stay faithful to the scholastic and Aristotelian project, we understand that our cognition arises by virtue of reciprocation between world and intellect. The knowledge we arrive at is not merely 'in our minds', or, as for the nominalists, determined by our conventions of naming. This leads to the question of what constitutes the reality of the existent entity (whether material or immaterial) that allows it to be grasped by intuitive intellect. For Duns Scotus this entails a distinct characteristic of individuation, which is the unique and unrepeatability of the entity.⁸ This 'contracts' to itself the totality of universal categories by which it is constituted. These necessarily embody accidents of nature and will, the innumerable contingent details of life, the choices that are made, that are utterly definitive for the individual. These contingencies are what make the individual *this* person and not *that* person, *this* horse and not *that* horse; and the same with every single existent and actual thing, event, series of events, act, object, thought, perception, part of an event or part of an object, that we can possibly encounter, or make present to ourselves. This intellectually-grasped existent individuality is termed by Duns Scotus *haecceitas*, transliterated as *haecceity*, and commonly rendered in English as 'this-ness', which accurately conveys its meaning when set against the abstracted 'what-ness' of *quidditas*.

⁷ Ingham & Dreyer (2004) p.28. We should on no account be misled by the emphasis on the intellectual grasping of existential being into equating the Scotist formulation with modern existentialism. For scholasticism, existence cannot itself be the 'essence' - see Bettoni (1979) p.65.

⁸ This is technically known as the 'formal distinction'- Duns Scotus: God and Creatures (1975) glossary pp.505-7; also Ingham & Dreyer (2004) p.36 who describe it as the distinction 'between *haecceitas* or individuating difference of an individual and those features it has in common with others of a similar type (the common nature).'

The relevance of this distinction for a consideration of the cognitive continuum, and the parallels between the unique case and haecceity, should be apparent. The description of a non-categorical mental act of direct cognition as 'intuitive' is equally decisive in establishing the possibility of divination. In this way we may compare the concrete existential particularity of the divinatory unique case as an expression of the 'irreducibly particular' haecceity of *this* person who seeks divination, or of *this* situation being divined.⁹

However, caution is appropriate. I am drawing comparisons from just one aspect of a far-reaching and integrated theological project. While staying faithful to the broad terms of scholastic discourse, the aim is to bring out its phenomenological and intuitive complement as this bears on the unique case, rather than trace the problematics of Duns Scotus' logic.¹⁰ He addresses questions that are distant to modern thought yet are urgent for Christian doctrine; principal amongst these is the relationship of the individual soul to its Creator. Further, the 'subtle doctor' is not an easy thinker to follow. His arguments are nuanced and technical; he died in middle age with his project incomplete, leaving behind ample opportunities for contending interpretations.¹¹

Most medieval theologians considered the soul to be single, entire and

⁹ Irreducible particularity: see Cross (2005) p.60,78.

¹⁰ Duns Scotus is guided by a profound Christian intuition, but he defines his rigorously analytical method in terms of Aristotelian natural-scientific theology rather than in terms of revelation or Scripture - see Ross & Bates in ed. Williams (2003) p.195.

¹¹ Bettoni (1961) pp.185-6 describes the negative opinion that for centuries fell on the thought of Duns Scotus: 'a confused literary legacy which gave rise to very difficult and almost insoluble problems in the systematic study of his teaching... with him, it is said, criticism prevails over constructive thought; the scholastic method, hitherto simple and orderly, becomes confused, subtle, tortuous...'

indivisible. Even Kant is moved to remind us of this understanding. Given this single being, lacking internal distinction, how could the soul have contradictory natures, and be angelic in its rational powers and yet carnal and non-angelic in its sentient nature?¹² It is not necessary for current purposes to indicate the logical sequence of his analysis of this dilemma. There is however a breathtaking vista opened up by his conclusion: namely, that with respect to the human soul haecceity is the perfection of individuality, and therefore is a formal (logical) condition for *individuation*.

Christian speculation of this order seems far indeed from participatory consciousness in primitive mentality, where the individual tends to participation in the collective. Christianity offers a quite distinct spiritual understanding, and its perfection of the individualised soul has become the frame of self-recognition for Western mind. This is arguably the inspiration for a teleological dimension observable in the European tradition of natal astrology.¹³ However, a related aspect of haecceity, its foundation in *contingency*, is especially relevant to all expressions of divination and across cultures, Christian and non-Christian, primitive or sophisticated. The decisive move is the demonstration that God is the God not just of essential principle but of contingency.¹⁴ The Scotist doctrine is that the mind of God, as well as containing all quiddities, comprehends the *possibilities* of all circumstances, contingent and necessary; this is known whether or not the possibility is actualised.

¹² See the summary in the entry on Duns Scotus by Wolter (*Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Vol.2 Macmillan, 1967). The insistence on the indivisibility of the soul is characteristic of the Augustinian tradition.

¹³ Christian teleology is reflected in interpretations that seek to transcend the simply literal, as in Alan Leo and the humanistic approach initiated by Dane Rudhyar.

¹⁴ Cross (2005) p.78; also Normore in ed. Williams (2003) p.136: 'the First Cause causes contingently whatever it causes.'

This opens into paradox, however syllogistically sound, because propositions are advanced that are incomprehensible. Duns Scotus pushes to the limit of abstractive understanding, yet his conclusion strikes an immediately obvious 'intuitive' note; once heeded, the phenomenological potency of this framing of haecceity induces ferments, fast and slow, in later philosophy. Haecceity has been a shaping thought in later culture.¹⁵ Leibniz modelled the concept to his own ends in his *Discourse on Metaphysics*, offering the following dramatic illustration of the contingent domain:

the quality of being king that belongs to Alexander the Great, taken in abstraction from the subject, is not sufficiently determinate for one individual, and does not include the other qualities of the same subject, nor everything that the notion of this prince includes, whereas God who sees the individual notion or haecceity of Alexander sees in it at the same time the foundation and reason for all the predicates that can truly be ascribed to him, such as that he would defeat Darius and Porus even to the point of knowing a priori (and not by experience) whether he died naturally or by poison, something we can only know historically.¹⁶

Here, on the canvas of a single fulfilled human destiny, is the unique case that makes Alexander, Alexander; the prince is something more than a tally of his accidents and

¹⁵ The concept of *intuition* had a major impact on later scholasticism through William of Ockham, who however transformed its meaning by making it the foundational and first act of cognition, granted by the senses and not the intellect, inverting Duns Scotus' intention - see Ingham & Dreyer (2004) p.30. Apart from Leibniz, haecceity has significantly informed the philosophies of C.S. Pierce and Martin Heidegger, and the latter connection is worth pursuing for a phenomenological interpretation of divination. It has more recently been taken up by Deleuze & Guattari (1987). For Pierce, see Boler (1963); for Heidegger see van Buren (1994). Amongst poets, Gerard Manley Hopkins recognised the match of haecceity and his concept of 'inscape', see Cotter (1972).

¹⁶ Leibniz ed. Martin & Brown (1988) p.46. Leibniz' early engagement with scholasticism gave way to rebuttal, but the problem of haecceity recurs throughout his work - see O'Leary -Hawthorn & Cover (1996).

the sum of his abstracted predicates. The 'something more' of individuation gathers up all the predicates and contingencies in the sight of God. In this universe of divine contingency, we should note an important distinction made by Duns Scotus, between the haecceity of sets of entities 'accidentally' brought together, but which are in themselves essentially unrelated, and the haecceity of a fully integral individual entity, such as a particular horse or a particular man.¹⁷

Taken at a simple level of consideration, Duns Scotus posits a form of extrasensory perception.¹⁸ There is nothing new for a medieval thinker in such paranormal speculations, but what is new is the foundational status accorded to this knowing. Given the doctrinal implications, it is not surprising to find that Duns Scotus shows reserve, leaving us to puzzle over ambiguities.¹⁹ He indicates that intuitive cognition is the necessary logically prior condition for certain of our rational understandings, especially those depending on existential self-awareness. It is this that gives the intuitive faculty a primary role in moral knowledge.²⁰ However, our understanding of this faculty is obscured; compared to abstractive cognition 'we do not experience it in ourselves as certainly, but it is possible.'²¹ Intuitive cognition is perfected in the beatific knowing granted to the resurrected soul; in this pure state

¹⁷ Leibniz appears to conflate the distinction of accidental and essential formalities in individuation - see Ross & Bates ed. Williams (2005) p.215. The Scotist distinction offers possibilities for the discrimination of different modes of the unique case in divination; it may be suggested that one class of practice (for example, natal astrology) is rooted in the self-existence of the individual soul, while the other class of practice is rooted in the moral response of the soul to the existential situation (for example, the katarthic astrology of interrogations, inceptions and elections).

¹⁸ Pasnau in ed. Williams (2005) p.297.

¹⁹ Ambiguities in the concept of intuition - see Pasnau in ed. Williams (2005) pp.296-300.

²⁰ Ingham & Dreyer (2004) p.30: 'Scotus presents the intuitive act as a necessary condition for any affirmation of the truth of a contingent, existential statement. The act reveals the present state of affairs to the moral subject.'

²¹ *God and Creatures* 6:19 p.136; see also Glossary p.499-500.

there is the unmediated vision of the individuality of God. Following in the Augustinian pattern, Duns Scotus reminds us that such exalted knowing is not granted to us 'in our present state' - that is, the state after the Fall. He illustrates his theme by quoting Paul: 'now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face'.²²

Angelic Knowledge

The question of how far we recognise haecceity in ordinary perception is an ambiguous one, left unresolved by Duns Scotus; that very ambiguity characterises the attempt to abstractly define the intuitive mode. With this in mind we can appreciate the locus of much of this theological discussion in the liminal region of spirit-beings. The distinction of abstractive and intuitive is first made explicit in the context of *angelic cognition*.²³ This engages us in an analysis that might seem embarrassing, if not downright weird, for the post-enlightenment theologian, let alone a modern philosopher; but for the discussion of divination this is amongst the most fruitful of concerns.

Duns Scotus indicates that haecceity is determinative for the sense of self-knowledge, yet here is how he places his argument, in the context of the intellection of angels:

For Michael does not know himself in the way he would know Gabriel if Gabriel were annihilated, viz., by abstractive cognition, but he knows

²² *God and Creatures* 6:20 p.137, quoting I Corinthians 13:12. Allusions to Biblical passages are infrequent in Duns Scotus; here the whole passage, and its context in the Epistle, addresses the nature of individuation, and he surely intends his reader to appreciate this. The text is best known in the King James version: 'For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as I am known.'

²³ Dumont (1989) p.581. This is spirit-philosophy at its utmost, living in Kant's 'cloud-cuckoo-land'.

himself as existing, and existing in a way that is identical with himself. He also is aware of his intellection in this way...he knows himself to be knowing, that is to say, he knows his knowledge as something existing in himself.²⁴

The move to the liminal realm of the angelic in describing the intuitive faculty alerts us to the Platonic and neo-Platonic attribution of divination to the daimonic, a thread that can be traced from Socrates and Plato through to Iamblichus. This same pattern is explicit in the Christian respect for angels and corresponding abhorrence of impious spirit-entities, the demons.²⁵ The power of contingent knowledge, including precognition, passes from the noblest of the pre-Christian gods and daimons to the Christian angels; Augustine grants them divinatory skills far superior to those of the demons, and matched only by the Biblical prophets. The most significant theological distinction between these two orders of spirit-being is that angels gaze on eternal causes, whereas demons do not. This defines divine provenance for the angels. Despite their powers demons may mislead and be misled, even in non-malevolent instances, hence the perils of divination.²⁶

These conceptions, guaranteed by Scriptural authority and the Church Fathers,

²⁴ *God and Creatures* 6:19 pp.136-7. The quotation in the following section, 6:20, of I Corinthians ch.13 (see n.21 above) is an auspicious coincidence for our inquiry into divination by spirits, since Paul is especially concerned with the right understanding of spiritual yet imperfect gifts granted to Christians, including 'speaking with the tongues of angels'. It is obvious that for Duns Scotus the intuitive knowing referred to is something more than ordinary subjective self-awareness - but in that case, when we think we 'know ourselves' then in our fallen state we are mistaken and do not know ourselves at all.

²⁵ Flint (1991) p.157ff. She notes that 'angels, like demons... poured into our period rank upon rank. It is hardly, in short, possible to move far into the Middle Ages without falling over one.' This is a valuable study, although a regressivist imputation underlies Flint's methodology. She sees divination as a subset of magic, which she treats as essentially coercive (see for eg. Introduction pp.3,4).

²⁶ See the discussion in Chapter 8; also Flint (1991) pp.160-1. Another commonly accepted distinction is that demons have airy bodies, angels fiery and vaporous ones (p.138 n.69).

are embedded in medieval Christianity early and late, and are debated amongst the most scientific and rational of the theologians. Aquinas does not admit to angels having precognition of contingent events, for that belongs to God alone; but he believes that angels exist in vast numbers, may take material form, have marvellous gifts of perspicuity and inference, and know singular things and particular individuals.²⁷ For Christian theology generally, as for Aquinas and Duns Scotus, the angel has self-knowledge and knowledge of particulars. With the revealing of haecceity, the place of spirit-agency in the unique case of divination becomes ever more closely delineated.

This suggests the following conclusion: shaman, classical pagan and medieval Christian alike acknowledge a supernormal agency at work in various expressions of divination. Further, seeking the assistance of an independent volitional spirit-entity is an acknowledged form of practice. Applying the insight of Duns Scotus to the *human diviner* rather than the *angelic knower*, the innate intuitive faculty secures a non-abstractive knowledge of the existential unique case in its essential *this-ness*, its singularity of context and individual meaning. The knowledge attained is both empirical and moral; here is the intuitive pole of intellect in divination, demonstrably similar in primitive mentality and in medieval Christianity. It is at this point that the comparisons - as well as points of difference - become illuminating for the study of divination. Charged with questions from the Christian understanding of angels, we come back full circle to the Zulu *sangoma* and his divination by the spirits. Beyond the doctrinal bound of Christianity, the essential analogy is to bring the 'angelic' knowing back to the soul of the diviner, as a function of hermeios.

Comparing the Cognitive Models

²⁷ Aquinas treats of angels and demons extensively in *Summa Theologica* I Q.50-64.

A question arises as to how far the models discussed are a good match as we move between a dual-mode description (Lévy-Bruhl, Duns Scotus), a continuum (Tedlock), and a triple-mode categorisation of divinatory practice (Sikhumbana). Over the course of his thinking Lévy-Bruhl moderated the polarisation of his early position, bringing it a step closer to the idea of the cognitive continuum. The polar definition remains intact but is transferred from prelogical mentality, treated as a culturally self-contained whole, to participation as a distinct mode of cognition. This allows the possibility of comparisons in the orientation to the mystical between primitive and non-primitive cultures. On this basis I have sought to show, using the description of the unique case of divination as a medium of comparison, that participatory mind is identifiable with the intuitive category established by Duns Scotus. These constructions, described within different world-views, share a phenomenological identity; that is, they point to the same primary order of cognition.

There remains a problem of theory concerning the nature of intellect. What Lévy-Bruhl calls 'understanding' is identical to the categorial function denoted by Duns Scotus as abstractive cognition. However, it is a principal conclusion for Lévy-Bruhl that participation is wholly affective; it is 'felt' and not 'understood', and this is why he considers that it is not an intellectual knowledge.²⁸ By contrast Duns Scotus describes intuition as a complementary knowing within intellect. The difference is significant but untangling it goes beyond our immediate concern; I suggest that however the matter is conceived, it does not annul the *event*, which is direct cognition of the haecceity, the singular existential reality grasped as meaningful or meant. Whether we call a knowing affective or intellectual it is still a *knowing*. However, for both our authorities the intuition, although particular and individual, is necessarily pre-

²⁸ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) p.4 'participation...is neither thought nor represented, and accordingly is not a thing of the intellect.'

interpretive, or better still coeval with interpretation. At the instant there is an interpretation, at the moment the diviner knows what the meaning means, then there is the first act of abstraction and the first re-presentation.

When this logical structure is applied to the experience of diviners in each and every unique case, there arises the pragmatic necessity of describing a complex spectrum of divinatory embodiments, performances and representations. This requires the in-practice distinction of an intermediate continuum of negotiation, part intuitive, part abstractive; here is the to-and-fro reasoning process of Sikhumbana's divining 'with the head'. In fluid forms of symbolism, such as astrology, the divinatory craft induces spirit-like intuition, but is secured by a counter-movement towards the abstractive pole. One manifestation of this complementary orientation is the observation of fixed rules that demarcate the bounds of interpretation.²⁹ This element of practice lends itself to proto-scientific and causal theorising and is easily misunderstood, and its accurate description requires an extended discussion. I will in brief offer the observation that, as a function of abstractive intellect, each established divinatory practice *derives its own categorial structure*, such as the symbolism of the planets and signs in astrology. These symbolic vessels in turn enable the act of interpretation to follow a non-arbitrary inductive method that is both communicable and negotiable.

The Four Senses Hermeneutic as a model for divination³⁰

The hermeneutic approach so far adopted has moved from the act of the

²⁹ The traditional form of horary astrology, with its relatively fixed rules of perfection or non-perfection granting 'yes' or 'no' as an answer, illustrates the polar abstractive tendency.

³⁰ The Four Senses Hermeneutic and divination: the ideas and some of the material for the remainder of this chapter were originally published prior to the study undertaken for this thesis, in Cornelius (1994) ch.14 & 15, pp.264-293. (See also amended version in Cornelius, 2003, ch. 14 & 15, pp. 277-302).

individual diviner to the pair, seeker-and-diviner. This has been undertaken by a combination of two principal concepts. The first of these is the idea of a spectrum of divination in the *cognitive continuum*, spirits-head-bones. Divination involves the chicane, the double-consciousness of the diviner carrying the unknown back into the known. The spectrum enables the comparison of different practices, and is shown to be related to the speculative-realised modes of cognition of the diviner. The second principal concept brings the double-consciousness we have identified into an unarguably hermeneutic expression, that of the dual-unity of *theōros-hermeios*. This locates divinatory interpretation as dialogical, requiring an expectation, a seeking and an assenting as much as a making of divination; it also assigns a place for 'theories of divination', since cultural forms and individual beliefs secure the process of understanding and act as conceptual bridges between unknown and known. These beliefs send the seeker on his pilgrimage.

In addition to the two principal concepts already discussed a third is now introduced. This is primarily theological, and it expresses the dialogical relationship between unknown and known from its *telos*, the end-point or purpose-to-which of divination. An interpretation starting from the supposed end-point of divination may be described, only half-metaphorically, as a hermeneutic from the god's point of view.

It should be no surprise that we will find penetrating interpretations of the divine dialogue in theology, and there is indeed a model for such an analysis in the Four Senses hermeneutic of medieval Christianity; this is nothing less than a theology of the symbol, inviting an interpretation of symbol as employed in divination. Whether the subtle movement that this refers to is at the heart of *all* divination remains problematic. However, I suggest that adopting the teleological approach allows a description of significant features of divinatory interpretation that would otherwise remain opaque. An initial attempt in this direction will be made in this chapter. In pursuing this goal it is first necessary to offer a brief resume of the Four Senses

hermeneutic within its original Christian context.

The Four Senses hermeneutic reached its full expression by the time of Thomas Aquinas in the 12th century, fulfilling a tradition of scriptural interpretation stretching back through Augustine to Origen, Clement, and ultimately St. Paul.³¹ It is an extension of what is technically referred to as 'typology', whereby an event, situation or individual in the Old Testament is a foreshadowing (a *type*) of a feature of Christ's mission (its *antitype*).³² The Four Senses hermeneutic was rejected by Luther and generally by Protestantism. One of Luther's main criticisms is that the method lends itself to arbitrary and obscure interpretation and takes us away from the experience of Christ; since the enlightenment the hermeneutic has declined in authority even within Catholicism.³³

The developed form of the hermeneutic suggests a four-layered interpretation of scripture, with the understanding that these are senses or meanings of the text. These senses are the *literal*, the *allegorical*, the *tropological (moral)*, and the *anagogical*. This structure embodies the understanding that a simply factual and historical treatment of the story of the Israelites and the life of Jesus will not bring out the full intention of scripture - that is, God's intention - which demands in addition a figurative or metaphorical treatment. Certain passages of a mythic cast, as in the story of Adam and Eve, defy factual and historical interpretation altogether, and must be treated from the start as metaphorical expressions - or veils - of spiritual meanings. The approach is vital for Christianity in disclosing an interpretation of events from the Old Testament as a pre-figuration of the mission of Christ (allegory) and of the

³¹ Metzger ed. (1993) p.311 on the history of Biblical interpretation.

³² Metzger ed. (1993) p.311 : Typology is discussed by Paul, who is also responsible for introducing the 'allegory' into Biblical exegesis.

³³ Lubac (1998) pp.9-11.

Second Coming (the anagoge). It achieves hermeneutic completion in interpreting the text for the soul's participation in the truths thus revealed (tropology or morality). The Four-Senses hermeneutic is summarised in a famous medieval verse:

*Littera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria,
Moralis quid agas, quo tendas anagogia*

The letter teaches deeds (things done, the facts), allegory what you should believe (doctrine), morality what you should do (the Christian life), and anagogy where you should go (the mystical goal).³⁴

Systematic metaphorical interpretation of sacred texts and myths is not exclusive to Christianity, which borrowed from Judaic exegesis, from classical authors intent on uncovering philosophical truth in Greek mythology, and from Philo Judaeus, who synthesised Old Testament revelation and Greek *logos*.³⁵ The demands of Christian interpretation are however unique in character, partly because of the need to prophetically match the Hebraic old law with the Christian new, and partly because of the need to reveal a universal spiritual order, no longer limited to the covenant granted to Israel, but now revealed for all time in the incarnation of the Son of God. These necessities shaped the initial approach to allegorical interpretation developed by the early Church.

Two from many examples will suffice to illustrate the approach to Biblical interpretation, especially for the purposes of preaching. The non-literal senses lead to the recognition of faith, hope and charity (*caritas*, Christian love and the moral life). If

³⁴ Dunbar (1929) n.16 p.31.

³⁵ Caplan (1929) p.289.

we take the word 'Jerusalem', then as a matter of historical report this refers to the city of that name (*literal* meaning); the Bible must always be read with this meaning in play. However, there are further 'mystical' senses. The first of these is Holy Church (*allegorical* meaning); the second is the faithful soul (*tropological* meaning); the third 'is the life of the dwellers in Heaven who see God revealed in Zion' (*anagogic* meaning).³⁶ The second example is the interpretation of Exodus, taken in this instance from Psalm 114: 'When Israel went out of Egypt, the house of Jacob from a people of strange language; Judah was his sanctuary, and Israel his dominion'.³⁷ The literal event is an *allegory* of the coming of Christ leading all souls (Israel) out of sin (Egypt) and the land with the strange tongue (our estrangement from God) to redemption (sanctuary). This interpretation is accepted as a matter of dogma, which requires faith. This in turn is the *anagoge* of the second coming (dominion), that for which we hope. Of the greatest importance for each individual Christian is the understanding of *tropology*, the moral of the event, for this leads to charity. What is required is that the individual soul in understanding scripture turns itself (*tropos* = turn) towards the truth: then the soul knows itself to be led out of Egypt in the very act of hearing scripture, and the meaning of Exodus is embodied here-and-now.

The allegoric beyond Scripture

Christian orthodoxy necessarily holds the Four Senses within the bounds of Biblical exegesis; a further move is required to translate it into a universal model of spiritual-allegorical interpretation. The release of this potential comes with Dante, who took the unprecedented step of translating the Four Senses into poetics in composing the *Divine Comedy*. Prior to his creation, allegory in secular literature was commonly

³⁶ Guibert de Nogent cited in Caplan (1929) p.283.

³⁷ Haller (1973) p.69. This example is used by Dante in his letter to Can Grande to explain the allegorical method used in the *Commedia*.

employed in a single metaphoric sense, with figures in a poem representing specific human virtues or vices. Dante shows that art may, in its own voice, fulfil the multiple senses revealed to us in scripture.

Since allegory is the root method of inductive divination, and the Four Senses is a hermeneutic of divine allegory, then there is a true match in creating this as a hermeneutic for inductive divination. What happens when we view divination in the light of the Four Senses hermeneutic? Judicial astrology, as in the judgment of horoscopes, is the outstanding instance of a *divinatory allegoric*, and I will use it as my main example, while acknowledging that only a minority of practitioners in modern western astrology would be comfortable with this description. The following descriptions could substitute Tarot, or any other sophisticated inductive form, for judicial astrology.

Astrology consists of arrays of symbols that are omniscopic, capable of providing metaphors for anything whatsoever that can be conceived in the human imagination. The complete body of interpretations of astrology's symbols is an entirely theoretical entity, since nobody can ever reach the end of speculative associations of symbolism; nevertheless its formal structures (such as the planetary rulerships and the doctrine of aspects) and the rules and conditions by which they are applied (such as when and how to cast the horoscope, how timings and transits are employed) are found in every astrology primer. The body of structured symbols and methods constitute the doctrines of astrology (doctrine of nativities, doctrine of horary etc.), and these are communicable and learned within the astrological tradition; in these the astrologer has *faith*. Doctrine, dogma and faith are foundations for the allegorical sense, while the shelf-yards of new books in astrology each year are a testimony to the industry of astrologers in seeking to augment speculative interpretations for the various symbolic arrays. Some comparison may be made between this activity and preaching, keeping the faith alive by continual repetition.

The doctrines of inductive divination appear and are used as techniques, ways of achieving this or that result; yet this is also to locate divination as an 'add-on', simply another branch of knowledge of the world. An effective critical tradition from Cicero to Augustine and beyond should lead us to be a little more subtle. Beneath the appearance of ordinary knowledge the doctrines of divination are properly understood as symbolic decisions or rituals of performance. This becomes apparent as soon as questions are asked about the right or wrong, better or worse techniques. With the *I Ching* oracle, beginners sometimes ask whether the yarrow-stalk divining method is 'better' than the use of three coins, and in Tarot an issue arises about whether one 'ought' to read card reversals. Students of astrology agitate earnestly over the right house-system or table of Terms. The only viable answer about right and wrong is 'it depends'. For the concept of wrongness to have a bearing in ritual and symbolic acts then it may be related to a number of hindrances, which include schism or confusion over agreed conventions, incoherent expression, inappropriate context, and dissipation of affect; boiling these possibilities down to an objective criterion of technical efficiency is already to have misunderstood symbol.

Staying with our example of judicial astrology, the usual interpretive procedure involves taking up the literal narrative, the story brought by *theōros*, to be allegorised into symbolically appropriate signifiers (the craft term for 'signifiers' in astrology and some other divinatory forms). This may involve negotiation and discussion between astrologer and enquirer. Alternatively the astrologer will create a literal narrative interpretation for the enquirer to take away and ponder. This process may be as sparse or as intricate as the astrologer's inclination and knowledge will allow, within the limits of the traditions and doctrines of the divinatory form. In either case the conditions and changes of signifiers are inferred to be conditions and changes in the world of the enquirer, so that interpretation returns to the *literal sense*, a judgment about what this all means in the world.

This transaction between literal and allegorical senses appears at first glance similar in type to literary and poetic metaphor. There are, however, features that render divinatory allegory entirely distinct. One feature is that the divinatory symbols are in a self-enclosed universe of their own, with no essential relationship with the world of historical narrative apart from the symbolic nexus which momentarily unites them, such as the moment of birth or the act of making a Tarot spread. This is especially obvious in astrology, where the planets and stars eternally fulfil their courses, regarding only themselves and the heavens; this remote perfection equated with the awesome authority of the heavens in antiquity. For the Christian hermeneutic, the Incarnation is the symbolic nexus. The self-enclosedness of the divinatory symbols leads to what Gerald Bruns terms *radical interpretation*, that is, interpreting between two systems not joined by cognate values. There are two worlds here, a double-consciousness that is emphasised in Christianity, of our world and that of the symbolic Other. Like the Christian priest hermeios translates between the two.

A second feature emerges in considering the allegoric sense and its relationship to the literal. This throws light on divination, but also exposes once again the pagan-Christian dilemma. Aquinas resolved a long-running debate about the status of ordinary 'literary' metaphors appearing in the Bible by placing all such uses as literal, and not allegorical. A statement such as 'Christ sits on God's right hand' is, for the purposes of the Four Senses, a literal truth: 'all symbolical expressions or acts, all figures of speech *consciously employed by the writer*, must be understood as literal'.³⁸ This assertion in turn clarifies the traditional recognition that God, the original author of scripture, 'is alone able to use events and things in the course of history to signify reality'.³⁹ We immediately recognise that the claim of divinatory allegory, distinct

³⁸ Smalley (1931) p.61 - my italics.

³⁹ Smalley (1931) p.61f. Smalley states that Aquinas' originality as commentator 'lay in this very

from literary allegory in human words, is identically in the category where events and things signify reality. This is what an omen is: the appearance of a bird, the disposition of a planet, the turn of a Tarot card. There is a fine theological point here, since the argument I have sustained in this thesis is that the omen is *addressed* to the one who accepts it as omen. Similarly Christian scripture is addressed to all, but each individual soul must assent to that address as *to them*. If this comparison in address is conceded, then we have demonstrated an authentic parallel to the Four Senses hermeneutic in the literal and allegorical senses in divination.

The realised allegory

The distinction between realised and speculative divinatory interpretation is directly related to the allegorical in the Four Senses, since without the instance of realisation the interpretation of the allegory remains speculative and literal, carrying little affective force. In the Christian interpretation realisation is where the act of faith, learning the doctrines, trying to believe, is no longer 'put on' and wilfully adopted, but seizes the soul from within. In anthropological terms we recognise the realisation of the allegory as *participation mystique*. Without this sense being in play, the other mystical senses can only be conceived literally, and therefore not truly conceived at all.

