

From Primitive Mentality to *haecceity*: the Unique Case in astrology and divination

Geoffrey Cornelius

Part I

The question before us is the nature of divinatory intelligence,¹ which is the mode of thought whereby meaningful interpretations are sustained in divination. This paper supports the view of some anthropologists that divination involves a distinctive mode of consciousness, mental pattern or cognitive faculty. To this end, I bring forward what may seem at first to be an unlikely combination of descriptions from anthropology and scholastic philosophy. Part I reviews Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's description of 'primitive mentality', in order to establish a characteristic of divinatory interpretation that I have termed the *unique case*. In Part II I suggest that the unique case parallels the concept of *haecceitas* (anglicised as haecceity or 'this-ness') posited by the medieval theologian John Duns Scotus. This concept is dependent on his distinction between *intuitive* and *abstractive cognition*; this pairing indicates a foundational analysis that may be fruitfully applied beyond its original context to the question of omens, astrology and divination. At the same time, this approach complements the anthropological perspective by suggesting a loftier intellectual register for divination than is usually granted to it by contemporary scholarship.

Astrology is considered here in the practical and applied form in which it is most commonly encountered, which is as a method of judgment and interpretation, and this is treated as a practice of divination. Beyond its explicitly divinatory manifestation astrology raises complex questions in that it has from its origins encompassed cosmology, sacred science and pre-modern psychology. These large questions go beyond the remit of our current topic, but in acknowledgment of them I indicate astrology's somewhat distinct status in the phrase 'astrology and divination'. However, it is in its role as divination that I consider astrology here. I have previously given an extensive demonstration that *judicial astrology*, the art of practical and (most commonly) horoscopic interpretation including the judgment of nativities, employs a divinatory rationale and is in all essential respects a form of divination.² Indeed, judicial astrology is *the* dominant and most highly articulated manifestation of divination in western culture and on the Indian subcontinent. Academic commentators and critics, secular and religious, have no difficulty in identifying this practical form as divination, even if the designation is not one that many contemporary

¹ Vernant (1991) p.303f.

² On the argument for judicial astrology as divination, see Cornelius (1994/2003).

astrologers would comfortably acknowledge.³

Reflection on the phenomena encountered in divinatory practice leads to the suggestion that astrology and divination involve a distinct category of understanding, standing in contrast to our usual way of thinking. Discussing the rivalry in ancient Greece between oracular and non-religious secular decision-making, Vernant suggests that the logic of dialectical and persuasive argument involved in secular discourse is 'wholly alien in its principles and spirit to the divinatory mentality'.⁴ The contrast is equally strongly drawn by Vickers, in his study of occult mentalities in the renaissance,⁵ and the corresponding distinction between what is sometimes called 'analogical-synthetic' as opposed to 'analytical-discursive' thinking is something of a commonplace for the cultural historian.

This distinction is affirmed by some astrologers. Here are two quotations to this effect from leading modern astrological theorists. The first is a trenchant observation from the English astrologer Dennis Elwell:

And wherein lies its [astrology's] power to shake the world? Simply in this: it demonstrates that there is another way of looking at the universe, another angle from which everything takes on a different appearance. Down the centuries astrology has been a stubborn and sometimes tongue-tied witness to the existence of another dimension of reality.⁶

³ The scholarly consensus is that judicial astrology is properly understood as divination. Dorian Greenbaum (2007) p.9, states that 'astrology and oracles partake of divination.' Ann Geneva (1995) p.9, describes judicial astrology as 'a unique divinatory and prognostic art', and while acknowledging overlaps with other disciplines, she is concerned to distinguish astrology's epistemology from those of proto-science or of magic and religion. Alie Bird (2006) by contrast locates astrology in a magico-religious category but equally declares it to be 'indubitably a system of divination' (see for example pp.169,242). For Willis and Curry (2004) p.67, the various categories of horoscopic astrology, including natal astrology, are all 'best understood as divinatory, each in its own way.' There is a striking difference between scholars and practitioners on this issue. Bird observes that it is 'somewhat contentious' within the present-day UK astrological community to describe astrology as a divinatory practice, since most astrologers simply cannot see any connection of their painstaking and learned methods with 'exotic' practices of divination (pp.75-6, 236). Dennis Elwell (1999) p.3, distances astrology from 'hand reading, the Tarot, witchcraft, the I Ching, and the rest of the gypsy band,' a view shared by many practitioners, American and European, ranging from modern psychological astrologers to the hardline traditionalists. The conceptual dilemma faced by modern astrologers should become apparent in the course of this study.

