

## Geoffrey Cornelius – Interview (Recorded 10<sup>th</sup> July 1998)

*With minor revisions, and footnotes, from Geoffrey – October 2010*

*Interviewer: Garry Phillipson*

### Part One: Astrology and Philosophy

#### 1.1

Q: In the interview you did with the *Mountain Astrologer*, you said, “... a big issue arises here as to whether the practise of astrology, in and of itself, is enough if not informed by some deep, guiding philosophy. This is a big question.” (from *The Mountain Astrologer* Oct/Nov 1996)

Do you have an answer?

A: I deliberately left it as a big question in that interview with Mary Plumb. To move a little around the topic: it interests me how various astrologers who have been creative for me, seem themselves to require some other structure – philosophy, spirituality – to support them. That’s clear with Alan Leo, who felt that astrology had to be with theosophy. His position was that astrology would be hollow *without* this guiding philosophy. One can see the influence of theosophical ideas on Rudhyar, and the whole humanistic tradition. Then we see the support that depth psychology has given the modern tradition – it’s as if astrology on its own isn’t enough for its practitioners. That’s a common theme.

Going back historically, you can see the idea that Platonic principles underlie astrology for many of the Renaissance astrologers. So, quite apart from my own involvement, my remarks reflect a problem that astrology does have through and through.

I take the view that astrology is a form of omen-reading, or reading of signs. Once one takes that view, the question of that which is *signing* becomes immensely important; what is it that is giving the sign? At that point, the sign itself is not sufficient *in itself* for the situation that one is in: something is being shown to us, there is that which is showing. So once you move away from the idea of astrology as a natural structure of the universe (in the form of the medieval science view of it, perhaps, or the Ptolemaic view, or the spiritual science view of astrology) and you put it in this form of intelligence, or thought, or mind – at that point you cannot simply be content that the *showings* do occur, because the *showings* are *intending*. So the intention behind them is the key – either the intention of the practitioner, or the intention of that which seems to be showing you something.

So I’d move the question around, to say that the very phenomenon of astrology which we experience places us in a position of relating to some other unknown, which is manifesting in the sign of the astrology. Hence a simple discussion of the technical nature of the sign of the astrology is never sufficient; it would remain hollow.

That's partial, but it begins to open up an answer to your question while still skirting round it at quite a distance. You'll have to find ways of opening it up by asking further questions; keep pursuing it until you get the answer you want.

1.2

Q: Well, I think it's a question about Life, the Universe and Everything – and as such, is too big to ever be completely answered....

A: Too big to take in one gulp. But one can begin to lay out parts of the problem. In *The Moment of Astrology* the whole approach I was adopting was to move in sideways, moving round, taking bites at things without saying 'Here is the answer!'

It's important to say that I'm resistant to the approach which believes that there is *one* answer. One is automatically suspicious about that attempt. That is why I couldn't say to you, 'Here is the answer – here is that which gives the final underlying meaning or ground to what astrology is' – that approach must be viewed with some suspicion.

I'm convinced that theorists in astrology have fallen short when they have tried to reach for the ultimate ground of astrology, or the thing that will answer the astrology/science debate. It isn't to be taken in that direct way, and previous attempts have failed. So let's move a little more circumspectly – or, deferentially – in the face of this.

1.3

Q: Recognising limitations is important, it seems to me: the rational mind is partial, what is in question here is the totality – and the totality can't fit into the partial.

A: No indeed. No one answer is sufficient. This doesn't make satisfying or easy reading, of course.

1.4

Q: In *Astrology for Beginners* it says, "divination is an act of religion";<sup>1</sup> and in *The Moment of Astrology* you quote Lilly - "The more holy thou art, and more near to God, the purer judgement thou shalt give".<sup>2</sup>

There are two different things, aren't there? The technical ability of the astrologer, and – whatever one wants to call it – their level of awareness, or spiritual evolution (the terms are all a bit unsatisfactory). Do you see those as being equally important?