It is in the opening from the allegorical onto the other mystical layers that we may see the analytical possibilities of the Four Senses, first and foremost in the very fact that there *is* something else beyond the full realisation of symbolism in the allegorical. This is significant in that many practically-minded diviners stop at the allegorical, gain some genuine realisation, and are content to offer an objective judgment, hopefully helpful, upon the literal things of the world. This is often all that

province: he disentangled the explanation of metaphor from explanations of the "spiritual" sense'.

enquirers imagine they want, as well.

The Divinatory Trope

The possibility of there being 'something else' beyond the realisation of symbolism and the capacity for a sound divinatory judgment shows in several different ways. It is first necessary to make an observation from long experience, that divination yields its much-desired practical results irregularly and unpredictably rather than regularly.⁴⁰ It also offers results that are not infrequently at a tangent to the stated or conscious intentions of the one seeking divination. These phenomena suggest something at an essential level that remains the responsibility of the *deōros* and *hermeios*, yet is not in the conscious control or the gift of either. This bears out the observation that divination is not meaningfully described in terms of a technical capacity.

We have arrived at an insider understanding that is difficult to sustain without long and secure experience, since the inclination is always to imagine there must be some other technique that would have yielded better results, with the obvious implication that the practitioner is not up to the mark: 'the fault lies with the artist and not with the art', goes the old adage. The 'illusion of technique'⁴¹ is found together with a marked tendency to legendary amplification amongst diviners. This manifests in the *astrologer-from-Benares syndrome* - some other astrologer or diviner who someone else has met, or someone else's cousin's boyfriend has met, who made these amazing predictions which all came true. There is always an astrologer from Benares, or a master back in the 17th century, or an incarnation of Hermes Trismegistus; anywhere

⁴⁰ Heaton (1990) p.11: 'astrology can predict; but we cannot predict when it will predict' - comment in *Mētis*. A minority of intelligent astrologers recognise this, but it is not something that comes forward in the literature.

⁴¹ Barrett (1979). Though dated in some respects, this work has much relevance to the problem facing divination in modernity.

other than here-and-now someone must have the immortal elixir that so hauntingly eludes us. To compound the issue, there are likely to be unambiguously paranormal and objectively realised occurrences for many level-headed practitioners, validating beyond all reasonable doubt the veracity of divination but unbalancing careful reflection. Every diviner has his or her own little Fire Of Stockholm. These occurrences lend themselves to inflation within the diviner's own recollection and may in turn become the stuff of legend, even if only within a tiny circle of colleagues and clients. One true function of such inflation and amplification is to secure the presentiment that itself guarantees meaningfulness in divination, which necessity requires a critically applied double-consciousness (the chicane) for the insider who attempts to study the practice objectively while being a practitioner.

Legendary amplification is a dimension in both the phenomenology and hermeneutics of divination;⁴² it is sufficient to observe it as representative of a cast of understanding which, when allied with the illusion of technique, renders problematic a consideration of the phenomenon and interpretation of tropology in divination.

The reason that tropology is at the same time morality is that its concern is not *per se* objective knowledge about the things of the world, but right attitude and conduct of the individual. The naming of tropology is particularly suited to astrology, since the Greek *tropos* defines the astronomical tropics (Tropic of Cancer and Capricorn). These are the turning points of the solstices, where the Sun reaches its

⁴² (Cornelius, 2003, pp.14-18 and n.4 pp.325-6): an analysis of a notorious legendary amplification in predictive astrology. This concerns the death prediction made by three Florentine astrologers against Pico della Mirandola, the 'scourge of astrology', who died in 1494; over the next two centuries this ill-fortuned prophecy matured and was much 'improved' in detail until it became a model for the truth of astrology. The legend was compounded in the 17th century by the death prediction issued by Morin de Villefranche against Pierre Gassendi, who had disputed the details. The final amplified form has even been cited in a modern scholarly text.

maximum declination North or South and turns back towards the equator.⁴³ The symbolism for the individual suggests that at a maximum of separateness there is the turn towards integration.

Recent studies by Maggie Hyde have related the tropological sense with 'divinatory space', an opening of understanding created in the ritual of divination, allowing a *resolution* of a problem brought to the oracle. It is an unbinding of the knot in an individual's understanding, and should be distinguished from a simple objective *judgment*, characteristic of the allegoric sense. Hyde has also demonstrated the parallel of the tropological sense with the neo-Confucian concept of 'moral pattern-principle', developed by Ch'eng-I as an explication of the divinatory interpretation of the *I Ching* oracle.⁴⁴ The distinction of *judgment* and *resolution* brings clarity to the task of divination; judgment is delivered by hermeios in order to serve the resolution sought by theōros. It is a common error to confuse the two, showing lack of discretion.

The tropological signification of attitude and conduct removes the centre of gravity of divinatory enquiry away from a description of the facts of the situation - what will happen? - and onto the moral and normative - what *ought* I to do? The form of words used by the enquirer in addressing the oracle is not on its own a reliable guide, however; some 'what will happen' questions invite a reflection on moral

⁴³ Referring to the *Timaeus* and to the myth of Er in the *Republic*, the solstices express the maximum of *the different* on the ecliptic, and the Sun therefore returns to the once-turning equator, the universe, regulating all difference back to *the same*. We may perhaps be permitted to speculate on the cosmological imagination of the Platonic model as carried over both into Christianity and into astrology. Then, interpretation from the tropological sense shows the union of the two motions of the soul in the ecliptic plane - its own self-motion and the motion of the World Soul. Interpretation from the anagogic sense shows their union in the equatorial plane, which is also the primary motion around the celestial polar axis (the 'spindle of Necessity'). Interpretation from the allegoric - planets and zodiac signs - is the emblem of soul in all possible embodiments in the World of our senses, which is the literal. For Christianity, this embodiment is the Incarnation.

⁴⁴ Hyde (2005); also Cornelius (2003) p.308-9.

conduct and interpersonal relationships, while some 'ought' questions are utilitarian and even mechanical, seeking the facts about an effective means to an end that the oracle is not permitted to query. This is an area where we find competing philosophies amongst diviners themselves; in modern western astrology we find the divide between a minority of traditionalists who treat horoscopes as giving 'the facts' (astrology as objective allegory), and the humanistic astrologers whose aim is soul-work and soul-growth (astrology as tropology).⁴⁵

Tropology and Recursion

Far from being simply a generalised 'good thing', the tropological sense manifests in specific and decisive craft issues of practical interpretation. For such circumstances I suggest that we already have a ready-to-hand term in the *trope*; this should be rescued from its loose modern meaning as a synonym for metaphor, so that for our purposes we reserve it for the tropological interpretation of a divinatory signification. A common way in which the trope is revealed is in what may be termed a *recursion*, where the signification could be said to fold back upon itself. This phenomenon represents the way in which divination commonly goes beyond the frame intended for it by its practitioners. The topic needs extensive demonstration to be convincing, but it is worth mentioning briefly several forms of the phenomenon. A well-known type of recursion, particularly in astrology, is *self-referencing*. Here an apparently objective interpretation (the allegoric) turns back to signify the situation of the interpreter and the context of the interpretation (the trope), in effect flipping the roles and demanding that hermeios should become theōros and assent to what,

⁴⁵ See the works of Dane Rudhyar, the pioneer of 20th century 'humanistic astrology'. This approach downplays the objective allegoric in its campaign against the determinism and crude objectivity it sees in traditional western astrology. Some traditionalists conversely fail to acknowledge a tropological sense.

unbidden, is now shown.⁴⁶ Closely related is a contextual showing, where an unexpressed dimension of the relationship of the individuals, diviner and enquirer, is signified, demanding interpretation over and above the nominal subject-matter.

I consider that within this field of the omen a hermeneutic approach offers the most immediate insights into divinatory and astrological practice, and there is more to explore than can be dealt with here. However, there is a further illumination from the distinction of senses between the allegoric and the tropological that throws light on the whole of divination, inspired and inductive alike. This emerges in the debate in Plutarch concerning the responses at Delphi, described in Chapter 7. One side of the argument declares that the E at Delphi shows that the oracle answers to the *interrogative if*, 'what will happen *if*...?', asks the enquirer. '*If* you do this thing, *then* that thing will happen', says the god. This however is a logician's understanding, and not that of a diviner. The representative for the temple priests says that on the contrary, E shows the *optative if*, since the god attaches his answer to the actual intention, the wish, of the enquirer; something we wish for has a material consequence in the world, and that is what the god foresees. A little reflection will show us that the 'optative if' is a viable interpretation for *both* the objective allegorical sense, the worldly match in any divination, and for the tropological sense, since it addresses the source of desire in theōros. On the other hand, the 'interrogative if' makes no sense tropologically when not rooted in attitude and desire. It is limited to functioning only in an objective-

⁴⁶ A well-documented and curious case of self-referencing/contextual recursion is that of the medical astrologer Graeme Toby. Researching a 1651 horary concerning pregnancy from the herbalist Nicolas Culpeper, he realised that this very same figure described his own wife's as yet unknown pregnancy. He made a correct prediction (a successful 'realised interpretation'), including significant and medically helpful details. The baby eventually arrived with a birth horoscope showing symbolically apt astrological contacts with the 1651 judgment on strikingly close orbs, beyond any reasonable interpretation of 'mere coincidence'. The mother's horoscope was also significantly implicated. Two observations are relevant to this particular case. Firstly, to make a move of this sort the diviner requires the free spirit and double-consciousness of the chicane, bound nevertheless to demonstrable worldly (literal) expertise, in this case medical. Secondly, of all the arts of inductive divination, judicial astrology is preminent in its specificity - that is, its capacity to rationally (non-arbitrarily) signify whatever order of symbolic detail is called for in the unique case. See Cornelius (2003) pp.215-8.

allegorical sense where divinatory signs signify worldly things, revealing their logical and causal connections to a detached and unengaged scrutiny. If we accept any sense of divination beyond an objective allegory, if we accept the broad logic of the Four Senses, then Plutarch's temple priests have the more comprehensive and plausible interpretation of the 'E' at Delphi.

Anagogic interpretation

The etymology of the word 'anagoge' simply suggests 'lifted up', thus implying transcendence. In the Christian hermeneutic the anagogic represents a goal that is reached - or un-reached - only in mystical contemplation; this does not become any less obscure when translated into divination. What is the goal of divination? Obscure though this is, we do have signposts on the path, starting with two basic understandings that go together. The first of these is the recognition that divination is *founded in an unknown*. The answer the oracle gives is not predictable or determined by any current condition, and in this respect the creativity of divination differs from that of poetry and art, since these are more or less conscious productions flowing from the current reality. The second understanding is that the oracle is non-arbitrary and *productive of meaning*. Its non-arbitrary nature renders it capable of interpretation, so that we know its meaning. I suggest that the Stoics understood this as the *logos* of oracles.⁴⁷ How this extraordinary power is mythologised and anthropomorphised, and the bridges of theory we build, varies with each culture, but the basis remains the same, namely that what appears in divination is intelligence and knowing that is *allos*, not-us, yet which is wholly bound up in us. In both primitive and sophisticated cultures it belongs to the ancestors, those from whom we have come. Because it is bound up with us we know it is important and it demands interpretation, and inductive

⁴⁷ *De Divinatione* I 82-3: Cicero quotes Chrysippus on the gift of divination and the duty this imposes on man.

divination is a form that allows it to speak with us in allegory. It is independently creative with respect to any particular human travail, great or small, and we therefore sense that we can bring our own unknowns to it for an answer.

The anagogic sense is therefore the spiritual source of the divinatory allegoric. This is indicated in the Aristotelian *telos*, the final cause. For the Christian this is the one God. For a non-Christian hermeneutic the figure is less defined, less ritually and theologically articulated, but equivalent as the ultimate *why*, the purpose towards which divination draws. It might not be obvious in any instance, with its own singular *why*, yet an intimation of its presence may begin to appear over some years, or in a combination of life events and symbolism. Equally, it might not appear at all.

An example should help to clarify these suggestions. As already suggested in Chapter 5, we may infer from the *Apology* and *Crito* that Socrates paid complete attention to divination, whether inspired or inductive. His daimonion prompted him on many occasions, and he appears to have given this 'voice' authority over his conduct. However, various divinatory showings, important as they may have been in their own right, took on full meaning only with the resolution, the effective interpretation, of Chaerephon's enquiry at Delphi. It is likely that although such incidents might at their time seem complete in themselves, in retrospect they were resolved as part of a series, building towards a climax of the Delphic oracle. Only this oracle bears the weight of the anagoge in the story of Socrates. At this climax a field of related showings is interpreted - and therefore revealed - within the illumination of a single destiny.

There is a closing of the circle in this spiritual hermeneutic, well recognised in Christianity, in the *return to the literal*. Unless change has been embodied and enacted then all joys are, literally, worthless; whatever signs are shown must be made true on earth. This is the pilgrim's journey and the return of *theōros*.

Part Five

De-sidere

Chapter Ten

The Symbolic Cosmos in Western Astrology

Astrology is interpretation by stars and planets, but this definition is too wide to be helpful. It is difficult to imagine any early culture that has not woven into its myths sky and earth, Sun, Moon and stars, and taken note of celestial and meteorological phenomena as omens showing divine or spirit-like purpose. The observation of such omens, however, may remain broad and unstructured, limited to the most obvious phenomena, without necessitating astrology's specialised body of interpretations and transmission of practice, which is what concerns us here.

Astrology as a specialist practice is by a wide margin the most significant and ubiquitous of the forms of divination in European and Europe-influenced civilisation, both historically and in modern times. I will broadly characterise this as 'western astrology'.¹ In its modern form this has a world-wide reach; its significant rival in terms of prestige and influence is the sister-tradition of Indian astrology, with

¹ This naming is widely used, for instance by Jim Tester (1987) who does not refer to other geographically and culturally defined astrologies, apart from Indian astrology. This reflects an approach that sees astrology as primarily judicial, ie. making particular judgments and predictions about events and people. This is equated - though not exclusively - with the development of horoscopy (the hallmark of the mature western and Indian judicial traditions). Horoscopes in turn are understood to have an 'astronomical' (non-symbolic) foundation, even though interpreted symbolically. A similar approach is evident in Holden (1996) p.1, who starts the first chapter of his excellent survey with the unequivocal statement that 'the Babylonians invented astrology'. However, despite the limitations of the naming, 'western astrology' remains the most adequate way of indicating the broadly identifiable tradition coming down from late Greek assimilation of earlier Babylonian and Egyptian astral religion and science, thence passing to Byzantine and Islamic civilisation and from the latter into medieval Europe.

The passage from Greece to India, assimilating Vedic elements, results in the partially distinct development of Indian astrology, which has close affinity and significant exchanges with western astrology. It has however taken its own technical and philosophical path, integral with Indian (especially Hindu) culture. On the evidence of my own researches, the hermeneutic methods developed in this current study are equally applicable to Indian astrology. Chinese and meso-American astrologies should be considered as distinct cosmological and divinatory transmissions.

its vastly greater number of practitioners and its penetration in contemporary culture on the sub-continent and in the Hindu and Buddhist diaspora.² Western astrology has itself grown out of a complex reciprocal interaction of Persian, Indian, Arabic and Hellenistic transmissions, which in turn draw on ancient middle and near-Eastern origins. My principal concern here is with the European model of western astrology as it flourished from the late medieval period, through the Renaissance and - barely having survived but now shakily back on its feet - into modernity. Because it is a living tradition with a demonstrable transmission from antiquity, its modern formulation ('modern western astrology') offers an invaluable insider insight into the divinatory imagination, which scholars of divination ignore to their cost. It raises philosophical questions of some subtlety, however, and with respect to these astrology's most active practitioners are not always its most discerning guides.

Both Western and Indian astrology, within their respective cultures, have sustained a preeminence over all other divinatory forms for the best part of two millennia. It is not my intention to offer a cultural history, but in order to come to terms with astrology as divination we need to bring out salient features that are significant historically as well as decisively shaping its interpretation. Kant points us unerringly to the most significant feature of all: that astrology is the direct

² Dean (1977) p.6. offers an estimate of numbers, with partial citation of sources, of 'serious full-time professional astrologers who depend on astrology for a living' in different parts of the world. This of course refers only to formalised *judicial astrology*, the practice of interpreting the heavens for specific worldly situations, usually from horoscopes. The estimate for professional astrologers in Europe is 400; USA is 1000; Canada 100. The estimate for India is >10,000, since 'virtually every village has its own astrologer'. There are relatively small numbers in other outposts of modern western astrology. There is no reason to suppose that these figures have changed substantially since the mid-1970's. The figures for judicial horoscopic astrologers are not impressive, but for every professional making their living from this practice there will be a number of dedicated amateurs for whom it is a whole-life pursuit, and an even larger number of active sympathisers and practitioners of other divinatory forms with some basic knowledge, quite apart from dozens of reasonably committed lay inquirers. This type of statistic may mislead us as to the scope of the astrological imagination, since it obviously does not include the wider possibilities of non-judicial or proto-judicial astrological symbolism in religion, art, healing and psychotherapy, nor does it indicate the considerable influence of popular media astrology.

expression of an *ensouled symbolic cosmology*.

Kant and astrology

Is astrology about *Geist* or *geister*, Spirit or spirits? Only a small minority of modern practitioners are comfortable with the latter possibility but most gladly embrace the former, while giving this a highly abstracted meaning.³ A few try to nudge the spiritual away and claim the mantle of modern science, but this attempt has met with scorn from outsiders and little enthusiasm from the majority of astrologers.⁴ A more significant movement has donned the cloak of psychology, but this is yet more discredited soul-stuff so far as the modern humanists and rationalists are concerned. Kant rules: astrology is dead-centre on the cross-wires of his artillery sights. Not only is astrology unashamedly rooted in spiritual philosophy, but the *modus operandi* of its practical applications, and most claims made by practitioners, are manifestly paranormal when set against the standards of modern empirical science, absurdities to be ranked alongside gross superstitions. Astrology is the emblem of everything that Kant and the analytical philosophers who claim his inheritance believe they must loathe, because not only is it an expression of *spirit-philosophy*, it is *spirit-cosmology*; this is the fount of astrology's imagination, a fact that he well understands. The most famous of all quotations from Kant is the opening sentence to the Conclusion of his *Critique of Practical Reason*, published in 1788. These words, engraved on his tombstone, ride on a fatal antinomy between his conception of the cosmos and the cosmos of the astrologer:

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and

³ At the start of the modern revival, Alan Leo entertained the concept of 'star angels' (Leo, 1919, p.12): 'I believe every human being belongs to a Father Star in heaven or Star Angel as did Jesus Christ according to our Scripture.' Also Cornelius (2003) p.168, p.182 n.5. I have demonstrated the plausibility of the spirits-hypothesis in practical horoscopy.(Cornelius, 2003, ch.6)

⁴ The attempt to create a scientific astrology is discussed in depth in Phillipson (2000) ch.9,10; also Cornelius (2003) ch.3,4.

awe, the oftener and more steadily they are reflected on: *the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.*⁵

In the passages that follow he summarises with precision the metaphysical abyss between pre- and post-Enlightenment notions of reality and the nature of human being. It suffices here to observe that in the very next paragraph he shows the awful result of primitive reasoning and wrong-thinking:

But though admiration and respect can indeed excite to inquiry, they cannot supply the want of it... The observation of the world began with the noblest spectacle that was ever placed before the human senses and that our understanding can bear to follow in its vast expanse, and it ended in - astrology.⁶

Note the rhetorical emphasis, designed to slightly shock the educated reader for whom astrology is *of course* absurd. Morals wrongly understood by crude reasoning lead to 'fanaticism or superstition', which provides a pairing for astrology. His right-thinking takes as a model the empirical sciences when guided by the critical method of the philosopher. Newton stands as a hero of this revolution of thought: 'the fall of a stone and the motion of a sling, resolved into their elements and the forces manifested in them treated mathematically, finally brought that clear and henceforth unchangeable insight into the structure of the world...'⁷ The same critical analysis, sifting the empirical from the rational, is to be applied by corollary to our moral nature.

⁵ Italics are in the original; *Critique of Practical Reason* 5:161. (Kant, 1976, p.28 Beck translation). For reference to the tombstone, Guyer (2006) p.1.

⁶ Kant *Critique of practical Reason* 5:162.

⁷ Kant 5:162.

The most profound departure from a spirit-cosmology - and from all traditional metaphysics - is Kant's understanding that while 'I recognise myself as existing in a universal and necessary' relation with the infinite inner world of the moral nature, my existence in relation to the 'unbounded magnitude of worlds beyond worlds and systems of systems' of the visible heavens is not universal or necessary but *contingent*, a mere speck of animality.⁸ For the traditional metaphysics of astrology 'contingency' becomes meaningless in this context, since for the astrologer the two orders are in a relationship, whether of causation or sympathy, inviting interpretation not just of worldly events but of human behaviour, hence the 'moral law within.'

Cosmos as symbol: Plato and Philip of Opus

Of first importance to astrology is a cosmological foundation that might seem so obvious as to scarcely need comment; yet the way in which this is taken up determines astrology's philosophy. The starting point is that the 'symbolic object' interpreted by the diviner *is* the cosmos itself, literally and physically. This is 'cosmos' in the sense of the spherical frame of the whole of perception and knowledge, rather than being a part of a larger field of perception that has been marked out for the purposes of divination or ceremony. The symbolic object is divided between the horizon and the sky, beyond which nothing can be known. It is marked out by stars which manifestly belong to it. It shows primal order by its turning in the diurnal rotation, the turning of the universe (*uni+versere*, to turn once). It shows change and a succession of differences by the complex motions of the 'lights' - Sun and Moon - and the other planets, celestial bodies that belong to it just as much as do the stars and constellations. The planets are the focus of attention

⁸ Kant 5:161. This makes explicit the divide in understanding between Kant and previous metaphysics such as that of Duns Scotus, for whom contingent creation fulfils God's purpose for each unique soul.

in the mainstream tradition of interpretation.⁹

Since the primary symbolic object of astrology is the whole perceived cosmos, this symbolism is *co-present with time and space*; it is not *in* them, it *is* them. Directions towards the horizon are the four cardinal directions of space, north, south, east and west; the turning of the celestial sphere *is* the day, the movement of the Moon is the month. The Sun does not 'take' a year, its movement *is* the year. It is easy to see why such vast symbolism must be felt to contain within itself all our worldly destinies.

The symbolism of sky and planets goes back to Mesopotamian sources, but the distinctive sense in western thought of the cosmic order and its role as time and space has come down to us from Greek philosophy, and especially Plato's *Timaeus*. The importance of this text for later astrology can hardly be overstated, especially when we consider that it prepares the ground for Aristotle's more universally known rational and scientific cosmology. Plato establishes a mythopoeic interpretation of Soul as Cosmos;¹⁰ soul is self-moving motion and as the World Soul it is the primary movement of the celestial sphere and thus of the whole created order. The demiurge who created the world twisted soul-stuff into the two bands of the celestial equator and the ecliptic, the circle of the universal rotation and the circle of the Sun and planets. These two circles are the Same and the Different, so that individual soul knowing the sameness of things *is* the equator, and knowing the difference of things *is* the ecliptic and the planets.¹¹

⁹ Astrology terms the Sun and Moon as planets; the word comes from the Greek *planetes*, wanderers. These bodies wander through the (relatively) fixed stars and constellations, bringing ceaseless change.

¹⁰ *Timaeus* 30b: (Bury transl.) '...this Cosmos has verily come into existence as a Living Creature endowed with soul and reason'.

¹¹ *Timaeus* 36e-37c.

The awesome beauty of the heavens and the planets, in contrast with the contingent and chaotic world below, leads to the vision of the beautiful fiery bodies and the ideal Form of beauty in one and the same perception. Stars and planets are *agalmata*, divine images of the intelligible world.¹² To gaze on them is the greatest benefit of sight.¹³ This is also philosophic *theoria*.¹⁴ The cosmological relation between philosophy and the Mysteries is developed in the pseudo-Platonic *Epinomis*, which places celestial contemplation as the highest point of wisdom;¹⁵ once the philosopher's desire (*eros*) has been aroused to the vision of the heavenly courses, 'he will partake of a wisdom that is unitary and will continue for the rest of time to be a *theōros* of the most beautiful things, so far as sight will allow.'¹⁶

Plato begins the task of interpreting philosophical *theoria*, but he still has clearly in mind the spectacle of the Mysteries. Philip of Opus, thought to be the author of the *Epinomis*, retains the sense of the 'return journey' of a pilgrimage, reporting back to those who sent *theōros*.¹⁷ The significance for astrology of Plato's intuition is the active and productive component in *nous*, the highest intellectual part of the soul and also the primary cause of all motion in the universe. As the individual soul rises to its *nous* it actively brings order into its own reality, in reflection of the primal task of the demiurge; heavenly knowledge is rendered participatory in our chaotic life below. This is the subtlest expression of an astrological cosmology.

¹² Nightingale (2004) p.173.

¹³ *Timaeus* 47b.

¹⁴ Nightingale (2004) p.169.

¹⁵ Nightingale (2004) p.181 n.94. The *Epinomis* is generally believed to have been written by Philip of Opus, a fourth century BCE member of the Platonic academy. One ancient report indicates that he may have 'revised' or 'transcribed' an unfinished text from Plato.

¹⁶ *Epinomis* 986c,d. (Nightingale transl).

¹⁷ Nightingale (2004) ch.4.

This summary is, I hope, sufficient to give a bare outline of the power of Plato's mystical cosmology. His imagery can - up to a point - be approximated into positive and literal assertions, but its mythopoeic form ensures that we never forget that the whole is figurative and allegorical. Heidegger's interpretation of Greek thought leads to the understanding that Plato is concerned with truth (*alētheia*) as unconcealment, and not as propositional correctness, and here he reveals cosmos.¹⁸ For astrologers inspired by this revelation, the *how* of their practice could hardly be rationally explained by such a model; yet Plato lays out a foundation for the *what* of astrological signification, giving root symbolism to the celestial sphere, the circles of the equator and the ecliptic, and the planetary orbits. This is integral with the *why* and *to-what* of cosmological *theoria*. The provenance of this revelation, as of astrological interpretation that flows from it, is divine.

Quite apart from its direct influence in Hellenistic philosophy, Plato's mythopoeic conception has resonated through later astrological thinking. It appears in the renaissance hermeticism and Platonism of Marsilio Ficino, for whom the planets are 'mirrored in the soul in such a way that we can work with their images and direct our inner life accordingly'.¹⁹ It is possible to trace this inspiration in later 'theosophical' interpretations of universal wisdom, from the *magia* of the late renaissance through to Alan Leo and the occult-humanistic blend of 20th century astrology; it has always tended to bring out the themes of free will and the dignity of the soul.²⁰ However, intertwined with the Platonic cosmos another metaphysical

¹⁸ Heidegger (2002) p.9: 'What then do the Greeks call *alēthēia* (unhidden, true)? Not assertions, not sentences and not knowledge, but the beings themselves, the totality of nature: the human world and the work of God.'

¹⁹ Voss (2006) p.30.

²⁰ The unity of the world-soul as a foundation of magic is a Platonic thread found throughout occult philosophy; cf. Cornelius Agrippa (2000) ch. LXVII p.208: 'How man's mind may be joined with the mind, and intelligences of the celestials, and together with them impress certain wonderful virtues upon inferior things'. Alan Leo taught that 'character is destiny' (cf. Leo *How to Judge a*

element has shaped the practical work of all later astrology in the direction of determinism: in our western tradition this is a legacy of the Stoics.

The thread of Stoic determinism

The Stoic contribution to the evolution of the astrological imagination is reflected in a stance that is broadly fatalistic. We find it in practitioners to the present day, and it runs as a powerful current just beneath the surface of even the most liberated and humanistic expressions of astrology. I hope to make clear how this bears on divination as a whole.

We know from the fragmentary evidence available that Stoic philosophy argues the case for the absolute determinism of *heimarmenē*, fate, where every worldly event is necessitated by prior causes.²¹ All is bound by one divine principle of *logos*, producing a universal sympathy between all things. We make a free intellectual choice to have knowledge of causes, giving us science, and a moral choice to assent to what is decreed for us, which is wisdom. There is a special place for divination, since the divine order signifies itself to us through certain signs and oracles, assisting us to wisdom. This leads to a deterministic but pious interpretation of oracles, and of astrology. The Stoic attitude with respect to astrology is most memorably conveyed in the *Astronomica*, the didactic Latin poem of Manilius written in the first decades of the Christian era. The 'secret of the skies' is given to us by the gods,²² and its purpose is to help free us from the vain desires and senseless fears of our lives:

Set free your minds, O mortals, banish your cares, and rid your lives

Nativity' p.35).

²¹ Reesor (1998) p.198.

²² *Astronomica* 1:25-27.

of all this vain complaint! Fate rules the world, all things stand fixed by its immutable laws, and the long ages are assigned a predestined course of events. At birth our death is sealed, and our end is consequent upon our beginning. Fate is the source of riches and kingdoms and the more frequent poverty; by fate are men at birth given their skills and characters, their merits and defects, their losses and gains. None can renounce what is bestowed or possess what is denied; no man by prayer may seize fortune if it demur, or escape if it draw nigh: each one must bear his appointed lot.²³

A 'stoic attitude' is often thought of as wise acknowledgment of the limits of our abilities and an acceptance of 'the way things are', especially in misfortune. This attitude recognises that the twists of fortune are not in our hands. However, the embracing of prophecy and divination in philosophical stoicism takes it to another and paradoxical level by giving us special knowledge of a determining power, allowing *prediction of the apparent play of chance itself*. This is an argument rubbed raw by Cicero as he returns to worry it again and again. For Stoic astrology, this determination is quite literally a function of the planets and stars, the locus of 'God's greatest power'.²⁴ This interpretation is explicit in Manilius. He explains that 'fortune is capricious', bringing ill-fortune to the worthy and benefits to the undeserving, and producing monstrous births:

Clearly, there is another and greater power to constrain and rule us, and to subject mortal affairs to laws of its own: it gives birth to men and at their birth determines the number of their years and the changes of their fortunes. Oft it joins body of beast with limb of man: yet that will be found no product of the seed... It is the stars which

²³ *Astronomica* 4:12-22.