⁴ Vernant (1991) p.306.

⁵ Vickers (1984).

⁶ Elwell (1999) p.4.

This is a statement of radical discontinuity between astrological interpretation and our usual mode of understanding; implicit in this stance is the assumption that the enduring vision of 'another dimension' has been vouchsafed to us by our remote forebears, in this respect wiser than us. The second quotation is from the American astrologer Dane Rudhyar, pioneer of the influential movement known as 'humanistic' or 'person-centered' astrology:

Science deals always essentially with collective factors. But what I consider as 'astrology per se' - astrology as a sui generis thought-discipline - has as its true field individual existential situations ...this distinction is of absolutely capital importance for the astrologer.⁷

Rudhyar's statement is an exact expression of what I have come to recognise as the 'unique case' in divinatory interpretation. It is consistent with the uniqueness and singularity of life as lived, in contrast to the logical generalities required by science. As will become clear in the following discussion, I locate this understanding as a principal component of astrology and divination.

The authors quoted above leave us with a strong polarity, even an antinomy, of modes of thought; on the one side divination, on the other reason, philosophy and science. This raises the question of whether there is any genuine dialogue or complementarity between reason and divinatory revelation. But whatever balance might be struck, we are still faced with the likelihood that divination elevates the exercise of a distinctive pattern of understanding, whether this is a faculty of mind and imagination, or a type of cognition.

If so, then an understanding of divination is hindered when the distinctive nature of this mode or faculty is ignored. Amongst the negative consequences are an ambiguous identification of the intellectual process involved in divination, and an inappropriate application of criteria of rationality drawn from the analytical-discursive mode. In the worst case, the whole range of divinatory practice is put down to a combination of weak thinking and charlatantry. All such misdescriptions lead to an inability to analyse divination beyond a superficial phenomenology of its terminology and its material practices. We are left with the wearying list of '-mancies', but little insight into the intelligence involved in any of them.

The potential for misdescription is equally a weakness amongst modern diviners, who seem content to borrow simplified versions of the prevailing philosophical constructions of their own age, or of a more amenable former age. Divination is not then interpreted in the light of its own phenomena, but is tailored to some extrinsic model. This leads to the curious situation that elaborated theoretical statements made by many

⁷ Rudhyar (1961) p.135.

contemporary diviners are inadequate representations of their own practice. It is scarcely surprising that their theories do not hold water and appear naive or even outrageous to the philosophical mindset of a critic with no relevant experience in the matter.⁸

Arguably the starting point for modern divination scholarship resides in the groundbreaking analysis undertaken by Lucien Lévy-Bruhl of primitive mentality.⁹ His method was nominally sociological but his background was in philosophy, and it is this dimension that seems to give him a breadth of vision, especially in his discussion of the non-Aristotelian, non-syllogistic nature of primitive patterns of thought. His conclusions provide an intellectual framework for the suggestions entertained above, that divination involves a mode that is other than our ordinary everyday understanding of thinking, and does not proceed according to our usual conceptions of logic.