A: Now, you said there are two separate things – the technical state of the astrologer and the state of the soul, or state of mind, involved. In many ways I accept St Augustine's statement – where he attacks astrology and says, 'when astrologers give answers that are true, it is not because of the technique, because there is nothing in

---

<sup>1</sup> Geoffrey Cornelius, Maggie Hyde & Chris Webster *Astrology for Beginners* (1996: Icon) p.10.

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey Cornelius *The Moment of Astrology – Origins in Divination* (1994: Penguin/Arkana) p.308 revised edn. 2003: Wessex Astrologer) p.310, quoting Lilly's 'Epistle to the Student in Astrology' *Christian Astrology* (1647).

that technique; it is from some other agency that the answer is true'. I think there's a great perception in that particular line of criticism of astrology.

Symbolic perception appears to me to be a natural human faculty, or faculty of mind; and all the technical superstructures that then are built up around it advance that perception not one inch. It's like saying, 'how can you improve your sight?' One sees, and everything we do around that might complicate the act of seeing. Or it's like consciousness itself – there can be no technique of that. Of course, for ourselves, we articulate our understanding – because we have to – and that is where a model of what we do builds up, and one builds up one's technique and one's theories.

But astrology isn't, fundamentally, a technical problem. I know that's a radical position. When techniques are employed in astrology and something becomes illuminated, one has found a way of giving a vessel to something that is already there; but this 'something that is already there' – it's *that* that is required, and any amount of techniques aren't the same as *that*. So there is, then, the awareness of the astrologer of this very thing, when the astrologer is using techniques. That is what is required.

I'm not saying 'remove all technique'. Technique is a human construct; it would be like saying, 'don't be human any more, just be pure mind'. You live in circumstances, and the circumstances produce the things that you do, and you articulate yourself in that circumstance. The technique is an articulation of yourself in some way.

In fact, the technical structure of astrology – doing progressions, organising things – could be better seen as a ritual form than as a technical form. So I read the sixth house as ritual, a craft, rather than its modern sense of 'a means to an end'. When one asks 'what is the correct ritual I should use in a particular circumstance', the answer is, 'whatever seems to you to be the right thing to do'.

When one studies the working of astrologers and astrology, one sees that the technique cannot answer for it. It is what the astrologer is *doing* – which they then articulate through their technique – that is the key. So I don't make the separation mentioned earlier. In my view, a fall occurs in astrology where the technique becomes seen as the carrier of the truth of whatever astrology is; it's the other way round.

I've got a particular problem here, because even saying this isn't appropriate all the time - I don't teach basic classes in astrology and say this! I teach classes and say, 'Do your progressions, do this, and this, and then you will achieve this result'. I say this, even though it isn't the ultimate truth of the thing; it *is* the necessary thing to say in those circumstances.

This type of discussion, at this profound level, has to be taken discreetly. It's an interesting conversation – I think it must be because you're a Buddhist, so you're asking me Buddhist questions. And your position here would be as interesting to hear as mine would be. I very much like what I have read and understood in Buddhism of the concept of 'skilful means'. That is necessary, both in practising and teaching

astrology or symbolism in general. So, on some occasions you will talk as if (this) and on some occasions you will talk as if (that).

So I say, 'You must master your techniques – that is absolutely essential. You learn this, you do this, that is the form, that is the practice you do'. At the same time, take it one step further, remove the attachment to technique, and realise the other source that appears to be at work here.

It's very complicated.<sup>3</sup> I search for ways of articulating it; I'm not articulating it successfully to you. I struggle to find ways of bringing it into correct understanding – and then, perhaps, bringing it into words for others. For me, some of *The Moment of Astrology* represented an exercise in doing that in a form that would be readable, and understandable, and truthful in its way. But this is difficult. So, when it comes up in conversation at this level of questioning it's challenging and difficult to talk about.