²⁴ *Astronomica* 1:37.

fashion strange shapes; it is heaven which intrudes these hybrid features.²⁵

For the astrologers of antiquity 'embracing long ages in unremitting toil' astrology was learned gradually; 'by repeated practice and with examples pointing the way, experience built up the science'.²⁶

While quite different in philosophical complexion, the Stoic interpretation shares with Platonism a pious reverence for the heavens, guaranteeing astrology's divine and ultimate provenance. However, fertile though they are, these conceptions do not explain why astrology developed such an enduring influence in western thought over so many centuries, both as a cosmological system and as practical divination. For the measure of this question we must turn to Aristotle.

Cosmos and science: Aristotle and Ptolemy

Aristotle takes up the cosmological theme from Plato but abandons the imagery of the pilgrimage to the Mysteries and the return journey of the enlightened soul; metaphor and mythic narrative does not fit his conception of philosophy. Where Plato and Philip of Opus restore harmony in the world through the spectacle enjoyed by *theōros*, for Aristotle that pure act of contemplation is itself the goal of philosophy, with no further 'use'.²⁷

In place of a symbolic cosmos Aristotle achieves a rational and scientific explanation, stripped of myth yet fully divine. As with Plato, the source of motion is

²⁵ *Astronomica* 4:98-103.

²⁶ *Astronomica* 1:54,62-5.

²⁷ Nightingale (2004) p.187f.

the heavens; the self-moved mover, which is god, sets time and change in motion by moving the outermost sphere, the *Primum Mobile*. We find a direct assimilation of major cosmological constructs from Plato, yet in Aristotle's hands they are demythologised and worked into rational theory. This applies to the first mover, who takes over from the demiurge; and to the roles of the celestial equator and the ecliptic, and the obliquity between them. For Plato, Sun, Moon and planets moving on the ecliptic circle signify difference and change in the unified whole. For Aristotle, in his *On Generation and Corruption*, the inclination of the ecliptic circle to the equator produces, as the Sun runs round it, not only the seasons of the year but the cycle of change in the world, bringing everything from birth to decay to death and back to birth again. This text, along with his *On the Heavens* and *Physics* shaped philosophical cosmology and provided scientific authority for astrology in Islam and the late middle ages in Europe. Astrologers such as al-Kindi and Abu Ma'sar cited these works as their authority,²⁸ while Aquinas and the scholastic philosophers felt impelled to bring Aristotle's cosmology, and with it a rational science of astrology, into accord with theology.²⁹

The essential component in the bonding of astrology, cosmology and science was provided by the 2nd century CE geographer, astronomer and astrologer Claudius Ptolemy. He built on the astronomical theories of Eudoxus and the discoveries of Hipparchus. In terms of cosmology he follows the lead of Aristotle on the relationship of knowledge of the heavens with theology, the necessity for a divine Prime Mover, the perfect nature of spherical and circular motion, the incorruptibility of the heavens, and the consequent lesser status of physics which deals with the corruptible world below.³⁰ His text known to us as the *Almagest* is the culminating

²⁸ Tester (1987) p.160. The Aristotelian works are often given by their Latin titles: *De generatione et corruptione*, *De caelo* and *Physica*. Another important work for early astrological theory is his *Meteorologica*.

²⁹ North (1989) p.272, dubs Aquinas 'an Aristotelian astrologer'.

³⁰ North (1994) p.107 has a useful summary of Ptolemy's development from Aristotle in the

achievement of Greek astronomy;³¹ he lays out a mathematical construction of the heavens involving a theory of cycles and epicycles to explain and accurately predict the planetary motions in their spheres around the earth. This cosmos, integral with the philosophical system of Aristotle, held unrivalled authority for fourteen centuries, until the revolution wrought by Copernicus.

The work Ptolemy performed for astronomy and cosmology is matched by the task he undertook for astrology, best known to us in its Greek name as the *Tetrabiblos*, the four books on astrology. This text is as much a culminating achievement in its field as is the *Almagest* for physical astronomy. In the context of the present discussion it is worth dwelling on the historical and cultural consequences of the great astronomer Ptolemy being also a founding figure of classical astrology. The astrology taught by Ptolemy is, moreover, thoroughly judicial - that is, it concerns specific judgments and predictions, both on the 'mundane' level of large-scale natural and human events, but also on the individual level of character and destiny. For this purpose the astrologer will normally expect to work with a horoscope of the planets' positions cast for the time and place of birth. Ptolemy's achievement is to embed an existing practice of these detailed judgments from the stars in the cosmology and philosophy of Greek science, empowering that practice through the late medieval period, and even today still offering it the ghost of a scientific rationale.

Ptolemy and Judicial Astrology

The extent to which Ptolemy reflects a Stoic cosmos has been the subject of debate, since Stoicism was widely known and influential in his day.³² What is clear is that

Almagest.

³¹ North (1989) p.57.

³² Tester (1987) p.68.

there was a common belief in a transforming force initiated by the planets and having a direct effect on the weather as well as on the earth below, and Ptolemy fits into an Aristotelian-Stoic position on this topic.³³ The main philosophical schools, including Stoics, Platonists and Aristotelians, also have a broad agreement concerning a uniting principle to the cosmos; there are close similarities in the way many astrologers, including Ptolemy, speak of 'the Aristotelian aether, the fifth element or quintessence, and the way others speak of the World Soul, *anima mundi*.³⁴ Jim Tester, in his survey of the history of western astrology, suggests that the philosophical system that suits Ptolemy's astrology is Stoicism,³⁵ but in my view this goes too far. Reading Manilius we are struck by the determinism-in-detail that must be involved, where Ptolemy - at least in his philosophical statements - holds to a distinction that is characteristic of the Aristotelians, between the primary order of causation of the celestial spheres and the contingent causation that ensues below. Contingent causation has an essentially *unpredictable* element. The aether or 'ambient', while primary as an agent of causation, is one only of the channels of causation;³⁶ hence the astrologer using only his science of astrology may infer or conjecture the general shape of events but not their specificity. Ptolemy specifically denies the idea of an irrevocable heavenly fate:

..we should not believe that separate events attend mankind as the result of the heavenly cause as if they had been originally ordained for each person by some irrevocable divine command and destined to take place by necessity without the possibility of any other cause

³³ North (1989) p.248.

³⁴ North (1989) p.248.

³⁵ Tester (1987) p.68.

³⁶ cf. *Tetrabiblos* I.2 8-9.

whatever interfering.³⁷

I added a rider above about Ptolemy's philosophical approach, implying a possible disjunction between his cosmology and philosophy as against his practical and interpretive statements. There is an issue to address here, because on a straightforward reading the *tone and mood* of the horoscopic part of the text is suggestive of astrological determinism - if *this* configuration then *that* event or situation follows. We should allow this mismatch rather than attempt to smooth it over, since it points to a characteristic dilemma of astrological divination. It is nevertheless my view that this should not be treated as philosophical determinism on the Stoic model, although the amplification of this point requires arguments concerning the nature of the aphorism that we will come to shortly. However, an ambiguity between Stoicism and Aristotelianism embodied in Ptolemy's attitude is found throughout astrology's later history, allowing deterministic judgments to push through under the cover of a justifying Aristotelian rationale.

Related to this discussion is a further observation from Tester which I question, but which raises an interesting point about astrological theory and practice. He believes there is 'evidence in the *Tetrabiblos* to suggest that Ptolemy was not himself a practitioner of the art', for instance in his use of phrases such as 'we ought to listen to the astrologer' rather than giving an opinion in the first person. But this is to downplay Ptolemy's stated intention in first laying out the philosophical possibility of astrological prediction before considering its uses or giving 'detailed instructions on the subject'.³⁸ Tester considers that the text 'is not in any sense a practical handbook: it would be very difficult to draw up a natal chart and interpret it

³⁷ *Tetrabiblos* I.3:11.

³⁸ Tester (1987) p.70.

from what Ptolemy wrote.³⁹ This may be true enough on the technical business of casting the horoscope but it is misleading to assert this for natal interpretation, where Ptolemy's writing is detailed, comprehensive and well ordered, permitting a step by step approach for a serious student. Throughout we encounter elements that would be of little relevance to the overall philosophical and cosmological argument concerning celestial influence, yet are of real technical and interpretive interest for the practitioner. To take one instance drawn almost at random from Book III, Ptolemy weighs and balances the mitigating effects of mundane placings in directing planets for estimating the length of life (ie. mundane squares in signs of short ascension spoiling the trine between planets, long ascension spoiling the sextile).⁴⁰ This is an unnecessary level of detail for a cosmological argument, proving nothing further than a point within horoscopic interpretation itself. A close inspection will yield many similar examples that could be of concern only to the practitioner attempting specific judgments.

It does not take long exploring Ptolemy's discussion of practical interpretation to realise that he shows a love of planetary typology that is the hallmark of the symbolist rather than the scientist. Out of a large number of examples I will pick out a single instance, the combination of Mars with Mercury and their influence on the soul:

Allied with Mercury, in honourable positions Mars makes his subjects leaders of armies, skilful, vigorous, active, not to be despised, resourceful, inventive, sophistic, painstaking, rascally, talkative, pugnacious, tricky, unstable, systematic workers, practising evil arts, keen-witted, deceitful, hypocritical, insidious, of bad character, meddlers, inclined to rascality but nevertheless successful and

³⁹ *Tetrabiblos* I:1 2.

⁴⁰ Tester (1987) p.70.

capable of keeping contract and faith with persons like themselves,
and in general injurious to their enemies and helpful to their friends.⁴¹

The bad placings incline towards sorcery and homicide. These are richly descriptive accounts. They are Ptolemy's own interpretations based on the tradition of his day. Not every astrologer in the tradition will agree with every one of these descriptions, but when each set is taken in comparison with the interpretations for other planetary combinations, then this particular set will be readily distinguishable as 'Mars-Mercury' to astrologers of any period in western astrology.

We may ask what it means that Ptolemy gives us such extensive arrays of symbolism, together with technical-interpretive considerations of some complexity. These descriptions, far outstripping the requirements of an Aristotelian scientific cosmology, are of specialist interest to the astrological practitioner. Their purpose is to build up the language of horoscope interpretation. Why would Ptolemy bother with them unless he, too, was a practitioner, or had the concerns of a practitioner? I do not consider that he writes here simply as educated *theōros*, but either as a practitioner or as an initiate.⁴² Dry and academic though his philosophical writing sometimes is, awkward as certain of his scientific rationalisations may be, he nevertheless relishes symbolism and addresses the competency required of the astrologer-*hermeios*. This is the voice from which his text speaks.

I suggest that Ptolemy's project is taken at face value, as an attempt to order and explain an already venerable but chaotic practice-tradition of judicial astrology, the astrology of judgments. He knows and cares about this not simply as an adjunct

⁴¹ *Tetrabiblos* III.10 132.

⁴² I use this word in the sense described in Chapter 4, equivalent to the *epopteia*. It is not necessary to prove that Ptolemy is a regular giver of judgments to others for him to have an insider understanding of astrological interpretation.

to scientific cosmology, but for its merit in its own right, and he seeks to rationalise its practice. Any practitioner who has seriously engaged the problem of both organising *and theoretically explaining* the raw materials of astrology will recognise what a tall order this is. There is an intriguing passage where Ptolemy criticises 'the ancient method of prediction... because it is manifold and well-nigh infinite..[and] depends much more upon the particular attempts of those who make their inquiries directly from nature than of those who can theorise on the basis of the traditions.'⁴³ In terms of our hermeneutic analysis I read Ptolemy's statement as referring to 'inquiries directly and non-speculatively realised from nature', experienced by the ancients but inadequately theorised by them. His main project in this text is best seen as a work of theorising practice, creating a speculative forestructure, a presentiment, for the rationally-minded student. His theory seeks to gather into *astrologos* the multiple and chaotic anecdotes and countless fractured 'rules' arising from the anecdotal infinity of unique cases encountered in practice.

Whether a modern astrologer chooses to agree or disagree with this or that technicality or item of interpretation is beside the point in assessing what Ptolemy achieved. By integrating astrological practice into scientific astronomy and the physics of Aristotle he performed a remarkable intellectual transmutation, reforming divinatory symbolism and its interpretation into Greek science. This remains more potent than most modern astrologers realise in providing the rationale for the temporal structure of astrological influence, hence for the birth horoscope.⁴⁴ On these counts the classical model as formulated by Ptolemy continues to be an enduring presentiment for the astrological omen.

⁴³ *Tetrabiblos* III.1 107.

⁴⁴ The question of the Aristotelian treatment of time and causation in relation to astrology takes the discussion into metaphysics and goes beyond the limits of the current investigation. Certain implications of Aristotelian/Ptolemaic temporality for specifics of astrological practice are discussed in Cornelius (2003), esp. ch. 5.

Astrology, cosmology, science

This is an appropriate point to review the steps so far taken into the question: what is astrology? It should now be apparent that a declaration of astrology as science, as proto-science, or as divination is not adequate without some qualification. Is the attribution being made from our modern perspective, from the late medieval perspective, or from the early Greek world-view? What aspect of astrology is being referred to? The achievement of the classical astrologers, most especially Ptolemy, was to create astrological practice as a method of science, firmly wedded to the Aristotelian cosmos. This was its prevailing status in Islamic culture, and in late medieval Europe after the influx of Arabic science and philosophy in the 12th century. From this point on its role within scientific cosmology was guaranteed by 'the astronomer' (Ptolemy) and 'the philosopher' (Aristotle). The relationship of the incorruptible heaven of planetary motions with the will of god and with the angels made it a divine science, even a close assistant to theology.⁴⁵

By the late middle ages, the scholarly consensus took completely for granted the idea of causal celestial influence emanating from the stars and planets, and not just from the Sun and Moon.⁴⁶ On the other hand, there was much reserve concerning the details, especially where the discipline entailed *judicia*, the art of judgments from horoscopes, and even more so when these involved prediction. Reserve came from religious concerns on the lines of the Church Fathers and Augustine,⁴⁷ and from scientific critics, such as Nicole Oresme and Henry of

⁴⁵ The study by Smoller (1994) on the influential Cardinal Pierre d'Ailly (1350-1420) describes the concordance achieved between theology and judicial astrology by the late Middle Ages. D'Ailly described astrology as 'natural theology', and saw it as an arbiter of Biblical prophecy.(see ch.7 p.122ff).

⁴⁶ North (1989) pp.282-3.

⁴⁷ cf. Chapter 8 for Augustine's censure of astrology.

Langenstein in the latter part of the 14th century.⁴⁸ Oresme makes the division of astrology into the understanding of Nature and Fortune, the former covering the correspondences of the heavens with the natural world and the latter being judicial astrology. He considered that judicial astrology was in principle possible, but in practice ineffective. Of natal astrology he says 'this part of astrology cannot be known and the rules written down on it are not true'. The judicial astrology of interrogations (horary astrology) and elections are dismissed as having no rational foundation.⁴⁹

In the classical western tradition, therefore, the divide between 'natural' and 'judicial' astrology is a first approximation in demarcating the question of astrology as divination. From both the Greek scientific and late medieval perspectives the practitioner is likely to justify *all* astrology, both natural and judicial, as 'science'. However, certain practices of judicial astrology were continuously under a cloud of suspicion as magical and irreligious, or simply irrational; it was well known that Ptolemy himself did not allow horary interrogations, and some notable astrologers have always followed this line.⁵⁰ Astrologers in the pre-modern western tradition therefore followed the general direction offered to them by Ptolemy and favoured a theoretical model that locates astrology as science, albeit divine science.

Until relatively recently, modern scholars who have bothered with astrology

⁴⁸ North (1989) pp.287-94.

⁴⁹ cited in Tester (1987) p.198.

⁵⁰ Ibn Ezra (12th century CE Jewish astrologer, and a practitioner of horary astrology) noted that 'Ptolemy conceded revolutions and nativities... but he did not find that interrogations were true' - cited by Garin (1983) p.39. Horary (Interrogations) is the art of judging a horoscope for the time and place a question is put to the astrologer; because it is difficult to find a causal rationale for this practice, it is usually condemned *prima facie* by purist Ptolemaic astrologers. Notable judicial astrologers who expressed reserve about the rationality of horary include Al-Biruni in the 11th century CE, Cardano (16th century) and Morin and Placido (17th century). It continues to cause discomfort to some judicial astrologers.(cf. Cornelius, 2004, p.102-5)

at all have followed Ptolemy's rationalisation and treated the discipline as an early science, rather than as divination, which vital aspect of the topic is almost invariably discounted as a naive superstition.⁵¹ This leads to a skewed historical perspective to the extent that astrologers, including the experts, may have used a loose 'scientific' model both to authorise their discipline and to provide its external structure, yet *in practice* did not predicate the unique case of symbolic perception on a rational interpretation of physical causes.

In its transmission from the Greeks astrology achieves the imagination of an ensouled cosmos revealing divine intention (its *why*). It integrates its description with logic, metaphysics, and physics in a rational-scientific model to explain the *how*. This is a theory of the transmission of causes from the divine and incorruptible heavens to the world below, which is the means employed by the divine intention. This description may be considered the fundamental or 'ground' theory of the classical and medieval tradition, since it unites the *why* of astrology with its *how*, showing the means by which the why is fulfilled; such is the gift of Ptolemy. Given the advance of rational and scientific thought in the Hellenistic era it should be noted that neither the Platonic nor the Stoic why-inspirations might on their own be sufficient for an enduring and persuasive ground-theory capable of sustaining astrology as a practice of symbolic interpretation. For this reason Ptolemy's rationalisation was probably essential for the survival of astrology in any practical form whatever.

Ptolemy's ground-theory shapes the presentiment from which the meaningfulness of astrological symbolism arises in each and every case of interpretation; while each interpretation gaining even modest assent from parties to it, and therefore being a success, turns back to justify the original presentiment and the methods employed,

⁵¹ Smoller (1994) p.4f states that Otto Neugebauer has been the leading figure to make research into astrology as early science acceptable. The historian of science George Sarton had dismissed 'the superstitious flotsam of the Near East', but was criticised by Neugebauer in his 1951 article 'The Study of Wretched Subjects'. (Neugebauer, 1951, p.111) Astrology is still wretched, six decades on, and divination even more so.

reinforcing future expectations. We recognise in this self-enclosed circle of expectation and fulfilment of meaning a manifestation of the 'hermeneutic circle'.

The Omniscopic Cosmic Signifier

On the cognitive continuum, judicial astrology belongs with the bones as a method of inductive divination. The celestial sphere is the divining bowl or the ritual space before the diviner, and the planets are the bones, the individual symbolic tokens; how fate has cast them round the bowl is the divinatory sign to be interpreted. The how-question of 'chance' versus 'determinism' in bringing about the pattern must be put aside; all that is required is that there shall be a pattern, not of any individual's choosing. This is a bones form according to our definitions because each of the principal symbolic tokens, the planets, together with each division of the celestial bowl, is assigned its own symbolism. This assignation is culturally rather than individually determined, although each practitioner, or school of practitioners, will build up distinctive associations and methods. With this proviso, astrology presents itself with objective and identifiably distinct symbols communicable to others and transmitted through each generation of practitioners. In short, it is language. As nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs of this language, the planets become objective symbols for the 'what' of the divination, the matter enquired about.

Although judicial astrology has all the characteristics of the bones, its analysis needs to be taken further in order to comprehend its unique hold on the divinatory imagination. Emerging from Greek inspiration, astrology's core symbolism coheres as a unitary cosmic symbol-system of omniscopic signification. By this condensed formulation I simply mean the following. It is cosmic because it both *is* and *symbolises* the cosmos itself, revealing time and space. It is omniscopic in that the range of its individual significations, especially those of planets, signs and houses, gives it an unbounded potential for symbolising anything in existence or in

mind, real or imaginary, material or immaterial. It is unitary in that it systematically organises its signifiers in logical relation to each other. Saturn is known as *not* any other planet, Aries is Aries by virtue of the eleven other signs, the descendant is that which is opposite to the ascendant. The effect of this is that each individual signifier depends on its differentiation from the other signifiers, and each allows the others their place.

One substantial consequence of this unitary, finite and omniscopic quality is that astrology's symbolism can be matched to any other conceptual whole. This has a widespread application, beginning in antiquity with the zodiacal melosthesia, whereby each part of the body is distributed to one of the zodiac signs; this is possible precisely because the circle of the zodiac is a complete whole with a beginning (Aries, head) a middle (Libra, reins) and an end (Pisces, feet).⁵² Astrological textbooks from the Hellenistic era on become compendia of correspondences, where every realm of human activity and the natural world could be classified against celestial and horoscopic archetypes.⁵³

The contrast of astrology with most other practices of the bones is obvious. The witchdoctor goes round with his symbolic tokens in a bag; the cast is in a tiny patch of space where the bones are expected to be symbols for the particulars of an enquirer's question. The rest of the world goes by unconcerned. Augury employs demarcated areas of the sky, to await the first bird to fly across from east or west, but this too does not constitute a cosmos, nor does it suggest an organised system of correspondences. Many forms of the bones lack the integrative and unitary quality of astrology; that is, one could add or subtract symbolic tokens without undermining the signifiatory potential of the overall system. Even where the tradition of a

⁵² Barton (1994b) p.74.

⁵³ Barton (1994b) pp.190-1 gives examples of early magical and medical correspondences involving herbs and stones.

practice has stabilised its form, there may still not be a clear and easily communicable underlying logic to the pattern of metaphors. This is the case with Tarot, where although the twenty-two trumps ('major arcana') and their principal divinatory interpretations are well enough settled amongst practitioners, and may not be added to or removed, the logic of their order and their interrelated meanings is far from clear and communicable. Different practitioners naturally have their own theories about this, but a scatter of inconsistent theories and attributions cannot rival the self-evident symbolic structure of traditional western astrology. I interpret the efforts that have been made to associate the trumps with the Cabalistic Tree of Life as an indication of the tendency for practitioners of divinatory forms to seek integration and coherence.

Traditional western astrology's stable and coherent unitary form received its greatest shock not with Copernicus, but with the discovery of a new planet in the solar system. The academic credibility of astrology had long since drained away under the pressure of the rationalism of the Enlightenment; now the arrival of Uranus in 1781 threatened the old system of planet-sign relationships from within.⁵⁴ It took at least a generation of discussion and argument amongst the tiny band of believers to settle a consistent interpretation for the new body, but the presentiment of the traditional form had been substantially diffused, and the successive discoveries of Neptune and Pluto simply accelerated this process. It is hardly surprising that an actual change in our scientific knowledge of the physical cosmos induces tension and change in the symbolic and divinatory interpretation of that same cosmos. This argument can be overdone, however. Demonstrating astrology's tenacious capacity to adapt to cultural change, a revived modern form was in the

⁵⁴ From the perspective of the symbolist it will not go unobserved that there is a coincidence of the arrival of Uranus with the revolutions in America and France, and with Kant's culminating achievement of the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781). Modern western astrology has given Uranus the meanings of contrariety, intellectual radicality, political revolution and modernity.

process of being born in the decades after the new planet.⁵⁵

However, despite the aspirations of the post-Uranian astrologers, after the era of Kant there is *no* part of judicial astrology that can be science. There is the possibility of a tiny element of natural astrology that might be stripped out and taken into the fold of recognised disciplines, but 'natural astrology' itself loses its meaning. There is no need for a dramatic expression of paradigm-shift; as with all divination it is enough if the prevailing *presentiment* for astrology is weakened in a culture. It is not about this or that detail - the edifice has been undermined not simply with the overthrow of Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology, but more subtly with the slow withering - or cancellation - of a spiritual cosmology that is the central pillar of antiquity, the presumption of an intelligent cosmos that cares to address us.

Here then is the particular importance of Kant's deconstruction of metaphysics, presenting a stark choice. The first option is to cling to remnants of the causal structure of an outmoded world view, lacking all intellectual credibility, though having a certain antiquarian charm. The second option is a radically different possibility, contrary to Kant yet guided by his clarity. This is the recognition that judicial astrology, although for long successfully sustained by the classical causal and temporal paradigm, is rooted in a divinatory imagination other than or prior to the form given to us by Aristotle and Ptolemy. This is the situation that astrologers find themselves in today. It is a painful process of recognition for the most thoughtful astrologers, however, and the great majority of practitioners and students are resistant to mentions of hermeneutics and the definition of astrology as divination.⁵⁶ This resistance does not materially hinder effective interpretation at a day to day level, which proceeds as it always has done under the Ptolemaic model,

⁵⁵ Curry (1992) p.11 notes 'the remarkable rebirth of judicial astrology in England's towns and cities' from the 1830's.

⁵⁶ Bird (2006) ch.5.

saying one thing in theory and doing something rather different in practice.⁵⁷ From the point of view of a hermeneutics of divination, the practice needs to be examined more closely, which is the subject of the next chapter.

⁵⁷ For the complex reasons outlined in this chapter a degree of mismatch between theory and practice has historically been a cultural necessity that serves the chicane and allows the practice to proceed.

Chapter Eleven

Judicial Astrology as Divinatory Allegoric

The dismantling of the Ptolemaic cosmos following the discoveries of Copernicus and Galileo sapped the intellectual status of western astrology by stripping away its principal theoretical justification: that of an ordered and finite heaven in which the earth held an integral place. The discovery of Uranus in 1781 completed the disruption of the traditional symbolic order of the planets, but by then European astrology had been in decay for more than a century, its epistemological status eclipsed.¹ The judicial element of astrology, its divinatory art of judgments, could and did survive relatively intact, although greatly weakened in prestige and self-confidence, relegated by the educated world to the margins of superstition.² Historians have been tempted to map the status of this judicial part onto the destruction of the Aristotelian cosmology and metaphysics that was used to justify it. However, the elements of symbolic practice and scientific rationalisation run their own courses and

¹ In astrology the Sun and Moon are planets; the other five traditional planets are Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. This total of seven has from antiquity been given numerological significance (the seven days of the week, the seven ages of man). For judicial astrology, the scientific discoveries from Galileo onwards were at least as important as the Copernican revolution, which retained a symbolically harmonious order governed by the Sun. The discovery of new planets, inviting their own interpretation, breaks up key elements of the traditional symbolic structure, notably in the question of planetary rulership over the zodiac signs (the Sun rules Leo, Mercury rules Gemini and Virgo, and so on), which is an elegant and consistent symbolism at the foundation of the classical tradition. Astrologers had to fit extra planets into this harmonious order; this no doubt hastened the abandonment of the old system of essential dignities. The response of the tiny band of serious astrologers to Uranus appears to have been gradual (Holden, 1996, p.180-1), but the cumulative effect of the new planets, Uranus, Neptune, and then Pluto, subtly altered the authority of tradition and weakened its sense of continuity.

² Curry (1992) pp.9-10.

require distinct historiographical treatment.³ The divergence is even more evident in modern times, since astrology may have become obsolete as science and as physical cosmology, yet it retains vitality as a symbolic and divinatory practice. However, the divergence has always lurked within the whole system of thought called 'astrology', which is an interwoven complex of scientific, mythopoeic, symbolic-divinatory and cosmological-metaphysical strands. The task here is to focus on the symbolic-divinatory elements of astrology's practice, viewed in the light of the analysis developed in this current study.

A helpful move at this point, following the theme of the previous chapter, is to establish two different paradigms of astrological interpretation. The first of these is scientific or proto-scientific, seeing the stars and planets as causes whose influences we attempt to determine, understand and predict. In our tradition this is rooted in the Aristotelian concept of efficient causation and its rendering into astrology by Ptolemy. This leads to a one-sidedly positivist definition of astrology concerned with empirical observation and a causal hypothesis, and is the approach often adopted by historians.⁴ Within astrology the Aristotelian-Ptolemaic line readily adapts to a soft-deterministic interpretation: 'the stars incline, they do not compel'. This remains a pervasive influence in the justification - or rationalisation - of their art for many astrologers.

The second and less common paradigm sees astrological symbolism as a form of language, or language-like. This is hermeneutic in its concern, focussed on the nature of interpretation. It is the approach adopted by Ann Geneva in her discussion of the decline of astrology in England at the end of the seventeenth century. This is the

³ Geneva (1995 p.12) comments: 'The convenient notion that the Copernican and scientific revolutions swept away all such "superstition" in its wake has ceased to be intellectually persuasive'.

⁴ North (1989) represents this medieval science interpretation of astrology, emphasising the influence of Aristotelian-Ptolemaic cosmology in shaping its development. See especially ch. 18, 'Celestial Influence - the Major Premiss of Astrology.'

era when natural philosophy began to distance itself from symbol and from poetry; and her 'ultimate conclusion' is that 'astrology's destiny is related to poetry'.⁵ There are precedents to this hermeneutic view amongst the neo-Platonists, especially Plotinus.⁶ In the 15th century, Giovanni Pontano argued explicitly that the language of the stars 'conformed in all essential ways to the language of humans... every astrologically significant configuration.. resembled a word or a phrase, the sense of which the astrologer could determine'.⁷

It is not a case of either-or with these paradigms. Both apply to nearly all instances of astrology, and both are required for the commentator who seeks to understand those instances. A starting point is to acknowledge that there is indeed a coherent and consistent interpretive basis to western astrology.⁸ This is a cultural fact independent of whether or not the astrological hypothesis, however framed, is true or revealing. We find this above all in the traditional interpretations of planets. Certain astrological ideas have entered our vocabulary; obvious examples are jovial (of Jupiter), martial (of Mars), venereal (sexual, as represented by Venus). Merchants and markets come from the god of trade, mercurial Mercury,⁹ and the idea of lunacy comes

⁵ Geneva (1995) p.273. The approach adopted by Ann Geneva appears to be unprecedented amongst historians of astrology.

⁶ Geneva (1995) pp.269-70.