Despite a wide cultural dissemination of his ideas, within anthropology itself Lévy-Bruhl's relevance was overshadowed for much of the twentieth century. His gentlemanly armchair theorising appeared distinctly 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.¹⁰ This goes together with Lévy-Bruhl's description of the primitive mode as *pre-logical*, attracting an unwarranted if understandable charge of ethnocentrism, as if primitives somehow cannot think, where we can. Lévy-Bruhl's initial framing of the concept therefore permits a regressivist interpretation that has never entirely been laid to rest as his theories

⁸ The problem of naive astrology: Alie Bird comments that when it comes when it comes to scientific censure, modern astrology has 'asked for it' (2006) ch.6 p.106.

⁹ 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 of his thought is best approached from the notebooks, which can be used to monitor his earlier conclusions. This is the approach I have adopted here.

¹⁰ For a perspective on early criticisms and a review of the influence of Lévy-Bruhl in anthropology, see C. 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 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 matches Lévy-Bruhl's usage, when it is limited to small-population tribal cultures with mainly pre-literate oral and ritual codes of interrelationship, and with limited technological capacity.

have been taken up. By 'regressivism' I mean a bias of interpretation where the object or category under question is assumed to belong temporally at the beginning of a developmental or evolutionary process, and which, on manifesting later in any individual or subculture, is negatively evaluated as a regression, an atavism or a throwback to the less evolved form.¹¹ A regressive bias is particularly corrosive in the study of divination, but it is even now all too often the first move of scholarship faced with divination in developed cultures; and it is still almost *de rigueur* where contemporary practice is concerned. Lévy-Bruhl himself was sensitive to many of the criticisms, and by the end of his life he was rethinking his definitions, abandoning the idea of the pre-logical. This has enhanced rather than lessened the force of his theory, and his seminal contribution is at last receiving the attention it deserves.

Lévy-Bruhl distances his approach from cognitive psychology and from metaphysics. While heeding his reserve, I suggest that it is precisely in these quite different discourses that his ideas may bear most fruit. However cautiously formulated, their implications are wide-ranging and controversial, since they suggest a challenge to 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 rendered incapable of comprehending the thinking of the primitive, which remains 'refractory to analysis'.¹² Opponents of this view argue that we all think in much the same way, although often defectively; the variety of beliefs and behaviours in primitive cultures is quite understandable by us, once we examine their premises; these can be explained by distinctive 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.¹³ This debate is far from resolved, but Lévy-Bruhl's basic thesis has become widely accepted, especially in the discourse concerning altered states of consciousness.¹⁴

The most important of Lévy-Bruhl's concepts is that of *participation mystique*.¹⁵

¹¹ I will not pursue this exact distinction further here, since in most contexts it is sufficient to expose the implied negative connotation of the concept of 'regression'. Not all interpretations invoking regression need be *ipso facto* faulty.

¹² Lévy-Bruhl (1975) pp.62,68.

¹³ Evans-Pritchard (1981) p.131.

¹⁴ see discussion by Roy Willis in Willis and Curry (2004) pp.142-4.

¹⁵ The word 'participation' is used by Lévy-Bruhl as an abbreviation for *participation mystique*; it is used in this paper with this meaning. Participation understood in this way implies something beyond a simple idea of things (or people) being mutually implicated. There is a degree of

This covers a multiplicity of behaviours and beliefs which never failed to exasperate and confound the European missionaries and administrators visited upon the reciprocally perplexed natives. It is a fundamental 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 whereby 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.¹⁶ The participatory significance of any given entity may change or even be reversed as circumstances change.¹⁷ 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 to be a simple matter for us to envisage participation as a strong type of emotional and affective association. Who does not have such an experience? We can readily extrapolate from this experience to the intermediary condition of folk superstition and sympathetic magic believed in even today by superstitious people. There is an abundant literature from the classical period to indicate the forms of this thinking. Through these intermediaries we might hope to project our imagination into the mindset 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 its consequences have 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 association. Instead participation is *the way in which*

ambiguity in Lévy-Bruhl as to whether participation is in our terms necessarily supernatural (and therefore 'mystical'). I suspect ambiguity goes with the territory and is not wholly capable of being resolved.

¹⁶ see for example Lévy-Bruhl (1923) p.117.