1.5

Q: Since you mentioned Buddhist thought – one of the devices which the Buddha used in teaching was a list of five faculties which had to be present in order for an activity to succeed – be it meditation or anything else. Two of the five are: investigation and faith, and the point is that each needs to be developed, *and* they have to be in the correct balance with one another; too much investigation and one has scepticism and doubt, which can undermine any activity; too much faith is blind faith, a complete lack of intelligent analysis. It's a useful way, it seems to me, of looking at how best to approach astrology.

A: Yes, astrology desperately needs the sort of teaching you are putting forward here. I agree with you, that's an absolutely correct insight. Getting the balance right for people entering into symbolism is a subtle thing to do. As a teacher, one blunders all the time in these things. But I can't bear the blind faith position in astrology, I really can't; I'd rather have an over-critical approach. Because that which is involved is powerful in itself, great distortions occur when there is no thought and intelligence brought to bear.

I feel that in the whole of our western tradition (this is a vast, sweeping statement I know) astrology hasn't found the balance it requires. It found it in its way in the medieval period, because it was integrated in a wonderful cosmological model and yes, astrology did have its place and I really mustn't talk against that observation. But as astrology has come forward into our era out of that background, it does not know what its place is, and its practitioners seem to have to take on a blind faith position about it in order to even hold the thing at all. As a practice, there aren't the intellectual vehicles around it that allow thoughtfulness. We're lost, and that is why we do look hopelessly to these other ways of thought – like theosophy, and psychology – to try to support us. It is a major dilemma.

Reverting back to the first question you put to me: I do see the need to take the move into thoughtfulness (this way of looking at things, which questions where the symbol has come from) but we haven't really found the move that could carry astrology for

---

<sup>3</sup> The complication lies not in *practice* but in expressing adequate *theory*.

us. None of the things we look to are up to the task, so there is a problem for modern astrology.

As you will have detected, there is a divide of attitude to astrology here, because many astrologers (and they are good, successful astrologers) will resist the position I have put, because they believe that astrology has in itself the power to bring this move to pass – and that the type of questioning which I'm suggesting, and which is implied in what you say, is somehow unnecessary or even undermining for astrology. It's an interesting division of thought.

On these lines I was struck by the divide between Sepharial and Alan Leo at the turn of the century.<sup>4</sup> I would like to research this more.

Sepharial was a brilliant astrologer, successful in lots of ways. He had a theosophical background, he had an occult understanding. But he completely disagreed with Alan Leo, and they became vituperative towards each other in journals before the first world war. The basis of the disagreement was this: Sepharial said, if modern practitioners develop their practice of astrology, we will find – in a few years – astrology used by actuaries (it's going to come into insurance, because it will be obvious that your length of life will be discernible through astrology) – and we should work to bring about this application of astrology.

Alan Leo said that this was to fundamentally misunderstand the nature of astrology, and that it would not turn itself to that kind of use. It simply was not of the nature of astrology to do that. Sepharial attacked Alan Leo for a kind of spiritual romanticism which denied the showing of astrology, and they divided completely on this point. Alan Leo says: there is some mystery which doesn't allow astrology to be shown in that way; Sepharial says to Leo, this is ridiculous – it is something given to us to *show*; we should bring our art, our science, up to the point where it will show itself to the world. Why are you holding us up with your half-baked mysticism?

So you see that divide cropping up – but only among astrologers who have built up a certain fire for astrology in themselves. Often, astrology remains so muddled that this dispute wouldn't come into clarity. But it is there, and it divides opinion greatly. In the same vein how come renaissance magicians and philosophers part company with craft astrologers? How come they attack astrologers as stupid, petty ogres? Craft astrology has divided itself, both from science (obvious enough) and in some curious way from spirituality, which is serious.

#### 1.6

Q: Yet (as an example) if somebody asks, 'Should I invest in this business', and the astrologer says to them, 'No – don't invest, it's going to go to the wall because there are a lot of hidden debts', and that comes true, then that might prompt the person to question, 'how is this possible, what *is* this universe in which such things are possible?' And therefore such a reading has the potential to act at just a profound a level as any psychological or spiritual application of astrology.