⁷ Grafton (1999) p.6.

⁸ cf. Grafton (1995) p.6: 'The continuity of the astrological tradition is, perhaps, unmatched in the intellectual history of the West'. It is my concern to indicate this continuity in terms not simply of theoretical premises and canonical assertions, which constitute the foundational presuppositions of astrology, but in its practice of interpretation and judgment.

⁹ Abu Ma'sar *Abbreviation of the Introduction to Astrology* (1994) ch.5:27 p.67 includes under Mercury 'commerce, receiving and giving, cunning, swindling, slyness'.

from the Moon, which has influence over the brain.¹⁰ The influence of the planets on human character is equally consistent; a study undertaken by Françoise Gauquelin of textbooks going back to Ptolemy established marked levels of keyword coherence amongst the interpretations given by astrologers from antiquity to modernity.¹¹ Any student of historical astrological texts will soon become convinced of the recurring patterns of broadly consistent interpretation, notwithstanding the great variety of symbolic associations suggested by different authors at different epochs. Astrologers seem to stick with their traditional authorities and bear out their interpretations.

As a starting point for the idea of interpretive consistency, here is an intriguing testimony from the 17th century astrologer William Lilly. He describes parting company with his teacher, Evans:

The occasion of our falling out was thus; a Woman demanded the Resolution of a Question, which when he had done, she went her way; I standing by all the while, and observing the Figure, asked him why he gave the Judgment he did, sith the Signification shewed the quite contrary, and gave him my Reasons, which when he had ponder'd, he called me Boy, and must he be contradicted by such a Novice! But when his heat was over, he said, had he not so judged to please the Woman, she would have given him nothing, and he had a Wife and Family to provide for; upon this we never came together after.¹²

¹⁰ North (1989) p.277, citing Thomas Aquinas.

¹¹ Gauquelin (1982). The purpose of this study was to test the fit of astrologers' interpretations with the empirical findings of Michel and Françoise Gauquelin's impressive (and never successfully debunked) statistical research into character-trait correlations with planets in significant zones of the diurnal circle for timed European births. She concludes (p.65): 'It is the link with character traits that was predicted with great accuracy, as well as the type of character which is effectively related to the Moon, Venus, Mars and Saturn.'

¹² Lilly, ed. Briggs (1974) p.23.

The question has formed the basis for a horary figure - a horoscope cast for the moment this client has sought a judgment from Evans the astrologer.¹³ What then transpires might be called 'looking over the artist's shoulder'. Lilly literally looks over his teacher, Evans', shoulder to see how he judges. He sees what Evans will have judged, and he too makes his own private judgment, and sees Evans give an answer to please the querent rather than give a true interpretation by the stars. Evans' admission to Lilly proves that they agree about the 'true' interpretation; this is not some piece of imagination or a hunch on Lilly's part, but refers to an explicit and shared craft of horoscope interpretation.

This is a corrective to an impression sometimes conveyed by historians that while technical methods and theoretical rationalisations may be conveyed through generations of astrologers, the essentially ad hoc, intuitive, and arbitrary nature of applied symbolic interpretation renders its transmission something of an illusion. The coherence of interpretation I seek to bring out is therefore commonly misunderstood by those who are outsiders not just to astrology but to symbolic interpretation as a whole. One consequence of this downplaying is that the historian considers himself released from the duty of studying any astrological interpretation on its own terms and in its own right. Indeed, it would seem an almost meaningless exercise, revealing little more than the momentary fancy of the astrologer.

The besetting sin of practising astrologers

The enduring quality of a coherent interpretive tradition is well revealed by the most influential astrologer since the Hellenistic period, the Arabian Abu Ma'sar, who

¹³ Horary astrology proceeds without reference to any natal (birth) horoscope and is frequently used for basic 'yes' 'no' issues. Its tradition embodies some distinctive rules and approaches. Lilly is widely considered amongst later astrologers to be a master of the horary method.

flourished in the ninth century CE. He synthesised Aristotelian science with the astrological traditions of the Alexandrians, the Persians, the Babylonians and the Indians.¹⁴ Richard Lemay describes Abu Ma'sar as providing one of the two poles of the medieval paradigm within which astrology was philosophically credible. The other pole is created by Aristotle, whose physics provides the foundation for the medieval cosmos. Building on Aristotle, '[Abu Ma'sar's] contribution in this momentous process stands at the apex of the evolution of all Greek and ancient science in the Near East, for which his works surpassed and truly outshone his immediate predecessors, contemporaries and successors.'¹⁵

Others take a less sanguine view of Abu Ma'sar's achievements, even if they can hardly deny that he is an intellectual giant. The late J.D. North sees in him a serious flaw:

In a sense, it is a cause for regret that this man stood at the crossroads of so many traditions - the Greek, the Indian, the Iranian, and the Syrian, as well as their various composite forms - and that he understood so many languages. When making his synthesis, the breadth of his reading was unfortunately not matched by any regard for consistency - the besetting sin of most practising astrologers, if not all. His philosophical awareness was unusual, even so...¹⁶

We are asked to picture Abu Ma'sar as an individual of considerable culture

¹⁴ Lemay (1987) p.58. There is a useful introduction to Abu Ma'sar's astrology in Holden (1996) pp.111-121. Holden cites material from Thorndike, referred to below.

¹⁵ Lemay (1987) p.58.

¹⁶ North (1994) p.195-6. It is noteworthy that North specifies *practising* astrologers - for it is in practice that the real-life unique case arises.

and awareness who nevertheless is declared to have had no regard for *consistency* in his major intellectual project. I infer that North has in mind the lack of a credible 'sufficient reason' to justify and hold together the variety of practices of astrology that he studied and employed. Or, put another way, despite his synthesis of Greek logic and science with astrology, some practices employed by Abu Ma'sar are manifestly incredible and unsustainable by the very reason taught to us by Aristotle, even on a loose reading of the philosopher. Horary astrology - judgment for a horoscope cast for the time and place of a specific question - particularly offends the canons of reason and the 'laws of thought'.¹⁷ According to this censure, Abu Ma'sar must have turned intellectual somersaults or suffered a delusional blind-spot in order to sustain these practices.

This understanding is philosophically too narrow and literal in its rationality to allow for the range of possibilities involved in symbolism.¹⁸ It also dismisses in advance the idea of form and consistency in astrological interpretation. But there is no point criticising this approach unless the discussion can go back to its roots, which are in any case as much a problem for the astrologers themselves as they are for the historian of culture. Abu Ma'sar's lasting intellectual influence is founded in his capacity to assimilate and yoke together diverse strands of astrology and Aristotelian physics; yet a literal and 'logical' interpretation drawn from this assimilation is seen to be inadequate to carry and justify the unique case, the actually experienced case by case practice of astrology.

¹⁷ Horary has always had an uncomfortable existence even within astrology itself. The 'laws of thought' refer to logical criteria first clearly articulated by Aristotle. 'Sufficient reason' as one of these laws is usually credited to Leibniz, although the same principle was understood by Anaxagoras.

¹⁸ This is a limitation in interpreting Islamic culture, which takes a view of the multiple dimensions of knowledge and the role of symbol in expressing an intertwined revelatory/supernatural and natural Divine Unity - see Seyyed Nasr (1978) Prologue and pp.3-4.

Here, then, is the 'besetting sin' of practising astrologers. From a strictly literal and positivist point of view, the astrologer must either be dense or he is double-thinking, holding at least two seemingly incompatible conceptions together at one and the same time. This, expressed in terms of the sophisticated culture and intellect of Abu Ma'sar, is identically the *chicane* which must offend many historians as they come face to face with manifest logical inconsistency. We return to the position that diviners and astrologers have always struggled with in western culture, namely that their practice of symbolic interpretation appears to them to reveal truth, often in a consistent, coherent and communicable manner, even though the foundation of that practice is a mystery that cannot be readily justified at a narrow rationalistic level. This dilemma was mercilessly exposed by Cicero and it remains a dilemma to the present day. To use the terms of a debate that has been ceaselessly exercised since Cicero's time, diviners and astrologers know the *what* and the *why* of their symbols, since they regularly use their established techniques to employ these symbols (the 'what'), in order to achieve the practical results they expect to achieve ('the why'). Against this, the rationalistic mentality ancient and modern demands to know *how*; that is, it requires a literal and exact statement of how a thing 'works', pinning down the sufficient reason for the phenomenon before it is conceded that 'there may be something in it' other than wishful thinking and misperception. Hence the intellectual fissure that arises in the discourse on divination, and the pressure on the astrologers to solve their dilemma by adopting pseudo-rational explanations of the 'how'.

The problem is practically resolved to the satisfaction of astrologers (and their clients) when they achieve a sufficient, if minimal, rationalisation that allows their interpretation. Compared with all other forms of divination, astrology is in a league of its own by being tethered to a literal and sensible framework of earth, sky and heavens. The authority of Aristotle gave Arabic and medieval astrological cosmology an almost

invincible rationale as science. Its horoscopic practice attracted reserve and frequent hostility, but judicial practitioners felt entitled to argue its case as part of natural philosophy. For the ordinary astrologer, and even more for the uneducated public, it hardly matters if this rationalisation appears wholly insufficient to a mind trained in philosophy, logic or scientific method. The practitioners continue their practice because it works, that is, it grants them and their clients some insight and truth. Once a minimum but sufficient rationalisation is secured, this happy condition allows a transmission of symbolism that continues to work for successive generations.

Symbolic immediacy in astrological narrative

We return to the importance of the peek over the astrologer's shoulder. However inexplicable the fundamental 'how' of astrology might be, the symbolism that is transmitted is for the most part *comprehensible* and *not arbitrary*, thereby allowing in the passage of that tradition a *shared immediacy of symbolism*. This means that the modern astrologer, working within a certain broad orthodox and traditional canon of the meanings of planets and signs and other principal factors, finds him or herself able to read the work of astrologers throughout history. The symbolic immediacy experienced by those earlier astrologers is communicated and re-experienced by another astrologer many centuries away. Following the distinction already insisted on in this study, this experience is affective and involves *realisation*; it is therefore not to be confused with a simply speculative weighing up of possible interpretations, even if rational speculation remains essential in the overall process.

Individual cases capable of illustrating the above suggestions are relatively uncommon in the early tradition. We are fortunate to have some striking anecdotes preserved from Abu Ma'sar, in a resume edited by Lynn Thorndike.¹⁹ This gives a

¹⁹ Thorndike (1954).

brief but illuminating record of astrology, not canonically and in theory, but in life and practice. Thorndike considers the text is valuable as a 'specimen of Arabic astrology', but is more concerned with its relationship to the history of science, for instance in correctly representing comets as more distant than the planets of the solar system.²⁰

In illustrating the nature of astrological interpretation it is important to deal with the difference between a legendary and a literal narrative. The following example given by Thorndike and dating from the 13th century CE, is in the genre of legend, although there remains a reasonable possibility that it has retained an element of an earlier report's symbolism. The case concerns an official who had gone into hiding, fearing arrest. Realising that his prince would call on Abu Ma'sar to discover him, he sought to confuse the astrologer's second-sight 'by sitting for days on a golden mortar placed in a vessel which contained blood'. Abu Ma'sar saw from his astrology that 'the fugitive was on a mountain of gold in a sea of blood, but ...he did not know of any such place in the world'. The official was finally lured from hiding by a promise of amnesty, and the prince marvelled at the artifice of the official and the skill of the astrologer.²¹

The connection of golden mortar = golden mountain, vessel with blood = ocean of blood is obvious, and exemplifies the endlessly varied yet non-arbitrary possibilities of all such associations made in inductive divination. The story illustrates the fluid yet real nature of symbol, since it would be a pointless account if the associations were arbitrary and anything could mean everything. However, legendary embellishment makes it difficult to convey this as an experience, and it also illustrates general rather than specifically astrological symbolism. Other examples in Thorndike's compilation

²⁰ Thorndike (1954) pp.22,29.

²¹ Thorndike (1954) p.31-2.

serve us better in capturing the specificity of astrological interpretations in their historical context, and it is to these that we now turn.

According to the text, Abu Ma'sar himself recounts the following instance:

We were with the army of the Cumans and many of us astronomers were sitting in a tent and someone was approaching. One of the astronomers said, 'Let's see what he is going to say.' So we observed the ascendant which was Sagittarius in the *termini* of Mercury. And the moon was there at that hour in empty course. And I said, 'He is full of idle talk and is a useless fellow.' And we questioned him when he arrived and he talked a lot of nonsense. And all the astronomers marvelled at my great experience.²²

This has the humour and facticity of a living experience of symbolism expressed through the craft of horoscopic astrology, and it is worth examining in some detail. There are two particulars that Abu Ma'sar has brought together. One of these is the Moon void-of-course (having no further aspect in the zodiac sign it currently occupies), which is particularly significant in this *katarchic* (non-natal) type of astrology. The meaning of the interpretation comes from the notion that once the Moon has completed its aspects in any sign, it has finished its work in that sign.²³ There is nothing more to come to fruit from such a placing, which is why the

²² Thorndike (1954) p.30. For 'astronomer' we may read 'astrologer'. The words were often interchangeable even where the semantic distinction (according to our modern definitions) was recognised. See the useful historical survey in Pines (1964).

²³ Moon void of course - this is defined in Abu Ma'sar *Abbreviation to the Introduction to Astrology* ch.3:21 p.43. The principle is explained in Bonatti *Liber Astronomiae* 87; the context concerns the way planets work together and separate from or apply to each other's aspects within their current zodiacal signs. When the Moon is void it 'runs alone' which is considered to be an impediment. Lilly *Christian Astrology* p.112 gives the following general interpretation for Moon void: 'you shall seldome see a business goe handsomely forward when she is so.'

messenger's talk is idle and a lot of nonsense. This reading is no surprise to any traditionally-oriented western astrologer. Confirming Abu Ma'sar's interpretation across eight centuries, Lilly tells of his own experience concerning 'Reports, Newes, Intelligence', that 'if the Moon was voyd of course, the Newes proved of no moment, usually vain or meer lyes, and very soon contradicted'.²⁴

The second element in this interpretation is more complex, yet in its essentials is equally comprehensible to other astrologers. It brings to light an important, if fluid, distinction between symbol and technique; that is, between the core of the symbol and its technical manipulation. The interpretation involves the ascendant in Sagittarius in the 'terms' (*termini*) of Mercury, indicating the area from the 15th to the 19th degrees of that sign; terms are subdivisions of zodiac signs falling under a minor influence of the five planets other than the Sun and Moon. Since terms fell out of use in the 19th century, their use here raises an issue for modern astrologers who do not employ them.²⁵ Yet the technical manipulation (the doctrine of terms) falls away in the face of the more fundamental symbolism, which is the juxtaposition by Abu Ma'sar of the primary symbols of the ascendant, the sign Sagittarius, and the planet Mercury. Now we will capture many more modern astrologers in the circle of interpretation. Any astrologer who has imbibed the tradition knows in his or her bones - not simply speculatively - that there is an uncomfortable match here, that Mercury and Sagittarius

²⁴ Lilly *Christian Astrology* p.192.

²⁵ Wilson, in his influential *Dictionary of Astrology* first published in 1880, covers the topic of terms but declares them to be 'wholly unintelligible' (Wilson, 1974, p.378). They had dropped out altogether by the time of Alan Leo's reform of 'modern astrology' at the beginning of the 20th century, and Leo does not even mention them. They have crept back into occasional usage in recent decades with the vogue for traditional astrology. 'Terms' are an example of concessions a modern interpreter must make in reading the older astrologers, yet - as the example referred to here shows - their use does not usually hinder the communicability of astrology, since they fall into secondary significance when set against the principal symbolisms of horoscopy that have endured since the Hellenistic era (notably planets, signs, MC and Asc.).

do not get on. The traditional expression is that Sagittarius is the detriment of Mercury, and the planet may blunder and do little good.²⁶ Mercury is the messenger-god, and the ascendant shows the theme of the horoscope and the matter arising, which is none other than the arrival of a foolish messenger. The Moon, Mercury and the ascendant all point in the same direction.

This is an example of simple horoscopic astrology in practice. Elementary though the recorded interpretation is, it takes a number of lines of explanatory text to unpack it, but having made such an analysis we better see the poetic unity that informs the whole. We may infer that Abu Ma'sar will not have been satisfied with just one testimony on its own, either Moon void or the state of the ascendant, but together they give a strong prognosis for what turned out to be true. There is a reasonable probability that this would have occurred to Abu Ma'sar in the mode that I describe as *realisation*, whether in a flash or after casting his eye over a couple of other theoretically relevant significations.²⁷ It is out of such realisation that he would predict with authority, thus impressing his peers who are likely to be skilled astrologers in their own right. However he arrived at his interpretation, the approbation of his peers is unlikely to be simply that his prediction turns out true - although that is an absolute minimum necessary condition - but that it is also symbolically apt. It is only in such

²⁶ Wilson (1880/1974) would without doubt recognise the *symbolism* intended by Abu Ma'sar even though he would reject the *technique* used to produce it. He finds Mercury ill-dignified to be '...unprincipled... a liar, thief, gambler, and tale-bearer; void of any kind of useful knowledge or ability, but very conceited' (p.318).

²⁷ Another 'theoretically relevant signification' is the lord of the ascendant, not mentioned here. I infer, entirely speculatively, that there were one or two indications that might point to a different interpretation to that offered by Abu Ma'sar, and it is in his ability to correctly relegate these in status that he shows both his experience and his intuitive mastery; otherwise, his interpretation would have been equally obvious and certain *pre facto* to the other astrologers, and less singularly applauded. To point out the possibility of contradictory indications is not an argument for the arbitrariness of astrological symbolism, however, but rather for its degree of creative latitude in every real-life context. There is *post facto* nothing insecure or arbitrary about the concrete manifestation of symbolism revealed by the foolish messenger.

aptness that the interpretation of astrological symbolism is coherent, comprehensible, and capable of transmission.

We may properly refer to transmission here, since once such apt symbolism is narrated, it is capable of an enduring literary significance. With inconsistent elements of the context reduced to their minimum and with the benefit of *post facto* hindsight removing all need for speculation and 'negotiation of the symbol', it is appreciated in the immediacy of realisation by any experienced astrologer in the same broad tradition, at any distance of time and culture.

The incident of the foolish messenger is just one of several cases reported in this text that amply confirm the art of Abu Ma'sar. It would however be misleading to present these examples of communicable divinatory symbolism without acknowledging the countervailing weight of non-communicable and obscure practice. What is obscure to one astrologer may of course be relevant to another trained in those particular practices. But given the accretions and changes of techniques over many centuries, it is not surprising that immediacy is often lost. It may still be possible to track the interpretation from its original premise through to its conclusion, according to the special approach of that school and the style and conventions of the whole period. This however is not an immediate experience of symbol, and the later interpreter is no longer aesthetically proximate to the original astrologer, but at a remove.²⁸

A self-referencing prediction

I conclude this consideration of Abu Ma'sar with a remarkable case reported in the collection. No reader with a sense of the poetic should have difficulty in

²⁸ There are several instances in the current text where the modern astrologer is likely to be at a remove, as in the discussion concerning the hyleg and length of life (see Thorndike, 1954, pp.27-9).

appreciating its potently affective symbolism. It does however raise a striking dilemma for the astrologer about the nature of astrology's working. Here is Abu Ma'sar's account:

Once with some travellers I went to Baldac and stayed with a friend of mine who knew a little astronomy, and he asked me how the moon would be next day, and I said "In quartile aspect with Mars." And he said to me, "Then don't you leave"; and I said to him, "I have no intention of departing on such a day, but the other passengers won't listen to us." He said, "Let's test them." So I said to them, "Tomorrow is an unfavourable day, wait, and I'll feed your animals." They would not acquiesce, so I let them go and stayed on with my friend. When they would be leaving, I observed the horoscope and it was Taurus and Mars in it. And the moon was in Leo in quartile aspect to Mars. I said to them, "For God's sake don't go at this hour," but they laughed at me and went off. I said to my friend, "I'm sorry for those senseless men." And we sat down and ate and drank. While we were still drinking, there came in some of the company who had been saved. For they had fallen among thieves and some were slain, others wounded, and the thieves made off with whatever they carried. Moreover, those who had escaped came at me with sticks and stones, saying, "These things happened because of your superstition, in order to confirm what you said." And I barely escaped. And then and there I swore that I would never discuss the science of astronomy with the man in the street.²⁹

There are features here that raise the largest questions of astrology. So far as I

²⁹ Thorndike (1954) pp.23-4.

know there exists no textual evidence to suggest how Abu ma'sar himself might address these questions. However, it seems almost banal to observe the obvious, that not all journeys under identical or similar configurations will come to grief; it is difficult to imagine that Abu Ma'sar would assume such a mechanical working to the stars. Therefore the aggrieved travellers are intuitively right in the naive recourse to 'magic'. There is something about *this* particular start of a journey that has indeed taken on more-than-ordinary significance and is quite different to all other journeys taken under similar planetary afflictions. What is most significant about it is that Abu Ma'sar the astrologer has made a prediction about it and has made it known to them, all in the name of an experiment. The symbolism at work has now come back to bite the author of the interpretation of the symbolism, implicating him in its outcome. Abu Ma'sar may neither wish nor be able to answer this uncovering of his role in the coming-to-pass of his prediction, just as it does not suit the classical tradition of astrology to take this line.

I therefore add to this simple but lively incident of horoscopic astrology an interpretation that takes it away from a pure and objective science of the influences of the stars, and into a relationship of participation involving the astrologer - this unique context, this particular astrologer, this unique result. The core of the event is an inductive-divinatory *realisation* by Abu Ma'sar, worked through straightforward and consistent astrology.³⁰ There is nothing incoherent here: *how* such an event comes to

³⁰ The core of the interpretation, as often with the most effective examples of astrology, involves elementary symbolism that would be readily understood even by a relative beginner. In the conversation of the evening before, Abu Ma'sar has observed that on the day of travel the Moon would be square to Mars, a violent indication. Mars is inimical to the Moon, and the square aspect itself is unfavourable. He probably realised at that point that Mars would be badly placed by sign, adding to the danger. Around the time of the travellers' departure, Abu Ma'sar cast the horoscope, giving greater specificity to the situation. Now he saw that the ascendant (rising sign) for the hour was Taurus with Mars itself rising, and the Moon in square to Mars. The placing of the malefic Mars, in detriment (Taurus), afflicting the Moon, afflicting the ascendant and completely dominant by rising, is a clear warning against undertaking any enterprise that risked danger - violence will be drawn down upon it. It is obvious that Abu Ma'sar immediately *realised* - that is, positively *knew* - the danger. This is no theoretical speculation in a game of possibilities, which is why the drama of the report rings true: 'For God's sake

pass remains a mystery, but the craft of interpretation is plain and unalloyed. This is sophisticated 'bones' divination, requiring the slow learning of symbolism, but it therefore belongs to language. This does however appropriate the whole event from a different perspective to that of the classical scientific (Aristotelian) or Stoic models of astrology, both of which tend to a universal and ceaseless system of theoretically predictable influences, requiring an arm's-length reading of objectively given signs. The unique case description of judicial astrology locates it as a one-off and essentially unpredictable *participation*, creating its allegory from celestial signs.

I suggest that Abu Ma'sar, like all experienced practitioners of astrology, simultaneously occupies two epistemological realms, not one. This is the double-thinking of the chicane, at work whether or not the astrologer is able to articulate such an understanding. He will have his canonical reading of symbol, a learned tradition claiming the authority both of Greek science and of archaic revelation. Against this he will have the unique realisation of symbol in every single once and once-only situation, dependent on his skill and intuition in order to hit the mark. We come back to the formulation that astrology of this embodied and concrete order arises as a unique case phenomenon, which is only ever seen in the literal context in which it arises, and in its historical facticity. However, as I have indicated, the theory of astrology in its classical and natural-scientific formulation insists on the objectivity of its results; it does not develop an oracular or unambiguously 'divinatory' interpretation even though its judicial method shows all the characteristics of divination. A two-faced quality is perhaps the main reason for the obscurity of the whole subject of western astrology, and the difficulty facing a scholar who is not steeped in its ways. Negotiating double-consciousness has to be left unspoken to the initiative and discretion of the practising astrologer. This is why it would seem to Abu Ma'sar better

don't go at this hour'. The violence that Abu Ma'sar predicted was drawn onto him, too, so his prediction became self-referencing. Whether or not he would accept this participatory description of the *symbolism*, he interpreted the *event* as a warning that he should change his approach in the future.

not to talk about astrology with the man in the street.

Cardano and the crisis of interpretation

With these admittedly subtle observations in mind it is appropriate to turn to recent discussions involving the 16th century Italian astrologer Girolamo Cardano (Jerome Cardan), stimulated by the comprehensive study by Antony Grafton.³¹ Cardano is unique in having made his own life the subject of published astrological studies.

Apart from several biographies of the 19th and early 20th centuries, the story of Cardano's life is immortalised in his autobiography, *De Vita Propria Liber*, translated into English as *The Book of my Life*.³² Cardano achieved his greatest repute as a physician, and in an important sense his astrology cannot be understood without seeing it in relation to his practice of medicine. Born in 1501, he trained and practised in medicine, becoming a professor in 1534. As well as his legendary skills as a physician he studied a compendious range of subjects, achieving an international reputation in mathematics, astrology, and philosophy. He published a Commentary on Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, with the intention of reforming and purifying astrology. He produced an acclaimed encyclopedia of natural philosophy and an influential treatise on moral philosophy. His treatise on algebra included the first printed solution for cubic quadratic equations; although he was not the original author of this solution, it is still in modern times occasionally referred to as 'Cardan's theorem'. His abilities extended to technology: there is a universal joint that goes by his name in French and German. Add to his technical and philosophical writings the literary accomplishment

³¹ Grafton *Cardano's Cosmos: the Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer* (1999). This section of the current thesis, pages 315-327, has appeared in amended form in Cornelius (2005).

³² Cardan (1931).

of his autobiography, and we discern the kaleidoscopic ideal of the renaissance polymath.

His climb to fame as an astrologer began in earnest in 1538 with a textbook for the celestial observer, astronomer and astrologer alike. He discussed theories of planetary motion and at the same time provided aphorisms for horoscope interpretation. He showed mundane astrology, including its application to the growth of religions. One likely reason for this text's wide appeal was its inclusion of ten example genitures, mostly of famous individuals, together with brief interpretations. This casebook approach, although historically not unknown, set a precedent for both contemporary and later astrologers. In the 1543 edition this had expanded to 67 horoscopes, and for the first time he included his own geniture. Thus began the pattern whereby Cardano used his own body, life and character, exposed and analysed in the interests of science, as a perfect demonstration of astrology.

An important conclusion concerning his attitude to astrology is that 'like most specialist astrologers before and after him' he was not a determinist, and in this he was consistent with Ptolemy.³³ Predictions are seen as probabilistic rather than absolute, and providence and divine judgment could in any case intervene, whatever the apparent determination of the stars. There is no imperative, therefore, to attempt to reduce all causes to the astrological, in theory or in practice. This helps to explain his pragmatic approach to the relation between medicine and astrology, which despite being frequently intermixed are seen as disciplines with distinct foundations: 'he admitted that medicine, though epistemologically less profound than astrology, was practically superior to it'.³⁴

³³ Grafton (1999) p.85.

³⁴ Grafton (1999) p.161.

His Ptolemaic orientation goes together with an attitude of reserve towards (although not outright rejection of) explicitly divinatory and katarthic forms of practice, such as horary, and he seems to have disapproved of magical uses of the art, as in the preparation of talismans.³⁵ He recognised the falsity of the attribution of the *Centiloquium* to Ptolemy because of its inclusion of katarthic aphorisms, rendering it conceptually inconsistent with the *Tetrabiblos*.³⁶ We should not read this as evidence of a rationalistic attitude, however. Despite his classical and Aristotelian leaning, by the end of his life Cardano acknowledged that some of his actions and his interpretations of signs were guided by his guardian angel, and he hinted that he might on occasion be in possession of a divine or semi-divine illumination.³⁷ What emerges as characteristic of his world is an open fabric of signifiers, modes of comprehension and theories, sometimes contradictory, with astrological constructs and cosmological symbolism forming a primary but not exhaustive or fully-determining function of reality.

In Cardano's hands astrology suggests an unrivalled means of constructing a narrative of a life. His autobiography and his interpretation of his natal horoscope went through at least three revisions between the mid 1540's and the final draft of his *De Vita* the year before his death in 1576.³⁸ The details of his illnesses, his early impotence, his gambling habits and his character traits, pleasant and unpleasant, were all laid out for his reader's contemplation.

³⁵ Grafton (1999) p.159.

³⁶ Grafton (1999) p.137.

³⁷ Grafton (1999) p.169.

³⁸ Grafton (1999) p.188ff.

Prejudicial knowledge: Cardano's fortieth year

Cardano's own use of astrology reaches a point of crisis in his fortieth year. His own early knowledge of astrology hurt him:

That branch of astrology which teaches the revealing of the future I studied diligently, and much more, indeed, than I should; and I also trusted in it to my own hurt.³⁹

Here are details of the damaging failed prediction which must have severely shaken his trust:

The very knowledge of astrology which I had at the time was, moreover, prejudicial, for it seemed to show me, and all my acquaintances declared, that I would not pass my fortieth year - that I surely would never live to be forty-five.⁴⁰

Despite its significance, Grafton does not discuss this crisis of interpretation. On observing Cardano's horoscope, it will not take a proficient astrologer, renaissance or modern, long to discern the simple outline of the prejudicial knowledge. In his natal horoscope his ascendant is at 6°10' of Taurus and (according to his computation) Saturn is at 25°28' of Gemini; the ascendant is directed to the conjunction of Saturn, without latitude, by an arc of direction of 39°. The classical Ptolemaic equation of arc to time of a degree for a year was adopted by all astrologers of Cardano's day. The arc

³⁹ Cardan (1931) p.169.