¹⁷ 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. His structuralist method shows its semiological potential in an interpretation of the meaning of the reversal as an expression of the polarity distance-closeness for two different elements of the hunt.

there are objects for seeing, and there is no entity apart from its immediately given participations.

In the eyes of his critics Lévy-Bruhl has confused a readiness for affective association, characteristic of the religious and magical beliefs found in early and primitive cultures, for a different mode of thinking. However, the ramifications of the theory help to build a convincing case. Participation is directly related to a cardinal observation, that *primitive mentality is not abstractive*. In taking up an entity as an entity we see it already in relation to its predicates and qualities, which constitute a set of logical relations defining the entity. It is exactly because of this habit of our own thinking that we will be misled by applying to participation a conventional understanding of the *pars pro toto* of sympathetic magic. 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 error of thinking lies not as such in the logical relation, but in the magical efficacy granted to that particular instance of the logical relation. For Lévy-Bruhl, however, the primitive has understood the relationship directly. Strictly speaking, there is not even a relation, because that would imply two things standing apart but brought together. For primitive mentality, they are not 'apart' in the way they are for us. We might also say of this participation that it is *intuitive*, without the mediation of the logic of categories so familiar in our way of thinking. My use of the word 'intuition' is dictated by a forward view to Part II of this study and the cognitive pairing of intuitive-abstractive from medieval philosophy. Provided we are wary of the excess baggage these terms carry, and provided we take account of the potent affectivity that Lévy-Bruhl attaches to his use of the word 'mystical', there remains a broad overlap with a non-technical use of 'intuition', as well as with the more specific philosophical usage I will discuss shortly.

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 along the lines of enumeration in the manner we take for granted, since 'one is not a number like the other numbers'. 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 a theme of this paper, 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. But this will, I hope, become clearer as we proceed.

Unsurprisingly, practices of omen-reading and divination are 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 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.'¹⁸

'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'; it suggests identity. Elsewhere he expresses the same theme as bi-presence, dual-units, and consubstantiality.¹⁹ One consequence of the principle, however named, is that the conceptual distinction we readily make between signs and causes may be quite foreign to the primitive. The omen and the agency intending it become identified, or 'consubstantial', and the omen is seen as the cause, or part of the cause, of the event that it also portends. It follows that in averting the omen, the event it signifies is averted.²⁰ Equally, the making of divination is indivisibly the making of the event being divined.²¹

I will now turn to a further aspect of participation that advances our 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, and 'each among them is *separate*':

Participation has reality only in so far as it is felt by an individual (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*, localized in space and time, or better said which has its own space and time.²²

¹⁸ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) p.144.

¹⁹ Lévy-Bruhl (1923) p.197. My insert is in parenthesis.

²⁰ see for example Lévy-Bruhl (1975) pp.69-71, where he describes 'a concrete consubstantiality which our languages lack a word to express'.

²¹ see for example Lévy-Bruhl (1923) pp.143-8. This has significant consequences for any comparison between pre-literate and literate forms of divination.

²² Lévy-Bruhl (1975) p.59.

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'.²³ 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 mystical intentional action, communication or warning. In order to convey this in our conceptual terms, this may be termed the *address* of the omen.²⁴ 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. By corollary, in seeking an omen or in responding to the spirit-world from which an omen has emanated, the primitive in turn addresses the volitional agency: prayers, appeals and imprecations are offered up to named spirits and ancestors.

A polarised statement of the problem we have in understanding primitive divination, such as the first of the two quotations from Lévy-Bruhl given above, is more characteristic of his earlier work, but such statements retain their force against a tendency to misrepresentation into which the modern conceptual attitude may easily be led. However, there need not be an 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.'²⁵ This widening of scope suggests an approach to divinatory phenomena wherever they manifest, even though these phenomena are sustained in some cultures and subcultures and channelled or repressed in others. Where the abstractive mode becomes dominant, we expect the collective patterns shaping and reshaping primitive mentality to show complex variations, differing with each culture and historical epoch. Nevertheless, if Lévy-Bruhl's supposition is correct, then it provides a basis for describing the thought process involved in divination across times and cultures.

We are therefore able to pose basic questions to divinatory practice, historical and contemporary, primitive and sophisticated: does divination entail an altered mode of thinking, a switch from an everyday orientation to the 'mystical mentality'? Does it conform to a non-conventional logic, or is it a-logical? We should set this against an alternative formulation: that divination as a distinctive activity involves ordinary cognitions, thought processes, and logic, based on the beliefs, reasonable or otherwise, of practitioners. We can see that this debate is of a piece with the dispute over participation;

²³ Lévy-Bruhl (1923) p.142

²⁴ This is my term, not Lévy-Bruhl's.

²⁵ Lévy-Bruhl (1975) p.101.

only the theorist who accepts at least the feasibility of Lévy-Bruhl's description of participation is likely to accept the possibility of a similar 'mystical' process in divination.

The balance of evidence from serious researchers in this field suggests that divination does indeed involve a mode of understanding that appears to be inadequately described in our conventional or scientific understanding of mental process. It resists our definitions. Whether this mode is 'extra-ordinary' is debatable, since it may be a general function of human understanding; but whatever it is, it resists our usual categories.

A major contribution to the debate is the concept of the 'cognitive continuum', developed by Barbara Tedlock on the basis of studies by several anthropologists. Tedlock observes that descriptions given by diviners commonly distinguish distinct modes of knowing through divination, located along a cognitive spectrum. The Zulu *sangoma* Sikhumbana explains to the researcher 'that there are three main methods of divining: through the spirits, with bones, and with the head'.²⁶ According to Tedlock, divination through the spirits is *intuitive*, although medicines are employed to induce the process of direct communication with these entities. At the other end of the spectrum is a rational and *inductive* interpretation of the arrangement of bones manipulated by 'chance', also medicine-aided. 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 or a 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.²⁷

A significant feature of Barbara Tedlock's approach is that she can offer a theoretical distinction of modes, in keeping with Lévy-Bruhl's hypothesis, while giving them complementary rather than contradictory functions. This in turn allows us to locate the common themes in a spectrum of divinatory practices, from the near-mechanical selection of lots to full trance possession, with guesswork, metaphorical narrative, and creative imagination moving back and forth along the centre of the spectrum. In my view this is an advance on Lévy-Bruhl's formulation, and it matches a body of evidence from both researchers and diviners.

This formulation illuminates hermeneutic descriptions of astrological practice. Observation 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:

²⁶ Tedlock (2001) p.193, quoting Kohler.

²⁷ Tedlock (2001) pp.191-2.

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.²⁸

Speculative interpretation involves rational inference employing conventional categories, embodied in the textbook interpretations of horoscopic factors; it is clearly distinguishable from realised interpretation, which carries a distinct affectivity or psychic charge. This latter can manifest as a hunch or intuition, and astrologers 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 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 process involved in any one single divination of the category described by Sikhumbana as 'divining with the head'. This category includes all sophisticated inductive divinatory forms, of which judicial astrology is a leading example.

It is worth taking an overview to ask how this primary datum of divination becomes culturally obscured. If we follow Lévy-Bruhl then the answer is that in our thinking about the world we employ abstraction, yet participation is not an abstractive mode. The cultural privileging of intellectual abstraction therefore correlates with the occluding of participation, the weakening of a sense of address, and a consequent transmutation in how we represent the 'mystical' to ourselves. This is neither a good thing nor a bad thing, it appears to be the process of culture itself. With the learning of abstraction, what we recognise as scientific knowledge goes from strength to strength, but participatory knowing retreats into the shadows of unreason. This knowing is not wholly beyond our reach, however, since the intellectually sophisticated modern diviner has a considerable advantage in coping with these subtle ideas. Equally, they are readily assimilated by individuals who are not diviners but who embody what Carl Jung aptly terms the *symbolic attitude*.²⁹