⁴⁰ Cardan (1931) p.196. The mention of the 45th year occurs in another passage: 'There were stars which threatened, from every aspect, my death, which all declared would be before my forty-fifth year - all vain findings, for I live, and am in my seventy-fifth year! It is not the fallibility of the art; it is the inexperience of the artificer'.(p.36)

of direction of the ascendant to Saturn therefore measures 39 years: that is why Cardano says 'I would not pass my fortieth year'. The symbolism is transparent. Saturn, the greater malefic, is anaretic, a destroyer of life. When the primary signifier of life, the ascendant itself, joins this evil planet, there will be death.⁴¹

However misplaced Cardano felt his earlier understanding to be, he appears to have structured his view of his life around this event and its signification, with the result that the life we now read about is ordered by Cardano's view of Saturn, and the melancholy shadow it casts backwards from his fortieth year. It is a story of a life in two halves. As Jean Stoner observes in her introduction to the *De Vita*:

That Cardan's forty-year struggle with poverty, disgrace and ill health should have left a deeper mark upon the man than his swift rise to fame and affluence is natural. We are permitted to trace every step of the difficult road down to that nadir of need when Cardan 'ceased to be poor' because he 'had nothing left to lose,' but we are scarcely aware of the swift turns of success whereby, after 1539, he became the most popular, fashionable and sought-after physician in North Italy.⁴²

⁴¹ Cardano gives the following data for his natal horoscope in the 1543 edition of his textbook: 1501 24 September, 6h40m pm for the meridian of Milan. MC 18Cap15; Asc 6Tau10; XI 22 Aqu; XII 19 Pis; ?? III 26 Gem; Sun 10Lib87(?37); Moon 11Pis42; Mercury 3Sco07; Venus 23Lib05; Mars 11Gem19; Jupiter 3Tau26; Saturn 25Gem28; node 11Tau36; Fortuna 7Lib15. With thanks to Robert Hand for this data. Modern recomputation shows several considerable variances, notably Saturn (19Gem20r); Mercury (26Lib27r); Moon (10Pis41); Jupiter (2Tau40r).

Cardano will probably have treated Saturn as afflicting the Moon natively by square. It is not easy to discern which other stars 'from every aspect' promise misfortune for the age of 39; neither do I feel confident about speculating on the symbolism of the forty-fifth year without further research in the 'raw data'. It must be stressed that the direction of the ascendant to Saturn is, other things being equal, one of the most powerfully destructive indicators for the classical astrologer. The modern-day humanistic and psychologically-inclined astrologer may with justification be appalled by the crude and simplistic fatalism of this interpretation, and agree with Cardano that it has led him seriously astray. The symbolism of Saturn in the life of Cardano is an intriguing topic which invites astrological interpretation.

⁴² Cardan (1931) p.xi.

Inexpressible complexity

The play of symbolism, and the possibility that these symbolic reflections could allow a valid objective inference, eludes the contemporary cultural historian. No doubt despite Grafton's best intentions, with the core of the astrological imagination misunderstood and entirely devalued, the astrologer under scrutiny becomes a hollow man, and we are left with a surface of ambition, vanity, boastfulness, credulity, trickery and intellectual self-deception.⁴³ This is reflected by the status of astrology in the text. Bits of symbolism and horoscopy are scattered throughout, but apart from a couple of useful instances they are generally too slight to allow the astrologically imaginative and educated reader to get to grips with Cardano's understanding. As so often happens in historical studies involving astrology, where symbolism is quoted it is not usually integral to the historical argument; like the occasional illustration of horoscopes the bits of astrology seem to be embellishments to the text, or alternatively curiosities (what odd things these people believed!).

Inevitably, the missing dimension renders an essential part of Cardano's

⁴³ The hollow man syndrome alerts us to several points in the discussion where impatience with his subject becomes evident. In chapter X, where Cardano's astrological self-analysis is cursorily reviewed, Grafton accuses Cardano of revealing minor traits as a distraction from major and less creditable aspects of character. In his revisions of his astrological material Cardano's acknowledgement of various technical and interpretive errors are 'efforts at camouflage'; against these we find that 'Cardano chiefly emphasized his triumphs'. Even worse, 'to bolster the impression that he was infallible he suppressed important elements of his earlier geniture' [p188-9 and note 40]. Although Cardano is pleased to lay claim to his successes, any profession of infallibility would be inconsistent with the Ptolemaic orientation of his astrology. He is no doubt open to the sceptic's charge of cutting large corners with his historical accounts, as in the case of his inaccurate predictions for the doomed Edward VI of England [p115ff]; however, his treatment of his own horoscope scarcely matches Grafton's censorious account of a prediction which has failed and has therefore been suppressed. A careful reading assures us that Cardano probably intends in the various editions of his text a qualified and undramatic examination of possibilities, not a masterly prophecy of absolute fate, the failure of which would be too humiliating to admit. We should in passing observe that, from two decades before his death, Cardano has indeed made an astrologically appropriate and seemingly broadly accurate general outline of the timing of major threats to his life and health after 1555.

practice of astrology incomprehensible to us, and Grafton falls into the habit of a generation of historians before him, in positing an unfathomable and even absurd complexity to astrological judgment. We learn that when Cardano fudged his data to make the symbolism fit, 'from his own point of view... he was simply operating in full awareness that horoscope interpretation required an inexpressibly complex, partly intuitive balancing of factors.'⁴⁴ For the post-enlightenment interpreter, guided by an assumption amounting to certainty that there is not, never was, and never could be, any substance of knowledge in astrology, then every manipulation made by an astrologer is a ramshackle extension to a castle built on the sands of an illusory epistemology. Inexpressible complexity arises from the astrologer's attempts to weave substance out of fiction, and interpret and rationalise something that never was truly there.

Given such complexity, the master astrologer is located as akin to an initiate in the mysteries, for no ordinary reader or student could hope to negotiate the impossibilities of the art. Grafton's view is close in spirit to that of Tamsyn Barton, in her study of astrology under the Roman Empire. He refers to her thesis that 'the labyrinthine technical complexity of ancient astrology - its emphasis on the multiple intersection of stellar and planetary influences, impossible to analyse fully in any written text - served above all to reinforce the astrologer's authority, since no amateur could hope to reach the jewel at the centre of the maze without expert guidance.'⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Grafton (1999) p.121.

⁴⁵ Grafton (1999) p.145. In *Power and Knowledge* (1994b) Tamsyn Barton presents a Foucault-inspired analysis of the power relationship entailed in astrology-as-initiation. Her work shows little sensitivity to the symbolic imagination, and in my view she misunderstands the relationship of astrological doctrine to astrological practice. Her companion volume *Ancient Astrology* (1994a) ch.5 pp.115-131 offers a parody of interpretation, applying aphorisms from Firmicus Maternus and Vettius Valens to the horoscope of Prince Charles, as an illustration of how the classical astrologer is supposed to have worked.

This image of an interpretive labyrinth founded in illusion provides the underpinning for Grafton's intimation that 'methodological incoherence' is characteristic of Cardano's work.⁴⁶ We can see that one must follow as a consequence of the other. The comment is made in the context of a case that is instructive to follow through. Grafton cites criticisms from a reader's marginalia appearing in a copy of the 1547 edition of Cardano's collection. He explains that one of Cardano's standard practices 'consisted of using one or two aphoristic statements about the powers and effects of individual planets and configurations to identify the central features of a geniture, without explaining what criteria defined the aphorisms in question as the most relevant ones to the case in question'. Cardano informs us that Mars appearing in a prominent position tends to cause violent death. Yet, as the dissatisfied reader observed, in the horoscope of the poet and humanist Poliziano, with Mars lord of the ascendant but opposing the ascendant from the seventh house, Cardano interpreted this instance of a prominent Mars as showing that Poliziano lived away from his native land, with no mention of the fact that he did not die by violence.

Fit signification and astrological judgment

The attitude of our marginalia critic - and also, we suspect, of Anthony Grafton - bears on the role of the aphorism, both in Cardano and in the astrological tradition as a whole. It is a common misunderstanding to assume that the aphorism is a type of axiom, as if it is a rule or first principle of interpretation, or is directly derived from a first principle. It takes a minimum of reflection or practical experience to demolish this suggestion; we will soon run across horoscopes that do not bear out such an axiom, as with Poliziano and his non-violent death. A more plausible possibility is to assume that aphorisms represent more or less strong indicators or probabilities of the occurrence of whatever they signify. In this case the astrologer has to apply an

⁴⁶ Grafton (1999) p.89.

intuitive synthesis of potentially relevant aphorisms to arrive at a judgment. The approaches we have discussed here assume that the aphorism embodies a top-down determination of stellar influence, with the aphorism occupying a place close to the epistemological first principles of astrology, producing through the symbolic form described by the aphorism its effect - or tendency to an effect - in the world below.

However, we get a rather different picture if we examine closely how in practice Cardano has employed his aphorisms. I suspect that it is in the demonstration of this practice, which may be termed 'fitting signification', that he has been innovative, and this may be the quality that helps to explain why his horoscope collection (like that of Gaurico after him) should capture the imagination of astrologers of his day. In these examples, rather than a top-down determination we find a bottom-up demonstration, a move of induction from the particular salient feature of the life story under discussion, to the fit signification in the horoscope of that native.

To return to the marginalia debate, the symbolist, ancient or modern, will immediately recognise that 'Mars prominent' is a fit signification for violence and a violent death *for those cases in which there has been violence or a violent death*. The obvious symbolism is that Mars is a slayer, a bringer of death, as well as being a bringer of war and aggression. Taken together these associations 'over-determine' the aphorism linking Mars prominent with violent death.

Poliziano did not die a violent death, and a quite different salient feature engages Cardano: the fact that the poet lived in self-imposed exile from his native land for a brief but dramatic period. Any astrologer will immediately appreciate his move: the lord of the ascendant opposite the ascendant (and therefore in detriment by sign) is a fit signification for one who is not in his own place. Here are some of the associations of symbolism that when compounded serve to over-determine Cardano's interpretation: the ruler of the ascendant shows the native, but it is both in opposition

aspect to his own place (the ascendant) and is in its own opposite sign (detrimented or *alienato*); this is the fit signification for Poliziano's alienation from his natural place.

It has been necessary to labour these essentially simple examples of interpretation to arrive at a significant conclusion which would otherwise remain obscure if we followed the opinions of some of our historians. The conclusion is that far from being arbitrary and unmethodical, far from being unfathomable and impossibly complex, Cardano's interpretations are relatively simple and show a coherent and consistent method, recognisable to any other astrologer.⁴⁷

The question arises of the purpose of demonstrating such significations, especially if their *ex post facto* nature, and their dependence on the unique and contingent circumstance of the native, reduces their universality as axioms. This topic requires a more extensive analysis than can be attempted here, but an indication can be suggested. First we observe that the move of 'fit signification' is fundamental to effective astrological interpretation.⁴⁸ Further, Cardano appears fully aware of the problem of 'infinite interpretation' flowing from a top-down axiomatic approach to the 'rules of astrology'; infinite interpretation points to the impossibility of deciding

⁴⁷ Grafton (1999) pp.94-5 gives a valuable record of a fairly complete interpretation arising in discussion between Cardano and Rheticus. This concerned the horoscope of a counterfeiter, Francesco Marsili, condemned to death by hanging and burning, and skilfully judged 'blind' by Cardano. The movement of interpretation is well worth tracing in detail, as it shows a series of straightforward steps which would be quite understandable to a modern traditionally-trained astrologer. The text gives the impression that with each step in his conversation with Rheticus, Cardano pauses to see that his judgment up that point has been confirmed, thus allowing him to build up a pattern of fitting significations. Apart from the concluding judgment of death, each interpretation is of a text-book simplicity. The notable judgment of death represents the boldest step, but this follows faithfully from Ptolemy and is in no sense arbitrary. There is no evidence of 'methodological incoherence' here. A second judgment is also given which will repay study.

⁴⁸ This inductive move is discussed in modern astrology under the heading of 'radicality', the understanding that an authentic horoscope shall be demonstrated to provide apt symbolism for the given subject-matter of that horoscope. It is essentially related to the hermeneutic category of *realisation* discussed here.

exactly how an astrological doctrine or a particular element of symbolism might manifest in the subject-matter to which the horoscope is supposed to refer. There is a practically limitless array of possible ways in which 'Mars prominent' could show itself in real life. The student will, however, flounder perpetually and never move beyond contradictory theoretical speculations until he or she sees symbolism working, and the primary moment of seeing it working is the recognition of the true fitness of signification in the unique and particular case.

The recognition of fit signification in the unique case is comparable to an aesthetic appreciation. Cardano's simple observations are rooted in salient features in life matched to fit significations in the horoscope; they ensure that once seen, the student will have a sure sense of what it is like for symbolism to work and spring to life. This is known only by encountering it in practice. Its principle cannot be axiomatically propounded, and it cannot therefore be learned from a textbook; it can however be *demonstrated* in actual cases and examples. This, we may infer, is what Cardano has set out to do. He explains that he 'did not add any of these genitures without due consideration or a significant cause, since each of them had some remarkable property or other'.⁴⁹ The mode of demonstration requires us to work from the detail of life and the world as significant, back to the astrology that shows it, rather than from the astrology to the world. We should not be surprised that, as Grafton observes, Cardano proceeds 'without explaining what criteria defined the aphorisms in question as the most relevant ones to the case in question'. Such an explanation would be appropriate for a top-down deduction from first principles, showing how the particular case is to be brought into accord with those principles. By contrast, the demonstration of fit signification involves a move which is the inverse of speculative deduction from an axiom.

⁴⁹ Grafton (1999) p.66

Radical interpretation and the poetics of astrology

By distinguishing the move of fit signification from the move of deduction from the axiom, I have argued the case that, as with the classical tradition of astrology taken as a whole, there is evidence of simplicity and coherence in Cardano's interpretations. It is worth considering why this simplicity eludes so many of our historians. This incapacity goes beyond a simple refusal on their part to countenance a symbolic imagination. One likelihood is that our view of science and rationality inclines us to think that axiomatic constructions, where particulars flow in a sequence of logical connections from primary causes, are necessary building blocks in any true system of knowledge. This is a view with a lineage that can be traced at least back to Aristotle, and the scientific enlightenment has not shaken it. For astrology in particular there is a hermeneutic penalty that goes with this axiomatic understanding: namely, the profusion of possible primary causes imposes an impossible calculus on practical interpretation, where each bit of astrological signification compounds with, contradicts or cancels out each other bit of signification, resulting in Barton's labyrinth of the initiates and Grafton's inexpressible complexity.

There is another move we can make which may help us understand the symbolic world of the classical, medieval and renaissance astrologers. This is to recognise that astrology has always had more in common with poetry than it has with science; and the thesis of astrology as poetic and metaphoric language has been well articulated by Ann Geneva.⁵⁰ If we follow the language analogy, then we observe that the astrologer's interpretation is not a piecemeal bit-by-bit affair, but involves a holistic process of radical interpretation, whereby the situation in the world is translated into the allegorical language of astrology, and back again. 'Radical interpretation' is a term

⁵⁰ Geneva (1995) : see especially her Epilogue on 'The Decline of Astrology as a Symbolic Language System'.

used by Gerald L. Bruns, adapted from the concept of 'radical translation' defined by the philosopher W.V.O. Quine as translation between two languages not joined by cognate values.⁵¹ The attempt to make an ordinary-language rendering of the world from horoscope symbols is a perfect example of translation between non-cognate systems. Such translation proceeds contextually, not bit by bit or word by word, but passage by passage or at the very least sentence by sentence. It requires the astrologer to see a whole configuration in the horoscope all of a piece, and to set it as a metaphor or allegory of a particular description of the world. Cardano's interpretation of Poliziano's exile matches this holistic move.

The lexicon of astrology's significations constitutes an internally coherent field of interconnected meanings, and this is what has to be 'mastered' by the student in his or her study of astrological doctrine. When the astrologer finds the apt astrological phrase for the worldly condition, it is by virtue of the whole field of meanings, yet it is not determined in isolation at this or that point of contact by any one of those meanings. The act of interpretation is no more - and no less - mysterious than the act of the poet penning the perfect expression, or the act of the composer creating the telling musical phrase. What is produced may be the epitome of simplicity and economy, yet these creative acts cannot be determined by a rule of poetry and grammar, or by an isolated element of music theory. There is no calculus that can contain them. A notable feature of creative arts, like the art of astrology, is that they may be appreciated by another practitioner, but equally by educated *theōros*, the observer with a practised commitment to that form.⁵² This is especially true for the astrologer in *realising* the aptness of another astrologer's interpretation. It is here, and not simply in the adaptations of rational and explanatory theory, that we find the capacity for the transmission of symbolic language over the centuries.

⁵¹ Bruns (1992) esp. ch.4 'Allegory as Radical Interpretation'.

⁵² Hence the vital role of *epopteia*, the initiate (see Chapter 4 p. 110).

Part Six

Divination and Modernity

Chapter Twelve

Psyche after Kant

The understanding of symbol and divination underwent a transformation during what we have come to call 'the Enlightenment'. The change became manifest with the new approach to science in the era of Kant, and was intimately connected with the critical philosophy for which he has been declared a champion. Having gone down a new avenue and thought a new thought, it is certain that we can never go back to the old metaphysics without knowing that we have already had this second thought and are attempting either to shake it off or to reform it. In divination the new way of thinking involves psychology rather than theology or metaphysics; it relates to our current topic in its attempt to describe and investigate unknown powers of the psyche.¹

One can traverse the whole field of modern philosophy and find little amongst the major movements and thinkers bearing on either mediumship or divination. For philosophy it is as if they do not really exist, or if they do exist, they have no weight, which is exactly the position we have been left in by Kant.² However, while Kant and his enlightenment forebears have almost killed off our

¹ See for instance Flournoy (1994) p.viii, distinguishing post-enlightenment psychological explanations of mediumship from theological theories (diabolic) and spiritistic theories (the intervention of spirits of the dead, as in modern spiritualism). Ellenberger (1970) p.53 notes that the origins of 'dynamic psychiatry' ie. modern psychotherapy, 'can be traced to the year 1775, to a clash between the physician Mesmer and the exorcist Gassner.'

² This is not to deny genuine attempts to think philosophically about the issues, especially in psychical research; see for example Thakur (1976). But these few attempts show that there is as yet no convincing way forward, and the philosophical arguments are full of contradictions and uncertainties of definition. *Divination itself is entirely lost* under the broader and intractable problem of defining and proving ESP; 'divination' is rarely mentioned.

subject matter as a concern for academic philosophy, they have not entirely uprooted genuine research and scholarship in other disciplines. Spirit-phenomena including divination are richly featured in anthropology, since these assume great importance in every non-modern culture the anthropologist studies; however, these studies have until recently been sociological and etic, from the outside looking in. Only in a corner of psychology, originally influenced by 19th century psychical research, is there any attempt at primary reflection on these experiences, treating them in-their-own-right. I bring out in this concluding chapter an arc of thought that runs from the psychical researcher F.W.H. Myers, through Theodore Flournoy and on to Freud and Jung. I take up their observations on the paranormal where these have a bearing on divination and especially on our hermeneutic endeavours; what emerges is a quite consistent approach. Although this comes from a radically different vantage-point to that of antiquity, I suggest that there remain significant continuities between ancient and modern interpretations of divination. This continuity suggests an intriguing opening for divination in modernity.

An indication of continuities is that the very same problems of definition arise, ancient and modern. We come back to the grounding of the question of divination in spirit-philosophy, with the consequent ambiguity between Spirit-spirits, *Geist-geister*. This emerges in the work of Theodore Flournoy, whose researches were preeminent in binding together the worlds of psychical research and modern depth psychology.³ His study of mediumship, *From India to the Planet Mars*, appeared in 1900, in the same year as Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*. Flournoy

³ The term 'depth psychology' is used here to indicate the movement of research and practice that includes what Ellenberger (1976) pp. 289-91 has termed *dynamic psychiatry*; this brings together Freud's psychoanalysis and Jung's analytical psychology, and all forms that have been largely influenced by these. The most significant common theme from the point of view of our current study is the acknowledgment of a dynamic unknown component acting in or upon the human psyche, characterised in the first instance (although not exclusively) as 'the Unconscious'. The broad distinction demarcates depth psychology from more orthodox scientific psychology and psychiatry concerned with physiological and biological mechanisms or functions of the brain and nervous system.

takes as real certain paranormal phenomena shown by mediums. He is however at pains to distinguish what he terms *spiritism* as a 'pretended scientific explanation of certain *facts* by the intervention of spirits of the dead' from *spiritualism*, 'a religio-philosophical belief' which he declares to be opposed to materialism in its insistence on individual morality and consciousness.⁴ His terms may mislead; our modern usage of the word 'spiritualism' matches his 'spiritism'. The distinction alienates him from many of the mediums he studies, for they are concerned with an identifiable and objective spirit-realm.⁵ At the same time his observation of the 'religio-philosophical' nature of his studies,⁶ like his attack on scientific materialism, is bound to raise suspicions in orthodox circles. Flournoy goes to some lengths to challenge dogmatic scientific denials of paranormal phenomena,⁷ which is an indication of how uncomfortable this whole area remains.

The Spirit-spirits ambiguity is equally problematic for Frederic Myers, who recognises that his work 'falls between the two stools of religion and science; it cannot claim the support either from the "religious world" or from the Royal Society'.⁸ Myers, a gifted poet, classical scholar and sensitive, was arguably the seminal figure in psychical research. Flournoy regarded him as 'the soul, the centre, the supreme motive force in this scientific movement'.⁹ He was also a major figure in

⁴ Flournoy (1911) Preface pp. viii-ix.

⁵ On the reaction from spiritualists, Flournoy (1994) Introduction by Sonu Shamdasani p. xxix.

⁶ Flournoy (1911) Preface p. x

⁷ Flournoy (1911) ch.1 advocates a critical attitude, while challenging the dogmatic rejection of psychical research by many scientists.

⁸ Myers (1920) Epilogue p. 295.

⁹ Flournoy (1911) p.49. For Myers' role in the development of the painstaking work of psychical research led by Henry Sidgwick, see for instance Gauld (1968) p.89; Sidgwick was 'constantly prodded into action by the eager and relentless Myers' (op.cit. p.104).

the evolution of a psychology of the unconscious.¹⁰ For Flournoy, the understanding of the vital place of paranormal phenomena required only the meeting of 'the subliminal psychology of Myers and his followers and the abnormal psychology of Freud and his school'. This would be 'a great forward step in science'.¹¹ Freud did not see things this way; however, Myers' researches undoubtedly influenced a generation of thinkers concerning the unknown powers of the psyche, and many of the ideas advanced by Flournoy, and discussed further in this chapter, are directly developed from those of Myers.

Myers postulates a subliminal Self, far greater in range and faculty than our ordinary consciousness, and this in turn draws 'strength and grace from a spiritual Universe'.¹² He distances himself from the theories of most spiritualists by holding that the paranormal faculties of this Self do not require 'continuous spirit-intervention and spirit-guidance' from discarnate minds; on the other hand 'the presumption is strong' that discarnate spirits independent of us may also affect our subliminal Self.¹³

We may reflect in passing how the Spirit-spirits question, along with elements of Myers' theory, reflects the Platonic and neo-Platonic approach to the agency of the daimon in all matters of ritual and divination, and therefore in all matters of the paranormal. Plutarch plays on the ambiguity in his observation that the ignorant think this genius is 'within us', but 'those who conceive the matter rightly

¹⁰ Flournoy (1911) p.67 calls Myers the 'founder of subliminal psychology.' This is perhaps exaggerated given the historical role of other major figures; but it is also possible that Myers' contribution has from the very beginning been consistently downplayed, precisely because his spirit-philosophy and his concern with post-mortem survival of consciousness runs against Kant's cancellations and into the swamp of academic derision.

¹¹ Flournoy (1911) Preface p.vii.

¹² Myers (1920) pp.67-8.

¹³ *ibid.* pp.16-17.

call it a daimon, as being external'.¹⁴

Although he acknowledges that he may fall between two stools, Myers' underlying hope that spiritual and scientific understandings might at least be complementary is evident in remarks on *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*; he says we 'can only regret that the philosopher Kant, who satisfied himself with some part of Swedenborg's supernormal gift, did not press further his inquiry.'¹⁵ But as we have seen Kant makes it explicit that spirit-philosophy and science *cannot* come together, which is why he will not pursue empirical investigations. It goes beyond a matter of proving or disproving one or more individual cases of paranormal powers, and the issue does not belong at that level. We may deplore Kant's turning away, but the fact remains that despite the high expectations of Myers, Flournoy and others, we are no nearer the longed-for empirical breakthrough in psychical research a century after their time. We may suspect that these questions require philosophical and even ontological explication rather than a scientific rendering.¹⁶

When compared with Myers, Flournoy is decidedly on the 'Spirit' rather than the 'spirits' side of this pair. This is explicit in his analysis of various examples of mediumship, including his extensive study of the medium Mlle. H  l  ne Smith, the subject of *From India to the Planet Mars*. Flournoy suggests that telepathy does not require the existence of discarnate spirits;¹⁷ he also observes striking occurrences of materialisation, yet sees no need for a spirits hypothesis:

¹⁴ Plutarch *Sign of Socrates* 581d,e - see Chapter 7.

¹⁵ Myers (1920) p.6.

¹⁶ The 'white crow' argument and the defence of divination by Cratippus are relevant here: see Chapter 6. Flournoy (1994) pp.226-8 offers a penetrating discussion on the impossibility of solving the question by statistical means.

¹⁷ The spiritist theory of telepathy is discussed by Flournoy (1911) p.209.

...I have discovered many signs which show that even these phenomena do not indicate the presence of any intelligences from 'the other side'; for, in analysing the mentality of these materialisations I have discovered them to be only creations of the medium - elaborations of her subconscious imagination.¹⁸

Inspiration and realisation

Flournoy follows Myers closely on the interpretation of heightened understanding that may result from the influx of impressions from subliminal mind. Myers treats the subject of 'Genius' in the third chapter of *Human Personality*:

We identify ourselves for the most part with a stream of voluntary, fully conscious ideas, - cerebral movements connected and purposive as the movement of the hand which records them. Meantime we are aware also of a substratum of fragmentary automatic, *liminal* ideas, of which we take small account. These are bubbles that break upon the surface; but every now and then there is a stir among them. There is a rush upwards as of a subaqueous spring; an inspiration flashes into the mind for which our conscious effort has not prepared us. This so-called inspiration may in itself be trivial or worthless; but it is the initial stage of a phenomenon to which, when certain rare attributes are also present, the name of genius will naturally be given.¹⁹

This subliminal approach can manifest at all physiological levels, as when an emergency calls forth superior faculties and physical capacities without conscious intervention, bringing acts of great strength and remarkable involuntary

¹⁸ Flournoy (1911) Preface p.ix; also p.149.

¹⁹ Myers (1920) p.51.

coordination. It 'takes command of the man and guides his action at the moment when his being is deeply stirred.'²⁰ When this occurs at the intellectual level with clarity and integration, then we have the 'inspiration of genius'.²¹

Flournoy puts this together conveniently for our purposes, although he uses the word 'divining' not as inductive divination but in its widest intuitive sense. He terms the process *subconscious conjecture*:

We all have the precious faculty of divining, more or less, the unknown in accordance with our acquired experience; and our presumptions are often correct. Now it happens that this power of reasoning - evaluation of probabilities, various inferences, etc. - is effected in the obscure margins of our consciousness which is preoccupied with something else, and that the conclusion alone springs forth full blown in the shape of a presentiment which imposes itself upon us with an air of immediate certitude. Upon reflection one can usually follow the chain and disentangle the sequence of ideas or incidents which have brought about this result.²²

These two descriptions readily extend to provide a psychological model for the performance of inductive divination. This formulation describes a significant element in the process of understanding in divination: *the 'subliminal uprush' is divinatory realisation*. When divining we are not 'preoccupied with something else' but intent on both the ritual and the enquiry at hand. Our purposive process of understanding ensures that we follow objectively the possible meanings of the

²⁰ ibid. pp.50-1.

²¹ ibid. p.47.

²² Flournoy (1911) p.125.

divinatory factors - this is speculative interpretation, proceeding by the rules, attempting to match the world or the enquirer's question with the signifiers. In the 'obscure margins of our consciousness' is a spontaneous movement of impulses, gathering until the instant of a 'flash of inspiration'. This need not be dramatic, but it does carry distinctive affect and is identifiable for its experiencer.

An inductive divinatory system creates a highly defined container, an alembic which the flash of realisation illuminates, so that hermeios may illuminate theōros. The diviner as hermeios pours full conscious attention into the alembic, creating in advance a language of symbols to hold the illumination, which therefore arises modulated to the significations that occupy the diviner's conscious attention. At this instant he *realises* what those signifiers *mean*. He can also perceive in the alembic the particular 'sequence of ideas' that has occurred in the build up to realisation, because this also is mapped onto the pattern of significations.

It is not difficult to trace the lineage from the daimon of Platonism to the intellectual genius named by Myers, crossing the *limen* between subliminal mind and ordinary consciousness in every authentic act of divination.

Cryptopsychism

Flournoy describes two significant and related activities of subliminal mind that have relevance to divination: *cryptaesthesia* (latent perception) and *cryptomnesia* (latent memory).²³ A useful generic term for all sensory functions working at the subliminal level is *cryptopsychism*.²⁴ There are many recorded cases to show the remarkable phenomenon of minute details being observed and recalled under hypnosis, or in a seance, sometimes many years later. A glance at a book can

²³ *ibid.* p.116. See also the detailed discussion in 'Cryptomnesia' Robert Baker in Stein (1996) pp.186-199.

²⁴ Flournoy (1911) p.114.

lead to whole passages being memorised, and fragments of a foreign language heard as an infant can reappear in sentences many years later, with no conscious knowledge of the language retained. If these manifestations emerge unexpectedly into consciousness, they readily become laminated with sensations of spirit-presence.²⁵ Cryptaesthesia is of significance where a diviner or medium might pick up tiny subliminal clues and responses from a client, and relay these back as information gained from divination or from the spirits.

Cryptaesthesia is a common component of one of Flourmoy's most instructive expansions on Myers, the *teleological automatism*. These manifestations are known to mediums and their followers as 'beneficent spirits', bringing us once again back to the daimon of antiquity. They are beneficent in bringing us to a good end, *telos*. They are 'psychic facts, scarcely noticed' which are astonishingly adaptable to our circumstances, and guide us at moments of need.²⁶ In *Spiritism and Psychology* Flourmoy gives two detailed cases from one source; both have the same characteristics. The individual involved, Mr. X-, heard at different times in his life a mysterious voice giving a short and incisive command. Here is an incident from his travels in South America:

On one occasion, as his party had just halted under a tree to prepare a meal, Mr. X- heard a voice command him, 'Save yourself!' and he forced the men to strike camp at once. Scarcely had they done so when the tree fell with a crash on the very place which they had just occupied. They would all have been killed had not this premonition occurred. An examination of the trunk showed that it was entirely

²⁵ ibid. pp.116-7.

²⁶ ibid. p.115.

rotten, and, so to say, hollowed out by white ants.²⁷

In a second and similar incident, crossing a river, the voice warned him to get his party to shore just before a promontory fell. The whirlpool created would have capsized the boat had they continued in their original direction. On both occasions the voice 'had a character so imperative that no hesitation was possible, and he was forced to obey it.'²⁸ Flournoy's analysis is that this originates in subliminal and therefore entirely unconscious clues, such as visual perception (eg. traces of termites, the appearance of the river-bank) or auditory perception (eg. hearing slight cracks). These clues are worked into a verbal and emotional automatism, inducing the voice and the spontaneous need to flee.

This leads to the suggestion that 'cryptopsychism' allows the modern psychologist to explain a large part of spirit-phenomena, ancient and modern. Flournoy keeps to the boundaries set down by Kant, since nothing in his research bears out the necessity for discarnate spirit-entities, or any supposed intelligence of reality other than that of the individual incarnate actors. There is, therefore, no empirical 'other side' to these phenomena. Flournoy professes a higher and anti-materialist spiritual aspiration for his work, but this does not intrude in his method at any point, and in this too there is an affinity with Kant. We do however find a distinct point of departure from Myers, whose explicit goal is a spirit-philosophy and the scientific investigation of the survival of the soul after death.²⁹

One of Flournoy's principal objectives in *Spiritism and Psychology* should be borne in mind, which is to lay to rest what he sees as understandable but false claims

²⁷ ibid. p.118.

²⁸ ibid. pp.118-9.

²⁹ Myers (1920) Introduction p.1ff.

of the spirit-seers. This is necessary in order to free subliminal psychology, with all its marvellous possibilities for investigating human nature, from useless fantasy and disrepute. The study of this subliminal element represents a major advance since the time of Kant, but is nowhere inconsistent with enlightenment thought; it raises genuine natural mysteries, particularly telepathy, but there is no ground for supposing that these researches challenge the scope of science and reason.³⁰

Interpreting divination as teleological automatism

The cases of the 'voice' discussed above lead to an obvious comparison with the *daimonion* of Socrates, and to daimon-theory in general. It follows that many instances from antiquity cited in favour of the veracity of prophecy and divination could be placed within the wider cryptopsychic explanation of supposed spirit-phenomena. For the sceptic, this would raise a question mark against the idea of a primary study of divination in-its-own-right, since the phenomenon is presumed to have a ground and function that is entirely other than that imagined by its practitioners, putting them in an identical situation to that of the spiritists.

These assumptions on the sceptical side are more provisional and less secure than they might at first seem. This is apparent if we take into account that in order to answer the *how* question - how do these seemingly paranormal phenomena work? - it is necessary to substitute one unknown (the subliminal mind, the unconscious) for another (the divine, the realm of the spirits), and then give the new unknown the same miraculous powers that were once attributed to the original unknown. This becomes obvious as we go back over the two 'voice' cases from Flournoy. At a common-sense level it seems inherently improbable even with a highly refined level

³⁰ Flournoy (1911) p.24 suggests that even if discarnate entities were to be verified beyond all doubt, science is more than capable of adjusting to this new fact. In my view he has not taken on the possibility of a fundamental philosophical 'category' problem, in that science may not be epistemologically capable of such considerations, nor should it be asked to be.

of physical sensitivity that there could be such exact knowledge of the stress in a rotten tree, or the geological loading on a section of the riverside, as to allow a non-expert mind to calculate the *exact instant* of its falling, whether now or in an hour or in a week's time. It is highly problematic to explain this away as cryptaesthesia, whatever subliminal cracks and rumbles might be heard. If we do accept such improbabilities, then we may feel entitled to entertain other ways of looking at the events. One of these is the curious sense that there is some reciprocation here, as if these events were 'meant for' Mr. X- 'here-and-now', and timed and given voice accordingly. Even if this particular thought goes nowhere, the so-called primitive or the diviner will be happy to settle for knowing these dangers in any way that is possible, whether by voices, divination or cryptopsychism. Learned debate about how the paranormal phenomenon has arisen is secondary to the fact that Mr. X- and his party actually escaped danger by virtue of it.

This might lead to the suggestion that against the grain of scientific thinking, the *how* of the event is less important than its *why*. This is directly suggested by Flournoy's use of the word *telos*, final goal, for the automatism (the unconscious occurrence) involved. We will certainly wish to know such a final goal as well as we can. And in that case, if the subliminal mind has such extraordinary powers of perception, then harnessing the teleological automatism ought in principle to be of enormous benefit. That would allow us to bring our conscious efforts and manifest desires in harmony with our unconscious knowledge, to the profound benefit of the whole person.

If it is objected that such an art is almost impossible to conceive, then the answer would be that *this is exactly what is aimed for in inductive divination*, and especially the more sophisticated bones forms. Following the conclusions already drawn from Myers and Flournoy we need have no fear about misreading the promptings, for *subliminal mind itself directs our interpretations*; this occurs in the 'uprush of inspiration' attending a realisation of symbol, provided only that the

diviner has the experience to recognise the phenomenon. A further desideratum is that the diviner should follow the conventional interpretations and procedures of the chosen form of divination in the first stage of speculative interpretation; this helps reduce arbitrary conscious association and personal bias which may happen when there are no rules at all. This in turn allows a spontaneous creation of intelligence where the divinatory form 'speaks' in its own voice, enhancing its authority and loosening the banal grip of our ordinary conscious mode.

By working through the implications of teleological automatism as a theory of divination I have indicated that the hermeneutic structure developed in the preceding chapters survives intact, although with one very important difference: the provenance of divination is thrown into question, if not entirely transformed. Most simply put, instead of coming from god or the spirits certain omens of divination may come from an entity called the unconscious, subliminal mind, or the greater Self. We only avoid this being a radical transformation if it is maintained that these are all names for the same thing, so that the unconscious is god. This begs large psychological and theological questions. Post-enlightenment the diviner who works on the old model and refuses to acknowledge any question concerning provenance is placed in an uncomfortable position, simply because depth psychology has indeed exposed a major element of what might be called the personal unconscious bound up with paranormal manifestations; the work with mediums by Flournoy and others can hardly be denied.

This is not the place to pursue this question further into divinatory praxis, except for the following brief observations. The issues raised by modern psychology were doubtless understood in antiquity in a different way but with similar end result. Ritual context, sanctification and divine address serve to minimise contagion by simply personal elements of an inferior nature, whether conscious or unconscious. This allows an appreciation of the Judaic and Christian abhorrence of revelatory practices not addressed to ontological ultimacy. From our modern point of view we

should recognise that the cryptopsychic explanation is yet one more *chicane*, one that is perhaps necessary for our era, by which theōros creates the bridge from the known to the unknown Other. For those who seek the ultimacy of provenance sometimes known in antiquity, then they will discover it in their divinations.

Freud and thought-transference

The discoveries of Myers, Flournoy and the early psychical researchers focus almost entirely on the role and capacities of the medium, or of the individual receiving paranormal impressions. Translating this into divinatory practice, the concern is on hermeios and rarely on theōros. Psychoanalysis, with its concern to interpret the patient, gives us a psychological approach to theōros. Like most of the pioneers of depth psychology, Freud was intrigued by psychical research, while maintaining a cautious scientific stance. One of his lectures, *Dreams and Occultism*, specifically addresses the question of paranormal phenomena and their relationship to psychoanalysis; I will summarise its salient points, especially as they bear on divination.³¹

Freud considers that the motives that bring people to occultism are dubious; they include a credulous desire for the miraculous and a resistance to the 'monotony of the laws of thought'. Professional fortune-tellers are 'insignificant and even inferior people, who immerse themselves in some sort of performance - lay out cards, study writing or lines upon the palm of the hand, or make astrological calculations'.³² Reason is treated as an enemy of the endless pleasures of nonsense,³³ and the subject can seem like a cover for religion, increasing our distrust. Psychical

³¹ Freud 'Dreams and Occultism' Lecture 30 of the *New Introductory Lectures in Psychoanalysis* (1973).

³² *ibid.* p.70.

³³ *ibid.* pp.62-3.

researchers have studied mediums, but this has become a specialised subject whose conclusions we still await. We can however make a reasonable conjecture, 'that there is a real core of yet unrecognised facts in occultism round which cheating and phantasy have spun a veil which it is hard to pierce.'³⁴ The analyst may glimpse these unrecognised facts through dream-work, revealing the existence of *telepathy*, and Freud suggests that a telepathic message may be received into a dream and then become subject to the 'dream-work' in the same way as any other daily residue;³⁵ that is, it will be transformed into a combination of dream-images, distortion being most evident where some illicit desire is expressed.

Closely related to telepathy, the paranormal communication of knowledge of an event between two people, is the phenomenon of *thought-transference*, where thoughts and secret desires pass between individuals. Freud finds that this is a notable feature of the prophecies made by fortune-tellers:

I have collected a whole number of such prophecies and from all of them I gained the impression that the fortune-teller had merely brought to expression the thoughts, and more especially the secret wishes, of those who were questioning him.³⁶

The satisfaction from having a secret wish expressed helps to explain why clients are often so pleased with the fortune-teller's achievements, with no resentment if the prophecies are not fulfilled.³⁷

³⁴ *ibid.* p.65.

³⁵ Freud (1973) p.66.

³⁶ *ibid.* p.72.

³⁷ *ibid.* p.70.

The capacity to pick up on hidden psychic material from the enquirer reminds us of Flournoy's researches and is suggestive of cryptaesthesia, sensitive subliminal perception, on the part of the diviner. Our interest has however moved over to the inquirer because of the psychoanalytic context, bringing the theōros-hermeios pair into play - it is after all the *enquirer's* secret wish that is under examination, both in the divination session and in the psychoanalytic exchange. These two activities, divination and psychoanalysis, are in some sense parallels, with the diviner's astrological chart or Tarot cards serving a similar role to that of the analyst's interpretive grid, or set of theories by which he can negotiate his way through the analytic session. From our standpoint of divination, it is no surprise that psychoanalytic theory should mirror the mutual and reciprocal nature of the theōros-hermeios pair in the transference relationship between analyst and patient.³⁸

In the second part of the lecture, we are offered an intriguing and lengthy discussion of a case involving Freud's own experience: this is his 'Forsythe Saga'. This has been discussed in considerable detail by Robert Aziz; I arrive at a broadly similar conclusion to Aziz' starting point, namely that Freud's report illuminates a potentially oracular function at work in the meaningful coincidences.³⁹ For our purposes this saga demands attention on several counts. First, while bearing on psychoanalytic concerns it also points to a wider domain of 'incomparably richer

³⁸ *ibid.* p.84. Helene Deutsch in Devereux (1970) pp.133-146 discusses the process of thought-transference between analyst and patient, frequently resulting in 'occult' (i.e. from our point of view, 'divinatory') phenomena.

³⁹ Aziz (1990) pp.122-132 argues that this case is prophetic of the major events of Freud's life, including the tragic death of his daughter within the year, the onset of Freud's own cancer of the jaw, and the decisive move to England. He provides historical details and offers suggestions along the lines of his view of synchronicity. There are however problems of theory in treating the later events as falling into an unconsciously precognised pattern that was objectively 'already there'. Freud as proto-hermeios does not even in broadest outline 'see' what Aziz, standing far distant, realises - or speculates. This raises the question of the epistemological possibility and status of the realisation of a pattern of synchronicity (or of a divination) granted to a third-party non-implicated observer, and Aziz does not begin to account for divinatory *address*. For my purposes it is sufficient to flag the possibility of the 'divinatory field' in the original case, suggesting a latency of interpretation rather than its actuality. Freud's saga, and Aziz's provocative analysis of it, invite further discussion.

material' beyond the limits of psychoanalysis.⁴⁰ Second, it is of unusual significance for Freud; he declares that this 'has left the strongest impression' on him, and there are other details which had to be excluded 'that would have greatly increased the convincing force of the observation'. Third, he interprets it as an example of thought-transference, which allows us to question the appropriateness and implications of this naming.⁴¹ Fourth, the whole situation and its interpretation reveal characteristic issues within the practice of divination.

The following bald summary of key events does not do justice to the many nuances of the narrative. The autumn of 1919 saw Freud's first foreign client after the war years. This was Dr. David Forsyth from London. He was seeking training and arrived to make an appointment. Fifteen minutes later Herr P. arrived; this was one of a number of unpaid sessions, undertaken on the basis that these would stop when Freud took on clients. P. talked of his erotic failures and mentioned for the first time the name of a girl he was attracted to, who called him 'Herr von Vorsicht' [Mr. Foresight]. Freud was struck by the coincidence and he showed Dr. Forsyth's visiting card to P.⁴²

Now we come to a second order of detail. Herr P. had earlier introduced Freud to Galsworthy's tales *The Forsyte Saga*, and he had lent Freud a fresh volume from the series a few days earlier.

The name 'Forsyte', and everything typical that the author had sought to embody in it, had played a part, too, in my conversations with P. and it had become part of the secret language which so easily grows

⁴⁰ Freud (1973) p.77.

⁴¹ *ibid.* p.77.

⁴² *ibid.* p.78.

up between two people who see a lot of each other.⁴³

Pronounced in German, 'Forsyth' and 'Forsyte' are scarcely distinguished; the English word 'foresight' would be pronounced by a German in the same way, and *translated* into German as 'voraussicht' or 'vorsicht' - the name the girl had called P.

There is yet another layer which is significant in its own right and in the context of the relationship of Freud and Herr P. Its bearing on the 'Forsyte' series is somewhat complex. It develops in a play on Englishness, Freud's name linking with Anton Freund (a friend, *'freund'*, and benefactor for psychoanalysis), a coincidence involving Ernest Jones, Jones' work on the *Nightmare*, and a nightmare experienced by P. These are interlinked in a further pattern of associations with contemporaneous events; Freud only partly acknowledges these in his text. I will not discuss the details of this third layer, since its intricacies do not add materially to our immediate theme. For the details, and for the prophetic possibility that may be involved, I refer the interested reader to the study by Aziz.

Freud suggests the obvious interpretation of Herr P.'s jealousy at being displaced in his analyst's affections. His attention is however mobilised by the curious coincidences in play. He allows that in several of the instances there may have been subliminal clues together with information passed on and later forgotten between him and P. However, after a consideration of alternative explanations he remains convinced that the first incident, the coincidence of P's raising of the name 'Foresight' and Dr. Forsyth's visit, cannot be easily explained: 'the scales weigh in favour of thought-transference.'⁴⁴

It is noticeable in Freud's treatment of the coincidence that he offers virtually

⁴³ *ibid.* p.79.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.84.

no symbolic interpretation; by this I mean an interpretation of the content or 'message', beyond its simple capacity of carrying a disturbance of jealousy in the transference relationship of analyst and patient. He does not even indicate the psychoanalytically revealing circumstance that Galsworthy's main character is notable for his possessiveness and jealousy over his wife, although this may have been part of Freud's conversations with P. More striking, he makes no reference to the meaning of the word 'foresight'; the way he talks about it, it would have made no difference if it had been some other name - it is simply a token. Given Freud's usual predilection for interpreting word-associations this is puzzling. The explanation appears to lie in his mechanistic interpretation of both telepathy and thought-transference, precluding precognition and prophecy.⁴⁵ Yet this whole incident appears to be urging Freud quite literally to a consideration of *providence* ('foresight') at work in the final causes of events.⁴⁶ Thought-transference and telepathy, limited to a mechanistic account of a two-minds exchange, miss the possibility that the 'meaning' of the coincidences is distributed across the range of actions and events involving various parties; and this meaning is to be recognised by the principal party to whom the showings are addressed - who is Freud. To ask which bits of this complex are and are not 'genuinely paranormal' is equally to miss the point that it is not *how* the showing has shown that matters, but the *why* and *to what*. What matters is the interpretation, not the explanation.

Freud does not allow his saga to involve precognitive elements, nor does it occur to him to consider it functioning as an oracle. His concern remains psychoanalytic. We are entitled to suggest, however, that treating it in this way does not do justice to the phenomena involved, which should be considered primarily in

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.85: 'it [thought-transference] seems actually to favour the extension of the scientific - or, as our opponents say, the mechanistic - mode of thought.' See also Aziz (1990) p.126.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* p.126. This is the basis on which Aziz takes off into his prophetic analysis.

the light of divination and only secondarily in the light of psychoanalysis. This does however give us a dilemma in that Freud does not conceive himself taking oracles or doing divination. On the principle that an omen is only an omen if it is seen as such, where does that leave Freud? His theory of thought-transference puts him in a halfway house, in an area that tries to be not-divination. Provided he can label the phenomenon 'thought-transference' or 'telepathy', then he is able to let it in, very much on his terms. This illustrates yet again the role of theory in moderating the experience of divination.

There is a further general point to take from this saga. As has been emphasised throughout this study, divinatory showings are more often than not implicated in a pattern of incidents rather than being one-off hits; no one part of the pattern need seem paranormal. This is where the metaphor of the 'field of omens' is most appropriate.

Jung and Synchronicity

Of all leading thinkers of the modern era, Jung has had the most significant impact on theories of divination. There are several contributory factors to his influence. One of these factors is that his psychological model emphasises the nature of symbol. Since he draws extensively on traditional symbolism, he shares a common pre-enlightenment heritage with European alchemists, magicians and astrologers who find that his psychology is a good match for their practices. In line with this observation, Leon Schlamm brings out Jung's significance as a 'post-religious or detraditionalised mystic' who is *also* a scientist, rather than turning away from science:

...he attempted to reintegrate those traditions of spiritual and scientific knowledge united in pre-modern esotericism, but divided by Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment philosophy and science,

within a critical modernist, post-Kantian intellectual setting.⁴⁷

For many modern diviners Jung has rescued symbol, and aspects of his work form a bridge of theory and practice across the divide of the enlightenment.

A major factor contributing to his influence on divination is an obvious one: Jung practiced divination and wrote about it. In keeping with his psychotherapeutic practice dreams were an essential component of his work with patients ('natural' divination); he also used several forms of inductive divination ('artificial' divination). His experience of divination is integral with his description and definition of the principle of *synchronicity*. This underlies divination and various paranormal phenomena, linking events a-causally but meaningfully.⁴⁸ It is this concept, its bearing on divination, and its relationship to the hermeneutic analysis of divination, that concerns us here.

Jung's early engagement with occult studies, and divination in particular, is recorded in correspondence with Freud in 1911. He mentions his interest in astrology and talks of the 'strange and wondrous things in these lands of darkness.'⁴⁹ Within a month he finds 'incredible things' and has begun to work with horoscopy, locating a mother complex in the horoscope of a woman, presumably a patient.⁵⁰ His fascination with mantic procedures blossoms further in the 1920's with his introduction to the *I Ching*, experimenting intensively by making divinations with this oracle.⁵¹

⁴⁷ Schlamm (2007) p.75.

⁴⁸ Wilhelm (1965) p.141.

⁴⁹ Freud-Jung letters ed. McGuire (1994) 254J.

⁵⁰ *ibid.* 259J.

⁵¹ Jung (1974) Appx.4 p. 405.

Jung sees that divination raises a philosophical challenge of the first order to the thought of the enlightenment. The *I Ching* may be credited with fully revealing this to him. In his 1930 Memorial address to his friend Richard Wilhelm, the translator of the Chinese classic, he remarks:

Anyone who, like myself, has had the rare good fortune to experience in a spiritual exchange with Wilhelm the divinatory power of the *I Ching*, cannot for long remain ignorant of the fact that we have touched here an Archimedean point from which our Western attitude of mind could be shaken to its foundations.⁵²

In order to express the principle involved in the oracle Jung has coined the term synchronicity, a-causal meaningful coincidence. In Jung's original formulation this indicates relative simultaneity in time, and stands as a complementary principle to causation.⁵³ The concept is invoked by many diviners and astrologers as an explanation of their practices, but more significantly it has been seen as a cultural force for change by followers of Jung such as Roderick Main, who share his view of synchronicity as an 'Archimedean point'.⁵⁴

Every serious discussion of synchronicity soon reveals one or more of the frustrations everyone - including Jung - discovers in trying to define it: 'the range of phenomena to which it is applied is so wide that not one of his [Jung's] attempts at detailed definition adequately encompasses it.'⁵⁵ An effective way of examining this

⁵² Wilhelm (1965) p.140.

⁵³ *ibid.* p.141.

⁵⁴ Roderick Main (2004) p.1 suggests that synchronicity 'arguably presents his [Jung's] most radical challenge of all to mainstream cultural assumptions'.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* p.39.

dilemma, if not of resolving it, is to trace the origins of Jung's formulations. We see immediately from the 1930 formulation that Jung is strongly influenced by astrology as expressed in its traditional Ptolemaic style;⁵⁶ the influence is explicitly acknowledged when he states that 'one is dealing with the relationship of events, not only analogous to astrology, but even essentially related to it'.⁵⁷ He accepts astrology's capacity to adequately 'reconstruct a person's character from the data of his nativity.' Here he talks of the hypothetical quality of the moment of time, a 'concrete continuum'⁵⁸ which does not cause connections yet is represented in a divinatory 'accidental picture' of them.⁵⁹ This leads to one of his best-known statements, reproduced like an *imprimatur* in numerous primers of modern astrology:

Whatever is born or done in this moment of time has the quality of this moment of time.⁶⁰

This definition makes qualitative time an ordering principle of phenomena, coextensive with causality and producing psychic parallelisms.⁶¹ The mantic arts such as *I Ching* and astrology have developed methods by which the normally obscure time-quality is rendered legible.⁶² This formulation of an objective time-quality remains dominant in Jung's thinking for at least two decades after his first

⁵⁶ See Chapter 10 for a discussion of approaches in astrology.

⁵⁷ Wilhelm (1965) p.143.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* p.141.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* p.142.

⁶⁰ *ibid.* p.142.

⁶¹ *ibid.* p.141.

⁶² *ibid.* p.143.

announcement of the concept. We can tell this from his influential 1949 Foreword to the *I Ching*, the English edition of Wilhelm's translation, where against causality - 'A causes B causes C causes D' - he sets psychic a-causal connections, so that physical events A' and B' might be 'of the same quality' as the psychic events C' and D' in 'one and the same momentary situation'.⁶³ There is a quite literal element in Jung's imagination at this point, and he can be accused of conflating ideas of subtle causation with a supposed psycho-physical connection. Defending 'qualitative time' he mentions connoisseurs who can place the vineyard and date a wine, and refers to the uncanny ability of 'astrologers who can tell you, without any previous knowledge of your nativity, what the position of sun and moon was and what zodiacal sign rose above the horizon in the moment of your birth'.⁶⁴ The connoisseur and the wine is likely to be explained as a matter of subtle causation and highly discriminating sensory skills; the astrologer's hit would appear to have no feasible relationship to causation, like the random process of the *I Ching* divination, and therefore might indicate an ability to read a-causal psycho-physical parallelism. It is not a matter of nit-picking to suggest that as deployed by Jung these notions are inconsistent and misleading. Even his most sympathetic readers acknowledge that he has not resolved the intellectual problem of defining synchronicity, nor, more to the point, has he adequately defined the paradoxes and impossibilities involved.

The desire for a universal principle of synchronicity to rank with causation reemerges at around the same time in Jung's seminal study *Synchronicity: An Acausal Connecting Principle*, which originally appeared in 1950; it was published in English in 1955.⁶⁵ Yet both the essay and the *I Ching* foreword include another

⁶³ Jung: Foreword to the *I Ching* pp.xxiv-xxv.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* pp.xxiii-xxiv. This flattering depiction of astrologers is *occasionally and significantly* true, but in the way it is employed by Jung it becomes yet another report of the famous 'astrologer-from-Benares'.

⁶⁵ The description of synchronicity as a universal principle uniting psychology and physics is

and distinct conception, which is nevertheless not adequately distinguished by Jung himself in these texts. As a consequence, synchronicity rests on a 'double conception', a fact that has been recognised by his commentators.⁶⁶ An analysis of the double conception is given by Maggie Hyde, who locates a definitive passage in the Foreword to the *I Ching*:

Synchronicity takes the coincidence of events in space and time as meaning something more than mere chance, namely a peculiar interdependence of objective events among themselves, as well as with the subjective (psychic) states of the observer or observers.⁶⁷

As Hyde remarks,

The ambiguity here lies in the phrase *as well as with*. The *relationship* between the objective events and the subjective psychic state of the observer is not clear. This in effect allows two versions of synchronicity which I will designate as Synchronicity I and Synchronicity II. The first emphasises the (meaningful) interdependence of objective events among themselves (Synchronicity I). The second version brings to light the subjective participation of the observing psyche (Synchronicity II). Once it is realised that Jung's descriptions contain two different formulations,

most clearly given in the concluding chapter 4 - see especially p.136ff. This description followed discussions with Pauli.

⁶⁶ see for instance Progoff (1973) pp.7,152; Marie Louise von Franz (1980) p.100.

⁶⁷ Foreword to the *I Ching* p.xxiv. The Foreword was originally written in English, so there is no question of ambiguity concerning translation. The two divinations mentioned in this text do not give unalloyed praise to the project as perceived by Jung; I suggest that the *I Ching* itself (if we can allow the personification) considers that Jung may have somewhat missed the point in his approach.

then many of the complications with the concept become clear.⁶⁸

This distinction of the two types of synchronicity has proved helpful in the task of disentangling confusions amongst astrologers and diviners who justify their practices on the basis of synchronicity.⁶⁹ We can also see that Jung himself has, throughout his experiments with inductive divination, followed two parallel tracks: a non-participatory objective model derived from mainstream Aristotelian-Ptolemaic astrology (synchronicity I)⁷⁰, and a participatory model derived from his experiments with the *I Ching* (synchronicity II). His own doubts about the adequacy of synchronicity I make his *Synchronicity* monograph intriguing, but also utterly frustrating when taken out of context by the unprepared reader, as Jung moves uncertainly between his two poles of interpretation. The hold of synchronicity I was shaken by the failure of the astrological marriage experiment, discussed below; and it is significant to note that by 1954 Jung had expressly discarded the notion of 'qualitative time' as defining synchronicity, as he made clear in a letter to the French astrologer André Barbault.⁷¹

In terms of our current hermeneutic analysis, we see that synchronicity I does not formally acknowledge divinatory *address* - the signs of divination are not interpreted as being *for* anyone in particular, nor are they dependent on any particular context. Synchronicity II, by contrast, is fully addressed - that is, it always depends on the unique case of interpretation, the particular and unrepeatable context

⁶⁸ Hyde (1992) p.128.

⁶⁹ *ibid.* pp.167ff. Hyde suggests that modern psychological astrology, such as that of Liz Greene, has pinned its colours to Jung's mast but has adopted 'qualitative time' and the Ptolemaic synchronicity I, and not taken vital clues from the insights into astrological practice suggested by Jung through synchronicity II.

⁷⁰ *ibid.* p.130.

⁷¹ Jung letters 26 May 1954 pp.175-7. See also Hyde (1992) p.127.

in which the divinatory showing occurs.

The existence of two incompatible forms in Jung's thinking produced an intellectual crisis which manifested in the 'astrological experiment' recorded in the monograph. This was a statistical trial for objective a-causal correlations between birth charts collected for 180 married couples, who might on classical astrological principles be expected to show cross-contacts ('synastry') between the two horoscopes. This experiment specifically tested Sun-Moon, Moon-Moon, and Moon-Ascendant synastry; it was wholly rooted in an objective synchronicity I model of astrology.⁷² An analysis of the results is not necessary for our purposes; it is the story of this test as it unfolded for Jung that is significant.⁷³ In breach of the procedural protocol that would usually be expected for this type of experiment, Jung's eagerness to see the results led him to take a first batch before all the data had been collected. To his delight this batch showed a higher than expected tally for the Sun-Moon combination. This is the *coniunctio* of the alchemists, a marvellous symbol of union. If this result were to be replicated in the other batches, it would be a remarkable validation for astrology. However, the other batches failed to confirm this result. The second batch showed a higher than expected tally for Moon conjunct Moon, and the third batch showed Ascendant conjunct Moon. Although each batch came up with *a result strongly indicating one of the three preselected factors*, they cancelled each other out when the batches were combined, so that the overall statistical significance of any of these factors was washed away.

Realising that the results matched his expectations and not some objective reality, Jung embarked on an extraordinary extension of the experiment. He had

⁷² Hyde (1992) p.129f.