There is, however, an enervating legacy of positivist nay-saying to overcome before we are able to 'read' divination, primitive or sophisticated. Until quite recent times, the possibility of a truth-value to divination, and what that 'truth' might mean, has scarcely been entertained as a topic for anthropological investigation outside the safely contained remit of the ethnography of distant tribes. And apart from Jungian and post-Jungian thought, modern psychology remains a dead letter for divination. It is worth noting at this point the understandable temptation to equate Lévy-Bruhl's primitive mentality with the

²⁸ Cornelius (1994) pp.282-3; (2003) p.293.

²⁹ Jung (1976) section 51.

concept of primary process as understood by Freud and psychoanalysis, and anthropology has been influenced along these lines.³⁰ This equation remains tempting as we move to the cognitive pairing of intuitive and abstractive. However, primitive mentality cannot be simply equated with primary process, nor can the model of dual cognition discussed in Part II be squared with Freud's primary and secondary psychic process; there are potentially illuminating cross-correspondences deserving of investigation, but these are partial and not definitive. A reduction to the blind instinctual drives of the Freudian *id* does violence to divination, of which any sustained pursuit is treated as evidence of feeble intellectual and moral development.³¹

The problem of abstraction is compounded for the diviners themselves; how could they stand apart? It has far-reaching consequences for them, since primitive divination directly involves the 'mystical' and the spirit-world. Once we have learned abstraction, we leave the primitive orientation behind, and to the degree that divinatory participation can no longer be thought, its ground is readily captured by abstractive explanation. This finds its expression in a reframing of the phenomenon within universal and objectively neutral laws that are believed to produce omens, oracles or showings. When the single pole of abstraction is substituted for the divinatory continuum then reframing becomes reduction and misaligns theory and practice. The unique case, the living experience of divination, is lost - not in practice, but in the theory that re-presents that practice. This misalignment is the single most debilitating hindrance to reflection, clouding theory from within practice, and at a certain point of development threatening to undermine the practice itself.³²

This is manifest in astrology, in its complex historical relationship with an objective construction of the the physical and observable cosmos, established in Greek science and interpreted for us by Ptolemy. The dilemma for the astrologers is that their cosmos is an inspired aesthetic and spiritual creation that has suffered polar abstraction in a non-divinatory epistemology. By deeply ingrained instinct and training the astrologers are understandably loathe to give up a theoretical construction which has, after all, served them well over the centuries. Even for the contemporary practitioner this construction unceasingly recreates the necessary conditions for the divinatory unique case - that is, it demonstrably keeps working as far as astrologers and their clients are concerned. But we have now debunked the physical theories of planetary dynamics worked out by Ptolemy

³⁰ Tedlock (2001 p.191) referring to earlier studies, says that 'everywhere it occurs, divination involves complementary modes of cognition associated with primary process and secondary process thinking or knowing.'

³¹ Freud (1973) p.70 declares that 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 The misappropriation of theory, obscuring practice both for the outside observer and for practitioners themselves, is a key observation of Pierre Bourdieu (1997).

and followed throughout the medieval period. It follows that theories of astrological influence, sympathy, or correspondence coterminous with that physical cosmos are sundered from their epistemological foundation at the same time as they are divorced from intuitive intellectual cognition. Despite attempts to move between literal and symbolic explanations, no other epistemological foundation is consistently understood by astrologers. This is why they remain tongue-tied.

Is it possible to rescue something from this wreckage of misperceptions? The task is to build on the work already achieved and articulate the intellectual process of astrology and divination without relying on regression and psychological reduction. We also need a broader perspective than conventional anthropology has so far provided. One possible move is to seek a more philosophical order of discourse. With this end in view, and with the unique case as a guiding thread, I now turn to a brief, but I hope sufficient, introduction to some relevant observations bequeathed to us by medieval scholasticism.

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