⁷³ For the account of the experiment see Jung (1970) ch.2 and comments on pp.53-9. See also Hyde (1992) pp.129ff.

three different patients whose psychological condition he knew, draw by lot random horoscope pairs which were then tested against a list of fifty astrological marriage characteristics. Jung was satisfied, as he perhaps now expected, that the patients' random choices were reflected in the factors coming out strongest in their batches. The first patient, for example, a woman 'in a state of intense emotional excitement' produced a striking preponderance of Mars combinations.⁷⁴ As Hyde remarks, 'the whole conduct of this "scientific experiment" has broken down into divination'.⁷⁵ Synchronicity II has broken down the expectation of synchronicity I. But this does bring Jung to one of his most significant observations about the practice of divination. Speaking of the astrologers he observes:

...I imagine that in their case too, as with me, a secret, mutual connivance existed between the material and the psychic state of the astrologer. This correspondence is simply *there* like any other agreeable or annoying accident, and it seems doubtful to me whether it can be proved scientifically to be anything more than that.⁷⁶

In a footnote Jung points to the impossibility of statistical testing in divination. As his statistics show, 'the result becomes blurred with larger figures':

We have therefore to be content with this apparently unique *lusus naturae*, though its uniqueness in no way prejudices the facts.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Jung (1972) p.79. It must be remarked that to the outsider the results suggested by Jung do not seem very convincing; but that is not to doubt the genuine nature of his 'realisation' in these synchronicities. There is often an interpretive limbo between the symbolic realisation of hermeios and its speculative reflection in the eyes of an objective observer who may stand on 'theory' but not in theōros.

⁷⁵ Hyde (1992) p.132.

⁷⁶ Jung (1970) p.85.

⁷⁷ *ibid.* p.85 fn.12. Elsewhere Jung talks about synchronicities as 'just-so-stories', which fits the *lusus naturae* theme. The 'Just-So Stories for Little Children' were written by Rudyard Kipling. They

This scientific impossibility points us to the limit of theory, and back to the dilemma faced by Kant. The 'game of nature' is none other than the *unique case of interpretation*, a singular this-ness at the ontological foundation of each and every omen. I suggest that whether or not contemporary approaches in psychology are able to even begin to illuminate the nature of divination hinges on their acknowledgment of this essential element of human experience.

are literary chicanes presenting origin-fantasies, such as 'How the Leopard got his Spots', with no further logic behind them than the story itself - just-so.

Conclusion

Conclusion

The Possibility of Certain Studies

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigured so together,
More witnesseth than fancy's images,
And grows to something of great constancy,
But howsoever strange and admirable.¹

It remains to conclude this study by suggesting where it might lead, on the basis of what it might claim to have achieved. Divination is something recognisably and universally distinct, for it seeks a direct and particular response from the Real, whether that is conceived as a god or the nature of things. It is therefore more specific than religious observance or worship: Plutarch says that to pray to a god is common to all, but 'to inquire from him as a prophet is our individual prerogative.'² The individual prerogative is what makes divination an *address* by the Real to the individual enquirer here-and-now, in 'the unique case of interpretation'. This exposes a primary consideration, underlying every other topic, which is that of *interpretation*. This is the hallmark of the methods of divination called 'inductive', a recognition captured in the definitive observation that the omen is an interpretation. There is not some pre-existing thing that, prior to its happening, was always somehow an omen; hence the necessity for a hermeneutics of inductive divination.

This in turn recalls the original choice of inductive divination, as opposed to divination as a whole. The distinction becomes fruitful when the contrast is made

¹ *Midsummer Night's Dream* V Scene 1 23-27.

² *Plutarch: the E at Delphi* 386c,d.

with the possibility of direct unmediated knowing, whether or not involving the impression of visual, auditory or other sensations. Unmediated knowing describes Socrates' *daimonion*. This appears to have been the situation with Swedenborg's vision of the Fire of Stockholm, and similar examples of direct paranormal knowledge are well recorded, as in the case of (apparently) non-symbolic clairvoyance and clairaudience, awake or in dreams. To call these various occurrences 'divination' without further qualification is problematic, since other instances of paranormal knowledge such as telepathy or thought-transference do not readily fall into this category. It is in the interpretation of these paranormal events in the context of their occurrence that we begin to discern the category of divination. Pointing to the event we re-present it and say, 'here is what this means'.

It is instructive to consider the role of the Pythia when seized by the god at Delphi, since this figure suggests the consummate performance of natural-enthused divination, as distinct from artificial-inductive methods such as augury. Yet even here, natural divination requires *prophētēs*, the interpreter.³ What is lost sight of when we focus too narrowly on the natural-artificial distinction of antiquity is that there is one seeking the oracle with a question, about which an interpretation becomes necessary; and the seeking or being addressed is part of the definition of the event called divination. The enquirer at an oracle requires an interpretation of the oracle, and just as an omen is an interpretation so too is an oracle. It is on this basis that a distinctive hermeneutic strategy is proposed, namely the designation of a complementary interpretive function of *hermeios/prophētēs* and *theōros*, where *hermeios* is the interpreter of the omen or oracle, addressing *theōros* in the matter of the concern of *theōros*. Crucial to the mode of analysis I have proposed in this study is the observation that the *hermeios-theōros* dual-unity is at work every time divinatory meaning is brought to light, and is not simply a matter of its embodiment in the dialogue of two persons, *hermeios* the diviner and *theōros* the enquirer.

³ *Timaeus* 72a,b. See Chapter 4.

This observation of a dual understanding in divination is, I suggest, the clue to the 'divinatory intelligence' sought by Vernant and others. As I hope has been demonstrated, there is much that is integral and specific to divination that deserves careful analysis and a discourse dedicated to divination in-its-own-right, the minimum condition for primary scholarship. Nevertheless, such a hope is quite probably yet another dream. We are presented with a fundamental ambiguity, inherent in the subject-matter, and it has been exposed or created by the new thought of the European scientific enlightenment.⁴ For divination, the ambiguity lies in the cultural and philosophical weakening of its chicane. Just in case this remark even now causes a surprise of the wrong sort, I remind the reader that the 'chicane' refers to something more interesting than cheap trickery, although it goes with that possibility. It is the move by which *semblance* creates the necessary condition for a desired change that could not otherwise occur. It is taken for granted by the shaman and by Evans-Pritchard's witch-doctors, and, it seems, half-understood by many tribal villagers.

The weakening of the divinatory chicane at the time of the European enlightenment is a historical reality whether divination is interpreted teleologically as drawing the soul into spiritual understanding, or whether it is interpreted non-teleologically as unconcealment and sooth-saying, or whether it is interpreted as both. Each of the elements I have brought together in the last sentence is now commonly and 'officially' seen as opinion and not knowledge. In the exact manner described by Kant, such things as soul and spirit and oracles exist in a register that is

⁴ Heidegger (1967) pp.89-90: 'Such a fundamental conception of things is neither arbitrary nor self-evident. Therefore it required a long controversy to bring it into power. It required a change in the mode of approach to things along with the achievement of a new manner of thought.' In Heidegger's interpretation Kant is at the axis of this new thought: 'Kant's philosophy shifts for the first time the whole of modern thought and being (*Dasein*) into the clarity and transparency of a foundation (*Begründung*). This determines every attitude toward knowledge since then...' (p55). This is why Kant has been called upon in the current study to be set against oracles.

not of true or false, revealed or concealed, undeniable or deniable, but of *fiction* based neither on experience nor inferences, whereby 'the pneumatology of man can be called a theory of his necessary ignorance... as such it is quite adequate to its task'.⁵ As often with Kant, there is a curious sense of double-meaning in this apparently straightforward expression of the critical philosophy. However, taken at face value, it allows the positivists and the modern-day reductionists who lay claim to his legacy to excise from science and philosophy a vast 'fictional' region of traditional metaphysics.

It might be objected that Kant's views are those of an educated elite and not of ordinary people, which is obviously the case, and popular divination goes its way unimpeded. There are educated and thoughtful people who rediscover divination for themselves; but as suggested earlier, they have to think-against the philosophical and academic tradition of their culture, rather than, as in premodernity, thinking-with that grain. The effect of this is that there has been almost no exchange between philosophical thought and the practice of divination. The practitioners get on with their practice and never think twice; and apart from the remote gaze of cultural history or the ethnographer's safely-distant tribes, academics neither study nor tolerate it.

The ambiguity we face with divination in modernity is that the relationship of mind with reality has been displaced from the order in which oracles once made the semblance of sense. Yet rather than suggesting that all is irredeemably lost for the diviners, there is a movement in the modern discussion of psyche, post-Kant, that may offer a window into future opportunity, against the inclination of the age. In the materials discussed this possibility emerges in the endeavours of the psychical researchers, and especially Frederic Myers, who first drew attention to the 'uprush of

⁵ *Dreams* 2:351-2. Quoted in Chapter 1.

inspiration' that releases the powers of subliminal mind. The teleological automatism illuminated by Flournoy and the manifestation of synchronicity described by Jung suggest an entry into the territory of omens and the divinatory allegoric in the *realisation* of the symbol. For that to happen, however, diviners and astrologers need to recognise that their interpretations are implicated through and through with their own *participation*. From the standpoint of antiquity the move to psyche is a poor substitute for divinity and Being; but for the diviner and the astrologer it has become the chicane of our age.

* * * * *

I opened this study with an admission of necessary ignorance, which is to acknowledge that there is here an inexplicable and unknowable component. This entails a distinct ontological stance, and a distinct way of defining what it means to be human. By 'ontological stance' I mean that human-being is *set-towards* or *in relation to* an unknowable otherness of the real, which unknowable otherness is also intimately human-being's own. This, perhaps, is how we are to understand the memorable inscription at Delphi, KNOW THYSELF, for it is none other than *that* which is known by asking of an oracle.⁶

It is for this reason that modern commentators who have a quite different ontological or metaphysical presupposition concerning 'being human' may make genuine observations, yet miss the mark of what it is to be a diviner or to seek an oracle. If we take a non-modern understanding of divination seriously, then this points to a relationship of human being with an intelligence or potency of reality that is unknowable to our ordinary senses, yet intimate to each of us, individually and socially. Wherever there is divination, there is attributed to it the potential for an

⁶ *E. Del* 392a,b. Plutarch takes the Platonic ontological stance that gives the god Being while our mortal nature 'presents only a dim and uncertain semblance and appearance of itself' to the final bafflement of reason.

unquestioned order of truthfulness, and a human means of revealing that truth, whatever scepticism there may be about most of its human interpreters. This potency need not be identified as a 'god', but it always works in a spirit-like manner.⁷ This represents the cancellation of the question 'how.'

The preceding remarks point to a dimension that I have in the main left to one side. I commenced this study recognising that since an essential element of the matter is formally unknowable, any attempt to give an explication of divination must proceed cautiously and in a roundabout manner rather than seeking to scale the mountains of metaphysics. In this respect I find Kant's words refreshing:

If there is anyone who knows of an easier method for arriving at this knowledge, let him not refuse to enlighten one who is eager to learn, and who, in the course of his investigations, has found himself confronted with Alpine peaks, where others only see before them an easy and comfortable pathway, along which they advance, or think they do.⁸

If this cautious approach, establishing the possibility of a hermeneutic analysis of divination, holds water and is useful, then some of the puzzles and perplexities of the multitude of divinatory practices will be better understood. At that point we may be in a position to clear the path towards the philosophical question of what is divination and what it tells us about truthfulness and the nature of the real. The studies I have made are, I hope, modest steps in this direction.

⁷ As already noted, the non-theistic 'naturalistic' conception coupled with a recognition of the spirit-like and a-rational working of the oracle is characteristic of Chinese thought. Such a view is not necessarily a function of cultural sophistication; Evans-Pritchard (1937) p.315 observes that Azande do not treat their Poison Oracle as a religious device, but neither do they consider the operation of the poison in the ritual to be a *natural* process - it belongs instead to the order of the oracular.

⁸ *Dreams* 2:331.

Appendices

Appendix One

A Summary of Part One of Kant's *Dreams of a Spirit-Seer*

The title of Kant's essay is *Dreams of a spirit-seer elucidated by dreams of metaphysics*, often abbreviated to *Dreams [Träume]*.¹ It is a substantial and closely argued monograph of around 27,000 words, in two main parts of several chapters each, together with a short preamble. With respect to the question of Kant's attitude to Swedenborg, the work is enhanced if we take account of relevant private letters appended in the definitive English language edition of his philosophical writings.

The structure of the text, and of his principal argument, is created by his tightly controlled division of the material into two parts, the first titled 'Dogmatic' and the second 'Historical'. By *dogmatic* is meant a theoretical and philosophical discussion of the limits of metaphysics, particularly as these bear on occult philosophy and questions of the soul and of spirit-beings. Although the 'spirit-seer' to whom the work refers is Swedenborg, he is not mentioned anywhere in the first and philosophically important part of the study; he is alluded to, but pointedly not named, just once in the Preamble. Had Kant not already alerted us to his intention to address directly the problem posed by Swedenborg, then this first part of the work could have stood alone; as a deconstruction of 'occult philosophy' it is a tour de force, perhaps precisely because, despite a semblance to the contrary, this is *deconstruction* and not *destruction*.

¹ *Träume eines Geistersehers, ertauert durch Träume der Metaphysik* (1766) translated and edited by Walford, D. & Meerbote, R. in *Immanuel Kant - Theoretical Philosophy, 1755-1770*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.301-359. The pagination of the Academy Edition ('AK') has been followed from Volumes I and II of *Immanuel Kants gesammelte Schriften* published by the *Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*; p.AK 2:315-2:373. For the purposes of this Appendix, I have embedded pagination references in the body of the text.

The allusion to Swedenborg takes on its full significance only in relation to Part Two of the work, where Kant describes the circumstances of the seer's vision of the Fire of Stockholm in 1759. Here in the preamble Kant makes the following statement:

What philosopher, torn between the assurances of a rational and firmly convinced eyewitness, on the one hand, and the inner resistance of an insuperable scepticism, on the other hand, has not, on some occasion or other, created the impression of the utmost imaginable foolishness? Is he completely to deny the truth of all such apparitions? What reasons can he adduce to refute them?

Is he to admit the probability of even only one of those stories? How important such an admission would be! And what astonishing implications would open up before one, if even only *one* such occurrence could be supposed to be proven![2:317-8]

Kant proceeds to lay out the reasons that can be adduced to refute the supposed truth of Swedenborg's apparitions, and this is the philosophical work of Part One of his text. He fails in the last analysis to find a positive philosophical response to the unique circumstance of the *historical facticity* of Swedenborg's vision, placing his project under enormous strain. This failure necessitates the drawing of an impenetrable epistemological barrier, demarcating our necessary ignorance. By that move, a vast tract of traditional metaphysics is *cancelled*; yet even in the act of cancellation, unresolved and in the balance, he offers a suggestion for symbol and a teleology of *hope* as a truth of the human spirit.

In adducing his reasons for this cancellation, Kant employs a closely-woven dialectical method. This current summary is intended to do no more than to reveal a bare outline of the architecture of the main part of that analysis, inviting the reader to return to the original, since the extraction I have made both here, and even more so

for the purposes of my own argument (in Chapter One), scarcely do service to the depth of this text.

In Support of the Traditional Arguments for a Spirit-Nature

In the first two chapters Kant commences his task with a preliminary review of the philosophical problem - the 'metaphysical tangle' - followed by a convincing elaboration of the position he wishes to challenge. He establishes the credentials of traditional arguments for a spirit-nature and for the soul, at the same time revealing the dilemmas these pose for the philosopher. In the second chapter, he uses these theoretical possibilities as the foundation for a fully-fledged hypothesis of spiritual reality; the second chapter is titled 'a fragment of occult philosophy, the purpose of which is to reveal our community with the spirit-world'. [2:329] It is this hypothesis that he will seek first to propose, and then to refute. The explicit refutation is the substance of the third chapter, entitled 'a fragment of ordinary philosophy, the purpose of which is to cancel community with the spirit-world'. [2:342] The dialectical process is however developed throughout the whole work, leading the reader through conflicting positions from the very beginning. In several instances, footnotes and seeming asides advance major themes of debate. The overall intention of 'cancelling' the notion of spirit-community requires the deployment of diverse arguments, for and against, and the final conclusion to this first part is reached only after Kant has exercised scrupulous attention in favour of the case that he has decided to oppose.

Something of the significance of Kant's text may be indicated by suggesting that in this first part of his study he delivers one of the most impressive arguments *for* occult philosophy to be found anywhere in our modern or early-modern literature. I certainly have not come across anything to match it. This is troublesome enough for any philosopher of the scientific enlightenment, but the unpleasantness for commentators is no doubt compounded by Kant's frank acknowledgment of his

own predisposition to accept in principle the possibility of ghosts, together with the post-mortem survival of something that we might call the soul. Far from these sentiments being simply a personal matter of belief and unthoughtful opinion, Kant affirms that 'the arguments adduced in the second chapter are sufficiently powerful to inspire me with seriousness and indecision when I listen to the many strange tales of this type'.[2:351] He therefore concedes this not simply as a common man, but as a philosopher.

The Tangled Metaphysical Knot

The first chapter of Kant's text is titled 'A tangled metaphysical knot, which can be either untied or cut as one pleases'.[2:319] This lays out the dilemma for the philosopher. Quite apart from popular stories about ghosts and spirits, the idea of spirit appears to be a commonplace in philosophy, and must surely constitute an important branch of knowledge. Yet if we dwell on what *exactly* is this thing, then sophistry or evasion ensue; 'the reason for this evasiveness is the fact that the easy and generally reasonable answer "I do not know" is frowned upon in the academies'.[2:319] Kant declares that he does not know whether spirits exist or not; furthermore he does not even know what the word 'spirit' means.[2:320] However, whether or not it is a figment of imagination, then something or other must be understood by the term. By a sifting of its usages, consistencies and inconsistencies, in both Kant's own ill-understood use of the term and in its employment by others, then it should be possible to unfold its concealed sense.

At this point, in an extensive footnote, he offers a hermeneutic analysis of the *surreptitious concept*, revealing the way in which meaning becomes determinate and communicable even in the case of an obscure concept such as this. The concept of spirit-nature has not been directly derived by abstraction from experience. Since there is doubt as to whether and in what mode it exists we cannot indicate its characteristics by an appeal to the senses, and if it is an immaterial thing, we have no

distinguishing mark by which to distinguish it from material things. So how has it arisen? Kant suggests that

There are many concepts which are the product of covert and obscure inferences made in the course of experience; these concepts then proceed to propagate themselves by attaching themselves to other concepts, without there being any awareness of the experience itself... Such concepts may be called *surreptitious concepts*... linguistic usage and the association of an expression with various stories which always contain the same essential characteristic, furnish that expression with a determinate meaning.[fn.2:320]

Because a concept is surreptitious it does not necessarily follow that it is untrue; however 'delusions of the imagination' are likely to hide in this form. Further, these concepts encourage us to arrive at 'precipitate judgments... which most easily insinuate themselves into the deepest and darkest questions'.[2:322]

Taking on the concept of spirit-nature, whether or not it is a delusion, Kant considers its supposed external properties, that is, how it might appear to an observer. He argues that the term becomes meaningless unless it refers to a substance that lacks the quality of material impenetrability - that is, spirit does not displace any material substance by operating in the place or space where it occurs. It occupies that space without *filling* it.[2:323] By similar reasoning, the spirit-nature in and of itself does not have extension and shape.[2:324] If such an immaterial thing in addition possesses the internal quality of self-knowing and reason, then it is termed 'a spirit'.[2:321]

In another revealing footnote Kant explains that the spirit-beings so far referred to 'belong to the universe as constituents of it' and are to be distinguished from the Infinite Spirit, the creator of the universe. Of this we can only apply

negatives, denying all properties of matter to it. The individual instances of spirit-substance are nevertheless 'supposed to exist in union with matter' in a reciprocal relationship by virtue of which physical beings constitute wholes. Kant doubtless has in mind the Christian-Platonic understanding of the soul's union with the material body, making the human-person a whole.[fn.2:321]

It is a large step from the theoretical possibility of spirit-nature to the demonstration of its actuality. However, Kant allows that traditional philosophy has established sound arguments to persuade us that everything that thinks, such as the soul, must be simple and indivisible.[2:322] He would insist on nothing short of its 'strict refutation' before he could be 'persuaded to dismiss as absurd what used to be said in the schools: *My soul is wholly in my whole body, and wholly in each of its parts*'. [2:325] Kant has in mind here the scholastic arguments concerning the soul.

The argument concerning the immateriality of spirit-nature, combined with the reciprocal co-location of individualised spirit with the corporeal body that it animates, allows Kant to rebut a common materialistic interpretation of the soul. This is the theory that would 'imprison my indivisible "I" in a microscopically tiny region of the brain... to operate from there the levers governing my body-machine'. [2:324-5] In a long footnote he cites medical evidence showing that extensive brain damage does not necessarily destroy the power of thought, and he discusses the features of our sensory experience that erroneously lead us to a brain-centred interpretation of the soul. [2:325-6]

The argument for reciprocal action between spirit-nature and matter, as with the human soul, may be persuasive but it leaves us with a conundrum. How do they combine? How could we even conceive of such a combination? In positing spirit-matter reciprocation we are thereby 'supposed to think of the only kind of combination we know - that which occurs among material beings - as being cancelled'. [fn.2:321] It is consistent with Kant's philosophical method that he should

expose the contradiction (the 'cancelling') that results from a belief in the spirit-nature; we are led to allow a causal relation that is beyond our knowing, since empirically we can only ever 'know' combinations between material beings. We may use empirically derived concepts as an analogy for this supposed spirit-matter combination, but we are then at risk of constructing a singularly obscure surreptitious concept without even realising the step we have taken. We may therefore satisfy ourselves that we have understood something that is not understandable at all.

As we will see, there is a curious outcome to Kant's debate. Although he strives to cancel spirit-philosophy, the overall effect of *Dreams of a spirit-seer* is to allow the dilemma to stand, ambiguous and unresolved. Kant is negotiating the limits of reason:

If there is anyone who knows of an easier method for arriving at this knowledge, let him not refuse to enlighten one who is eager to learn, and who, in the course of his investigations, has found himself confronted with Alpine peaks, where others only see before them an easy and comfortable pathway, along which they advance, or think they do.[2:324]

With the theoretical meanings of spirit-nature, spirit, and soul sufficiently elaborated in the first chapter, Kant proceeds to the challenge presented by Swedenborg, as yet unnamed. The hypothesis under question is that of 'our community with the spirit-world'. Kant does not presume to measure his understanding against the 'mysteries of nature' - these are the Alpine peaks. However, he is now sure enough of the premises involved to test the philosophical argument of any traveller he meets on the path.[2:328] In the chapters that follow he answers the challenge by first setting up the spirit-community thesis, and then refuting it.

The Argument for our Community with the Spirit-World

An outline of traditional thought is behind us, and we are now 'able to see spirit-forms, stripped of their corporeal shell, in the half-light with which the dim torch of metaphysics reveals the realm of the shades'.[2:329] Here, occult philosophy begins in earnest.

Counterposed to physical and mathematical explanations of the universe of matter, the proper subject matter of science[2:331], is a class of being which contains the ground of life. Spirit-beings are 'spontaneously active principles' and can act entirely independently of the material realm. Cause and effect between them is governed by *pneumatic* (i.e. spiritual) laws; where there is reciprocation with corporeal beings, as with the soul's occupancy of the human body, then the causal laws involved may be termed *organic*. When united these beings may 'together comprise a great whole, which could be called the 'immaterial world (*mundus intelligibilis*)'. Since the immaterial world stands together as a self-subsistent and indissoluble hierarchy, its relation to material things is contingent and not necessary. A relation with the material is in any case the work of only some of its parts, 'based upon a special divine provision'.[2:329-30]

It may remain beyond our capacity to determine in what way and to what extent this reciprocation of spirit and matter occurs, and Kant ranges across philosophical opinion on this subject. As for a scientific consideration of the influence of immaterial beings on our physical world then 'it can at best be acknowledged to exist; the nature of its operations and the extent of its effects, however, will never be explained'.[2:331]

We now move to a closer description of the laws governing the spirit-community and its particular relationship with the human soul. The immaterial world

would not be formed within the conditions which limit material bodies, since 'distance in space and separation in time, which constitute a great chasm in the visible world which cancels all community, would vanish'. This entails a duality in the human soul, which in its mortal life is a creature of two worlds. On one side, in its organic unity with the body, it senses only the material world. Yet as a member of the spirit-world, the soul 'would both receive and impart the pure influences of immaterial natures'. At death, the spirit community 'would perforce reveal itself to the consciousness of the human soul in the form of a clear intuition'.[2:332]

In a fine spirit of irony, Kant declares himself wearied by the duty of thinking with its 'tiresome indecision'. He now wishes to move to the more decisive 'academical tone':

Accordingly, it is as good as proved, or could easily be proved, if one were willing to take the time and trouble to go into the matter, or, better still, it will one day, I know not when or where, be proved that the human soul, even in this life, stands in an indissoluble communion with all the material natures of the spirit-world.[2:333]

Moving expansively on the inspiring possibilities that now open up before us, we may readily infer that just as we do not in an ordinary and sane frame of mind ('if everything is in good order') consciously receive spirit impressions, so spirits themselves 'cannot immediately receive any conscious sensible impression of the corporeal world'. They do not form any representation for themselves of material space or extension. Such representations may however be mediated by *souls*, since these are beings of the same spirit-nature in reciprocal relationship with corporeal bodies. Representations of the material to the spirit-nature will however be impossible to communicate directly to other spirit-beings who do not share such reciprocity. Likewise, without this reciprocity 'the concepts which these latter spirit-beings entertain cannot, in so far as they are intuitive representations of immaterial

things, be communicated to the clear consciousness of human beings', at least in their specific and immediate form.[2:333]

Kant has established the traditional and effective argument for the unique nature of soul, not simply as the foundation of organic life, but as the embodied and self-aware reciprocation of spiritual and material realms. 'It would be a fine thing', he remarks, 'if the systematic constitution of the spirit-world which we have presented here could be inferred, or even supposed as simply probable'. What this requires, however, is 'some real generally accepted observation', and towards this desirable goal he now sets forth further conjectures relating the spirit-realm to the universality of moral knowledge.[2:333-4]

An indication that there may some other nature at work in the human heart, countering the egoism of material and selfish desires, is the existence of true altruism. In addition, and beyond the desire to gain the applause of others, even a most sincere temperament shows a 'hidden tendency to compare that which one knows for oneself to be *good* and *true* with the judgment of others, with a view to bringing such opinions into harmony'. [2:334] As a corollary, we find the wish to harmonise the path of knowledge of another so that it may be in accord with the path we have chosen for ourselves. From this we perhaps infer a *universal human understanding*, 'a kind of unity of reason on the totality of thinking beings'. [2:334]

The universality of altruism leads to the recognition of the source of moral impulse, expressed in the 'strong law of obligation and the weaker law of benevolence'. This leads to our 'sensed dependency of the private will on the general will' since our own will is to be harmonised to this universal principle. To call this sense 'moral feeling' is inadequate, as this seems to locate it merely as a manifestation of our interior state without referring to its universal cause. Kant makes a telling comparison between this purely pneumatic law and Newton's definition of *gravitation* as a tendency of mutual *attraction* inherent in all particles

of matter. He explains that Newton had no wish to entangle his mathematical demonstrations in philosophical disputes concerning the 'cause' of this attraction; he treated gravitation as 'a genuine effect produced by the universal activity of matter operating on itself'. [2:335] We note in passing that this metaphor for pneuma typifies the homage offered by Kant and by enlightenment philosophy as a whole to the new science of the age, epitomised in Newton.

Kant is now able to resolve anomalies in the apparent contradiction between our moral life and our mortal existence, where moral virtue does not necessarily equate with material benefit. In the spirit-world, however, virtue finds its due reciprocation as a matter of necessity and by natural law. Already in this mortal life the soul would 'according to its moral state have to occupy its place among the spirit-substances of the universe, just as, in accordance with the laws of motion, the various types of matter in space adopt an order, consonant with their corporeal powers'. [2:336] At death, life in the other world would be a continuation of the pre-existing relation with spirit-beings, carrying through the effects produced by moral action during mortal life. It is especially important that this harmony should be understood as the 'order of nature' and not an arbitrary manifestation of the Divine Will. [2:336]

A further apparent anomaly may now be resolved, namely that if this is the order of nature, we may be surprised that the existence of the spirit-world is not a commonplace of observation. While the indivisible soul is 'simultaneously a member of the visible and invisible world, it is nonetheless not one and the same person', since it suffers a duality of quite distinct representations of itself to itself, one entirely material and organic and the other in relation to the spirit realm. Hence, 'what I think as spirit is not remembered by me as human being', and vice versa. [2:337-8]

Symbol and Spirit-Communication

Kant at this juncture develops a theory of *symbol* by which to account for an interchange of recognition which can arise between the two worlds. We may in our mortal life become indirectly aware of 'influences which emanate from the spirit-world'; these on occasion enter personal consciousness, and 'in accordance with the law of association of ideas, excite those images which are related to them, and awaken representations which bear an analogy to our senses'. [2:338-9] These representations 'are not ...the spirit-concept itself, but they are symbols of it'. Through the symbol a spirit-representation and a material representation or derived concept become linked, so that spirit-concepts take on 'a corporeal cloak in order to present themselves in a clear light'.

...ideas which are communicated by means of spirit-influence would clothe themselves in the signs of that *language*, which the human being normally uses: the sensed presence of a spirit would be clothed in the image of a *human figure*; the order and beauty of the immaterial world would be clothed in the images of our imagination which normally delight our senses in life, and so forth. [2:339]

Kant ends his defence of the theory of spirit-community with a discussion concerning the uncommon sensitivity required to recognise these indirect spirit-induced phenomena, and its attendant problems. It may even be called a malady, since it depends on an unnatural 'modification in the balance of the nerves'. [2:340] These sensitives 'would, at certain moments, be assailed by the vision of certain objects as external to them, which they would take for the presence of spirit-natures presenting themselves'. The vision is 'an illusion of the imagination', even though the cause of the illusion is indeed a genuine spirit-influence. The penalty of this gift is that delusion and truth are mingled together, threatening to render it useless, since 'it cannot be possible to distinguish the element of truth in such an experience from the crude illusions which surround it'. [2:340] Further, so alien are these representations

to ordinary experience, that 'it would not be at all surprising if the spirit-seer were at the same time a fantastical visionary, at least in respect of the images accompanying these apparitions of his'.[2:340]

The defence of the spirit-community hypothesis has now advanced to the point where it can answer the query raised at the beginning of the enquiry. The popular stories of ghosts, together with the assertions of philosophers about spirit, are the result of representations from the immaterial realm acting by imaginative association to produce corresponding sensory impressions, deceiving the senses into the appearance of an external reality. It is a deception, but one resulting from a true rather than a fictional cause. It may be entwined with false and fantastic explanations, yet 'no matter how much the deception is intermingled with absurd figments of the imagination, one need not let this prevent one from supposing that there are underlying spirit-influences at work'.[2:341]

Even accepting the possibility of this hypothesis, there is an important rider, a downside, involved. The preceding arguments have suggested that there may well be a mental imbalance in the sensitive. The prophetic power of Tiresias required that he be physically blind; this metaphor suggests that a price has to be paid, so that 'intuitive knowledge of the *other* world can only ever be attained here by forfeiting something of that understanding which one needs for the *present* world'.[2:341]

Kant's Cancellation and its Bearing on Divination

Kant now sets out his 'cancellation' of the spirit-community hypothesis, which he concludes on a surprisingly intemperate note. The argument works by cancelling rather than refuting, since in a strict sense it is impossible to *disprove* the hypothesis. There is a positive benefit from this, however, which is brought out in the fourth chapter, concluding this part. This impossibility is a boon since it helps us to be decisive and settled about what may and may not be a fit subject for

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philosophy.

Throughout his later writings Kant questions the entire realm of speculative metaphysics, and his discussion in *Dreams* may be interpreted as an early sortie into this larger terrain. The schism that has rendered divination unthinkable may from this perspective be traced to the more encompassing issue of the degradation of philosophical speculation on all matters spiritual. Here, however, Kant turns his focus onto a controversial subdivision of speculative philosophy, namely occult philosophy or 'Cabbala'. It is this move that makes the argument pertinent to our enquiries into divination, for there are defining threads of thinking, characteristic amongst diviners, expressive of a belief in, and an enactment of, spirit-community and the hidden workings of the soul. These thoughts and practices are unambiguously the remit of 'occult philosophy', and are less adequately identified as metaphysics. Whatever the occultist seeks and does stems from and returns to profound metaphysical concerns, yet it is possible to be a metaphysician without being at the same time an occult philosopher; the two should not be confused. Kant does not seek at this point to simply critique metaphysics - the explicit goal of *Dreams* is to cancel any claim on philosophy itself that might be presumed by the spiritists and the occultists. He therefore uses his wider critique of metaphysics as the solid ground from which to deliver a fatal blow to the wrong-headed dreams of the occultists exemplified by Swedenborg.

Anti-Cabbala

'Cabbala' is Kant's epithet for the subspecies of speculation that transcends even the loose forms of traditional metaphysics by invoking a knowledge reserved to the experience of the initiate. It is clear that Kant has no wish to limit his critique either to the Jewish tradition of interpretation that properly goes by this name, or to the Christian Cabbala in vogue since Pico. By Kant's era the term appears to have become associated with an abundance of occult flora and fauna, all marked by the

notion of secret knowledge. Kant's target is the attempt by certain thinkers to take these obscure, intimate and individual secret knowings and confect them into a metaphysic, one of whose goals is the justification and rationalisation of those very same occult experiences. Such constructions are false in both foundation and execution.

We may infer both from this essay and from the general tenor of his philosophy that he does not deny the validity of obscure individual experience; rather he challenges as illicit the conversion of that experience into metaphysical rationalisation, exalting untested and untestable opinion into philosophic dogma. All this is established in the third chapter of part one, titled 'Anti-Cabbala'.

The main objection, therefore, is that metaphysical dreamers dream alone; they inhabit a world that is not shared with others, nor is it capable of being shared. Were these dreamers to wake up, they would see the world we all share, and would not see anything which did not accord with what others see. It is in accord with the science-influenced temper of many intellectuals of his day that Kant should speak with such optimism of the unproblematic universality of self-evidence in the natural world around us. Humanity is on the verge of waking into the shared enlightenment of truth, where philosophy follows the trailblazing example of the mathematical and empirical sciences. Once we wake from ignorance,

...the philosophers will all inhabit a common world together at the same time, such as the mathematicians have long possessed. And this important event must now be imminent, if we are able to believe certain signs and portents which have made their appearance some while ago above the horizon of the sciences.[2:342]

In our slumbering ignorance there are two distinct classes of dream, and Kant carefully distinguishes between the dreamer of *reason* and the dreamer of *sense*. The

former may include the usual category of metaphysical philosopher; the latter includes those who have direct dealings with spirits, as in the case of Swedenborg. For such an individual, 'the impression of the senses itself precedes all judgment of the understanding and possesses an immediate certainty' which cannot be banished by subtle reasoning.[2:343; 2:347]

On this basis Kant offers a long discussion, together with a physiological explanation, to bring out the essential difference between a *waking dreamer* who is likely to recognise his own creative role in the reverie, and the spirit-seer, whose deluded perception is objectively transposed into external and sensed reality.[2:343-5] In both cases, the impact on the sensory apparatus is equivalent; here Kant refers to the theory of Descartes concerning *ideas materiales*, 'the view that all the representations of the faculty of imagination are, perhaps, accompanied by the concussion or vibration of the subtle element, which is secreted by the nerve-tissue or nerve-spirit'. The occurrence of this phenomenon ensures that the spirit-seer, unaware of his own creative role, cannot possibly doubt his perception. It even follows that the more strange and beyond-the-possible it seems, the more enhanced and vivid does the experience become.[2:346] In its extreme form, we are talking of madness, where 'the victim of the confusion places mere objects his own imagination outside himself'.[2:346]

Kant does not suggest that madness causes a belief in spirit-community; rather, the two conditions are related in that madness or derangement is likely to be the result of such a deluded experience. In the past some of these supposed 'semi-citizens of the other world' might have been burned at the stake as heretics; now it will suffice to purge them, or to treat them as candidates for the asylum.[2:348]

Kant discusses a variation between the senses that readily occurs in cases of delusion, so that *sight* may give us a fully transposed reality that is not equally available to *touch*. This helps to explain the phantom-like manifestation of ghosts,

seen and yet not solid, in numerous stories.[2:347] He also touches briefly on the cultural contribution to the perceived manifestation, since 'concepts of spirit-forms, inculcated into us by education, provide the sick mind with materials for its delusive imaginings'.[2:347] This suggestion may be appropriately combined with his discussion of symbol, discussed above [cf.2:338-9], whereby the derived spirit-concept takes on a 'corporeal cloak' adapted to our conventional language and imagery. On this basis it is easy to understand why spirits and ghosts show significant differences in their manifestations in different cultures.

These various critical observations, extending from a consideration of traditional metaphysics to a specific interpretation from occult philosophy, have prepared the ground. Kant now ties together the main threads in order to expunge any lingering claim to metaphysics and philosophy that might be entertained by believers in spirit-community. This is undertaken in the closing passages of the third chapter of part one, and in the short fourth chapter, which he offers as a 'theoretical conclusion' to the whole of part one. Even here, in these scathing and apparently settled anti-Cabbala conclusions, there remains a certain ambiguity about elements of Kant's stated position.

His first and primary act of cancellation is essentially the application of Occam's razor; occult speculation on the peculiar phenomena observed by spirit-seers is 'rendered wholly superfluous' by the simpler, more universal, and more practical explanation.² Kant's analysis of delusion arising in *dreams of reason* and *dreams of sense* demands general support since it calls on commonly recognised criteria of experience, rather than permitting each individual thinker to remain in his or her own realm of private speculation, lost 'in the dizzy concepts of a reason which is half-engaged in creating fictions and half-engaged in drawing inferences'.[2:347-8]

² Kant does not use the term 'Occam's razor'.

If we establish that delusion in some form is the most reasonable explanation of apparent spirit-phenomena, then it follows that philosophy wandering in this direction invites mockery, 'a more powerful instrument than any other for checking futile enquiries'. [2:348] We save ourselves from the attempt to 'seek out mysteries in the fevered brains of deluded enthusiasts' and we bear in mind that, far from being a heavenly inspiration, their windy metaphysics is nothing more than a f***. [2:348]³

Negative epistemology and the butterfly

Kant's main concern in the fourth chapter is his 'theoretical conclusion' to Part One. In line with the cancellation of spirit-community, he establishes what is in effect a *negative epistemology* with respect to all such questions. Before arriving at this point, he discusses the reason for our tendency to give credit to such beliefs; this is tolerant in tone, unlike the scurrilous attack with which he ends the previous chapter.

The notion of spirit-community has been placed on the scales of understanding, where 'such things seem to weigh no more than empty air'. Yet the balance in the scales has not been wholly impartial. 'One of the arms, which bears the inscription: *Hope for the future*, has a mechanical advantage', allowing even weak reasons in favour to outweigh more significant speculations against. Further, he 'cannot even wish to eliminate' this defect, which seems to be the consequence of a pronounced and popular 'fond hope that one will oneself somehow survive death'. [2:349-50] This must be the chief underlying motive for the widespread acceptance of ghost-stories, leading to a self-deceptive tendency to interpret illusory experiences and ambiguous forms in the 'shades of night' as 'phantoms harmonising

³ Kant cites Butler's *Hudibras* on farting. The passage is omitted by at least one editor of Kant - see details in the Cambridge edition.

with the opinions one held beforehand'.[2:350]

Kant's argument here parallels his earlier discussion of the culturally-conditioned form of spirits appearing in the delusions of sick minds,[cf.2:337] as well as his discussion of the 'corporeal cloak' that may be supposed to be put on by spirit-representations.[cf.2:338-9] The significance of discussing this phenomenon in the context of *healthy* minds in liminal or half-awake states is that Kant has advanced his argument carefully, step by step, towards a final deconstruction of conventionally acceptable spirit-philosophy:

And on this foundation, philosophers finally formed the rational idea of spirits, which they then incorporated into the body of their teaching. On examination, my own pretentious theory of the community of spirits will be found to follow exactly the same direction as that adopted by popular inclination.[2:350]⁴

He observes that this theory offers nothing in explaining either how spirit comes into the world, or is present in the world; what it does offer is a flimsy hope for our future, allowing us at least an *opinion* inclined towards spirit-community. As to the true *knowledge* of these things, Kant admits complete ignorance. Ignorance is inherent in the very nature of the subject. In consequence, different readers will be justified in taking contrary opinions, each side never short of 'justifying reasons'. With this impasse we arrive at a decisive epistemological distinction concerning spirit-beings:

From now on it will be possible, perhaps, *to have all sorts of opinions* about but no longer *knowledge* of such beings.[2:351]

⁴ Kant's 'own pretentious theory' is of course his proposition of occult philosophy in Part One, ch.2., AK 2:329-2:341.

The corollary of this observation is its natural extension: from now on it will be possible to have opinions against spirit-beings, but no longer secure knowledge by which we may discount them. This conclusion is not explicitly stated in so many words, yet may be inferred from the whole direction of Kant's thesis, throwing light on its root paradox.

We are offered here yet another far-reaching observation, quite against the sceptical grain of the whole piece, and relegated to the defensive obscurity of a footnote. It concerns *analogous reasoning as an expression of truthful inner sentiment*. Discussing the attitude of spirit-philosophy to the prospect of life after death, Kant adds a note on the symbolism of the butterfly, representing the soul (psyche = butterfly) for both the ancient Egyptians and the Greeks:

It is easy to see that the hope, which makes of death nothing but a transformation, has generated this idea and its symbols. But this does nothing to destroy our confidence that the concepts which have sprung from this source are correct. Our inner sentiment and the judgments which are made by *what is analogous to reason*, and which are based on that inner sentiment, lead, provided they are neither of them corrupted, precisely where reason would lead, if it were more enlightened and more extensive.[fn.2:351]⁵

These various observations underscore a significant personal concession both to spirit-philosophy and to popular opinion. From his acknowledged ignorance, Kant refuses 'wholly to deny all truth to the many different ghost-stories which are recounted', leading to the assertion that he is sceptical about each single case, yet prepared 'to ascribe some credence to all of them taken together'. [2:351] He reminds

⁵ Italics are in the translated text.

us that traditional arguments for spirit-nature and the soul are sufficiently credible to give us pause in the face of such accounts. Although his assertions remain throughout somewhat ambivalent, we may reasonably arrive at the following conclusion: Kant concedes that analytical and philosophical argument can neither *logically refute* nor even, despite his best efforts, adequately *cancel* the rational case for spirit-nature and spirit-community. Integral to the cancellation not being wholly effective is that Kant does not wish it to be so, as he has already informed us.[cf.2:350] This curiously reflexive and paradoxical observation takes on all the more force in the light of the specific and credible details of the clairvoyance of Swedenborg, researched by Kant and recounted in the second part of his thesis.

From his use of the terms we realise that the 'cancellation' of a concept may be less logically rigorous than its formal refutation, but is equally effective in removing it from academic discourse. Formal disproof of spirit-philosophy being intrinsically unattainable, his stated goal would seem to be its cancellation; yet the way in which he presents the clairvoyance of Swedenborg in the second Part undermines any chance of cancelling it.

Pneumatology as a theory of necessary ignorance

Despite his concessions to popular belief and personal opinion, and notwithstanding his reports on Swedenborg, Kant is determined to push his argument through to clarity about the proper scope of philosophy. On the basis of his critique of metaphysics, he reaches his goal with the argument of *necessary ignorance*, a radical negative epistemology. This is quite different to scientific ignorance; it is in the nature of our scientific knowledge that it is always relatively incomplete, a fraction of what we might eventually understand. Our incapacity to have knowledge of spirit-nature is however of a different order, since 'the spirit-nature which we do

not know but only suppose, can never be positively thought, for, in the entire range of our sensations, there are no *data* for such positive thought'.[2:351-2] In the absence of positive data available to the senses, we are left only with negations, suppositions of what the spirit-nature is *not*. Yet even these negations are based neither on experience nor on logical inference; it follows that reason, 'stripped of all assistance', seeks its refuge in *fiction*:

On this basis, the pneumatology of man can be called a theory of his necessary ignorance in respect of a type of being which is supposed to exist; as such it is quite adequate to its task.[2:352]

This conclusion allows Kant to put the whole debate, involving 'an extensive branch of metaphysics', to one side, being of no further philosophical concern. He in effect treats the debate as a parade of 'fancy's images'. At a stroke the philosopher is absolved from deciding one way or the other and should abandon a realm of futile enquiries beyond his scope. 'In this, as in other cases, prudence demands that one cut the coat of one's projects to the cloth of one's powers'.[2:352]

Appendix Two

St. Augustine's Conversion Analysed in terms of Inductive Divination

*A commentary on Confessions Book VIII Chapters 11& 12 sections 25-28.
(E.B.Pusey translation)*

Introduction to the Analysis

This remarkable record of divination is itself a figure of inductive divination carried to its fulfilment. It is not the intention of my analysis to diminish the meaning of Augustine's conversion and his knowing of God; rather, by taking his narrative faithfully in its own terms, to utilise his careful and discriminating description to bring light to questions of the nature of divinatory interpretation. The following annotations reveal only one corner of the implications, theological, philosophical and psychological, of this significant historical instance of divination, but are suggested as a necessary starting point to any more complete description.

The whole piece may be seen as the narrative of Augustine as *theōros*, reporting to us an account of his conversion, and placing these events in the story of his life. The report describes for us a pneumatic process in which may be inferred not only the movement of *hermeios* in the act of divination, but also the movement of the unknown spiritual agency. Augustine, here as in other writings, pays particular attention to the nature of the soul, which is to be distinguished from conscious attention or discursive mind. I have interpolated my comments (italicised) for text which I have underlined, to provide clarification and context where useful.

The analysis is completed in a brief discussion of considerations arising from this report.

[8.11.25] Thus soul-sick was I, and tormented, accusing myself much more severely than my wont, // *A. has rejected Manichean doctrine of good and bad souls contending in same person - he is therefore one tormented soul with no 'good' part* // rolling and turning me in my chain, till that were wholly broken, whereby I now was but just, but still was, held. And Thou, O Lord, pressedst upon me in my inward parts by a severe mercy, redoubling the lashes of fear and shame, lest I should again give way, and not bursting that same slight remaining tie, it should recover strength, and bind me the faster. For I said with myself, "Be it done now, be it done now." And as I spake, I all but enacted it: I all but did it, and did it not: yet sunk not back to my former state, but kept my stand hard by, and took breath. And I essayed again, and

wanted somewhat less of it, and somewhat less, and all but touched, and laid hold of it; // *'it' is the chain that binds him* // and yet came not at it, nor touched nor laid hold of it; hesitating to die to death and to live to life: and the worse whereto I was inured, prevailed more with me than the better whereto I was unused: and the very moment wherein I was to become other than I was, the nearer it // *'it' is the 'death' of the false life which is not in the Lord, holding Augustine in suspense* // approached me, the greater horror did it strike into me; yet did it not strike me back, nor turned me away, but held me in suspense.

[8.11.26] The very toys of toys, and vanities of vanities, my ancient mistresses, still held me; // *moving from the horror of death = false life to its seductive nature - there is no evidence this is an eidetic vision, it appears to be a metaphorical statement after the event* // they plucked my fleshy garment, and whispered softly, "Dost thou cast us off? and from that moment shall we no more be with thee for ever? and from that moment shall not this or that be lawful for thee for ever?" // *this and that shall be forever unlawful* // And what was it which they suggested in that I said, "this or that," what did they suggest, O my God? Let Thy mercy turn it away from the soul of Thy servant. What defilements did they suggest! what shame! And now I much less than half heard them, and not openly showing themselves and contradicting me, but muttering as it were behind my back, and privily plucking me, as I was departing, but to look back on them. Yet they did retard me, so that I hesitated to burst and shake myself free from them, and to spring over whither I was called; // *the change of position, to another ontological state* // a violent habit saying to me, "Thinkest thou, thou canst live without them?"

[8.11.27] But now it spake very faintly. For on that side whither I had set my face, and whither I trembled to go, there appeared unto me the chaste dignity of Continency, // *once again, this is a rhetorical device or statement after the event rather than a report of a vision - although this shows allegorical form, it is not in my terms divinatory/sacred allegory [other-speaking] since it can easily be restated in a more literal sense - it is the intentional allegory of the poet or theōros rather than the oracular allegory of the diviner or hermeios* // serene, yet not relaxedly, gay, honestly alluring me to come and doubt not; and stretching forth to receive and embrace me, her holy hands full of multitudes of good examples: there

were so many young men and maidens here, a multitude of youth and every age, grave widows and aged virgins; and Continnence herself in all, not barren, but a fruitful mother of children of joys, by Thee her Husband, O Lord. And she smiled on me with a persuasive mockery, as would she say, "Canst not thou what these youths, what these maidens can? or can they either in themselves, // in their own self-movement // and not rather in the Lord their God? // by the movement of God // The Lord their God gave me unto them. // by Grace of God they have been granted Continnence // Why standest thou in thyself, and so standest not? // the ontological status, standing in ourselves is not truly to stand // cast thyself upon Him, // the step of FAITH out of oneself // fear not He will not withdraw Himself that thou shouldest fall; cast thyself fearlessly upon Him, He will receive, and will heal thee." And I blushed exceedingly, for that I yet heard the muttering of those toys, and hung in suspense. And she again seemed to say, "Stop thine ears against those thy unclean members on the earth, that they may be mortified.¹ They tell thee of delights, but not as doth the law of the Lord thy God."² This controversy in my heart was self against self only. // one soul torn asunder by the demand for a change in its ontological status - here is the fundamental DOUBT that by grace may be resolved // But Alypius sitting close by my side, in silence waited the issue of my unwonted emotion.

[8.12.28] But when a deep consideration had from the secret bottom of my soul // the soul has places and parts that are not 'known' to us, and of which we are not conscious // drawn together and heaped up all my misery in the sight of my heart; // where it becomes KNOWN to him // there arose a mighty storm, bringing a mighty shower of tears. // extreme psychic tension, a crisis of the soul manifested in powerful emotional affect; the forcing into consciousness of overwhelming unconscious content // Which that I might pour forth wholly, in its natural expressions, I rose from Alypius: solitude was suggested to me // the coming change of place of the soul is mirrored by a physical change of place to solitude - this is suggestive of the step into a place or space appropriate for the appearance of the god - and in case this is thought to be an over-interpretation, note how Augustine makes much of the detail of his move into seclusion, most marked in the specificity of the 'fig tree' below

¹ Colossians 3.5 "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:"

// as fitter for the business of weeping; so I retired so far that even his presence could not be a burden to me. Thus was it then with me, and he perceived something of it; for something I suppose I had spoken, wherein the tones of my voice appeared choked with weeping, and so had risen up. He then remained where we were sitting, most extremely astonished. I cast myself down I know not how, under a certain fig-tree, // this specific detail has been a matter of discussion, but the orthodox interpretation appears to discount it as especially significant or symbolic : here are two Bible references to 'fig-tree' which may be relevant: John 1.48,50 - in the calling of the disciples, Jesus sees Nathanael (an Israelite without guile) under the fig-tree; also, perhaps less appropriate, Matthew 24.32, parable of the fig-tree which Jesus withers // giving full vent to my tears; and the floods of mine eyes gushed out an acceptable sacrifice to Thee.³ // *This is theologically significant - see I Peter 2.5 - that a spiritual ie. non-material sacrifice is made - which is none other than the offering of one's whole being, one's place, one's soul. The sacrifice is made which permits the petition (the IMPETRATION) that follows: // And, not indeed in these words, yet to this purpose, spake I much unto Thee: and Thou, O Lord, how long?⁴ how long, Lord, wilt Thou be angry for ever? Remember not our former iniquities.⁵ // *this is the heartfelt appeal to Deity which calls forth the response = oracle // for I felt that I was held by them. I sent up these sorrowful words: How long, how long. "to-morrow, and tomorrow?" Why not now? why not is there this hour an end to my uncleanness?**

[8.12.29] So was I speaking and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo! I heard from a neighbouring house a voice, as of boy or girl, I know not, chanting, and oft repeating, "Take up and read; Take up and read." // *the child calls 'tolle lege, tolle lege', which is the oracular RESPONSE to the impetration - this is an archetypical form of divination by language and the unexpected word heard // Instantly, my countenance altered, I began to think most intently // the change of countenance is a change of 'voice' marking*

² Psalm 119.85, old version

³ I Peter 2.5 "Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ".

⁴ Psalms 6.3 "My soul is also sore vexed: but thou, O Lord, how long?"

⁵ Psalms 79.5,8 "How long, Lord? wilt thou be angry for ever? shall thy jealousy burn like fire" "O remember not against us former iniquities: let thy tender mercies speedily prevent us: for we are brought very low".

the movement to hermeios, where A. will be able to make the inductive divinatory interpretation // whether children were wont in any kind of play to sing such words: nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. // this to-and-fro of thought is characteristic of the ceaseless negotiation and divinatory ratiocination that occurs between speculation and the moment of realisation // So checking the torrent of my tears, I arose; // awakened by the omen, hermeios has with full rationality taken command of the soul and is moving in double-consciousness // interpreting it to be no other than a command from God // this is realisation which is the full INTERPRETING, the 'as if' of induction, not direct knowing or seeing. Furthermore, the provenance of the omen is immediately determined, for this must be his GOD (ie. not Hermes or the daimon, since Augustine is not a pagan) since it is THAT ONE to whom he has sacrificed and appealed - this is the most significant element in the presentiment of this omen // to open the book, and read the first chapter I should find. For I had heard of Antony, // Antony's bibliomancy serves as a model, validating and allowing the current omen: here is another (secondary) element in the presentiment of Augustine's omen, part of the enabling and allowing forestructure that will have been considered in the to-and-fro of negotiation of the omen // that coming in during the reading of the Gospel, he received the admonition, as if what was being read was spoken to him: // Antony's omen is itself an instance of the inductive-divinatory - the 'as if' defines the double-consciousness. On a broader point, note the indication of a divinatory function of the 'reading' in Christian worship, which is publicly interpreted and made relevant by the priest [as hermeios] in his sermon, on behalf of the members of the congregation [theōros] who have come to the holy place // "Go, sell all that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come and follow me"⁶: and by such oracle // the reading in the Church BECOMES oracle - note how explicit Augustine is at this point // he was forthwith converted // Antony's unbidden omen real-ised and fulfilled // unto Thee. Eagerly then I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I laid the volume of the Apostle when I arose thence. // Augustine has been commanded by the first and unbidden omen; he now moves to its fulfilment and resolution, which is in seeking the response of the God through bibliomancy (the taking-up at random of the written word) // I seized, opened, and

⁶ Matthew 19.21 "Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me."

in silence read that section on which my eyes first fell: “Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, in concupiscence”.⁷ No further would I read; nor needed I: for instantly at the end of this sentence, by a light as it were of serenity infused into my heart, all the darkness of doubt vanished away. // enlightenment in the full real-isation of the meaning of the omen, which is the RESOLUTION of all doubt. This is a primary function of divination //

[8.12.30] Then putting my finger between, or some other mark, I shut the volume, // the formal act of divination is closed // and with a calmed countenance made it known to Alypius. // Augustine now restored as theōros // And what was wrought in him, which I knew not, he thus showed me. He asked to see what I had read: I showed him; and he looked even further than I had read, and I knew not what followed. This followed, “him that is weak in the faith, receive”;⁸ // Alypius as theōros is weak, and needs the inspiration of Augustine as hermeios for him. Augustine has in effect been a diviner for Alypius // which he applied to himself, and disclosed to me. And by this admonition was he strengthened; and by a good resolution and purpose, and most corresponding to his character, wherein he did always very far differ from me, for the better, without any turbulent delay he joined me. Thence we go in to my mother; we tell her; she rejoiceth: we relate in order how it took place; she leaps for joy, and triumpheth, and blesseth Thee, “Who are able to do above that which we ask or think”;⁹ // the nature of Grace // for she perceived that Thou hadst given her more for me, than she was wont to beg by her pitiful and most sorrowful groanings. For thou convertedst me unto Thyself, so that I sought neither wife, nor any hope of this world, standing in that rule of faith,¹⁰ where Thou hadst showed me unto her in a vision, // the conversion of Augustine is itself wrapped within the omen of an earlier dream by his mother // so many years before.

⁷ Romans 13.13,14 “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.”

⁸ Romans 14.1 “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.”

⁹ Ephesians 3.20,21 “Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.”

¹⁰ see Confessions Bk III.19

And Thou didst convert her mourning into joy,¹¹ much more plentiful than she had desired, and in a much more precious and purer way than she erst required, by having grandchildren of my body. // *what is attained by all parties here is superordinate to natural blessings, where divination combines with divination and with the effecting of grace, 'above that which we ask or think.'* //

Further considerations

Augustine understands that the moment of divination in the first omen is an act of interpretation: [8.12.29] *nihil aliud interpretans divinitus mihi iuberi nisi ut aperirem codicem et legerem quod primum caput invenissem* (interpreting this as nothing other than a command of god to open the book and read the first chapter I should find);

and that the act commanded is understood to be the consultation of an oracle, as in the conversion of Antony: *et tali oraculo confestim ad te esse conversum* (by such an oracle...).

The Biblical Oracle:

Augustine tells us that his eye fell on a phrase which is found to be part of Chapter 14 v.14 of Paul's Epistle to the Romans. Here is the relevant context in Paul:

Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans ch.13 & 14:

11. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep; for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

12. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

13. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

14. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

Chapter 14.

1. Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

¹¹ Psalms 30.11 "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness".

On the appropriateness of the Biblical oracle:

On first consideration, it would be tempting for a sceptical imagination to take the passage from Paul as representative of countless similar broadly fitting passages, but not otherwise exceptional. However, in the light of Augustine's own well recorded struggles with his desires, note how strictly apt the selected passage is in two related respects, concerning (1) the struggle with carnal lust which still clings to a possible provision for itself and (2), more profound, the redeeming of carnal (fleshly) desire in the resurrected body of Christ, which becomes the body 'put on' in the step of faith (see 8.11.27).

This aptness is rendered all the more convincing by the parallel address of the omen to Alypius. The next 'chapter' of the divination is the next chapter of the Bible, addressed to the weaker brother, the *theōros* who has not quite 'seen' in the profound way of Augustine. 'Doubtful disputations' forever threaten to pull down faith in the realm of *theoria* and speculation (see full text of Romans 14); the narrative suggests to us that the seeing of Augustine as *hermeios* is the catalyst for the conversion of Alypius.

On the nature of the Divinatory Interpretation (the 'take'):

'*Tolle, lege*' is marvellously apt for the instance of all inductive divination: the diviner will TAKE an event in the world and, applying the step of divinatory allegory, metamorphoses one thing (an arbitrary remark) into another, in order to READ it for the matter of concern.

Distinguishing unbidden and bidden (*omina oblativa* and *omina impetrativa*):

Augustine's conversion is typical of the 'divinatory field' sometimes experienced in ordinary life in an interweaving of incidents, symbolisms, interpretations, and actions. There are distinctive elements within this field, and we observe a classical distinction in the two separate parts of this whole omen-event. Although Augustine is petitioning God by his heartfelt appeal, he is appealing directly for grace, not for an omen. The *tolle, lege* omen that appears in response is therefore unbidden. This omen is interpreted by Augustine as a directive that he should make an act of divination with the Bible. His act of TAKING up the Bible and READING the first words his eyes alight on is therefore an impetration or bidding. This is in accord with a classical and commonly reported pattern of divination whereby an unbidden ominous event occurs which is then referred to the augurs/diviners who may decide to induce (bid) an oracular response. In this case the formal impetration by means of further divination permits a fulfilment and *realisation* of the meaning and intention of the unbidden omen.

* * * *

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