---

<sup>4</sup> i.e. 1900.

A: Absolutely. I'd like to make something clear. Although I am, in a way, a 'mystic' in the way that I have defined it, probably a half-baked mystic like Alan Leo, I also believe that the craft and practice of astrology means working in the marketplace, with all of human beings' practical concerns. Astrology must bring to bear on practical matters. 'Spirituality' doesn't mean transcending to some remote region. This is where I part company with elements in humanistic or transpersonal astrology that remove our concern away from ordinary life. I believe there are these other regions, but unless astrology is firmly grounded in people's concerns, it will be of no use. That is where the person's heart is; they are worried about their business, their money. It is only if that is addressed, that you can then ask them, 'in what universe is your money and your business placed?'

That's a dilemma. Astrology is both profoundly mystical – the universe it points to is of an extraordinary nature – and it must be rooted in the most ordinary of human concerns as well. In that sense – I don't know if you were hinting in this direction with what you said, I think you were – the implication is that we are talking about a practice which is a way, it is a path; it attempts, in its crude way,<sup>5</sup> to do what some of the great paths in religion are also doing – bringing human life, in some way, open to the universe. That's why I see astrology as having a 'path character'.

But I come back to the first question, which I was unable to answer for you. There isn't really an adequate expression for that path character, because of the historical constraints in our tradition.

I'll tell you an anecdote. Maggie and I have friends who are Buddhists, and I have always been sensitive to Buddhist ideas, and attracted to Buddhism. I remember coming across a passage of text which said that astrology is one of the 'useful arts', as is weaving. That was the place of astrology in many traditional Buddhist societies – it would be a useful art. I was irritated, and thought, 'that's typical – this description doesn't reveal the path character of astrology; this too is only seeing astrology as a set of techniques that can be fruitfully applied to some particular concern, rather than seeing that it actually demands the totality of 'whatever-this-thing-is' for astrology to exist at all. So I've even got a resistance to traditional religious attitudes, even in cultures that do accept astrology.

1.7

Q: As I see it, what astrology can do is to knock on the door of the ego and say, 'look – you aren't really separate; there is this universe, in which there is meaningfulness, there is intelligence expressing through events, and ultimately the individual is not apart from the universe, but is a part of it'. What I haven't found in astrology is any kind of methodology for systematically breaking down this belief in the separateness of the self.

A: Well – there you go, you've stated it and this should be an important part of the transcript. Yes, you've put that well. So we're both agreeing that the implication of astrology is this – er – *thing*. I'd probably use slightly different terms, but we really are in agreement. It shows that things are not as they seem in relation to who we

---

<sup>5</sup> Crudeness arises from the inadequacy of theory, not from limits of astrology's potential practice.

think we are, and how we define being a human being. It's not as it seems, something else cuts across – and that 'something' stirs people up and changes them if they take it seriously. And yet, nowhere in the textbooks on astrology is this matter discussed, or taught, or given names, or dealt with. Astrology stays rooted in its interpretative text, and to some degree in its technical level only. So I'm in complete agreement with you on that.

I've been influenced by contact with the *I Ching*. Most of the group who formed the original Company of Astrologers really had been influenced in their understanding of divination and symbols by the practice of the *I Ching*. I have always placed an expectation or demand on my astrology, of something that is articulated in the literature around the *I Ching* as a form of divination. So I tend to treat the *I Ching* as a model of how this divinatory form of the sign is incorporated and taken up into a much more - *transcendent* programme, I suppose you would say. I shouldn't use a word like 'transcendent'! But I mean by this a programme that does take on the whole ethical, moral and spiritual nature of the human being, and clearly has a path-orientation. The *I Ching* really is unique in world culture, probably, for having done that. One does see that attempt being made in other divinatory forms – it happens in the tarot, when it's linked with kabbala. One sees that attempt amongst tarot people – they don't just stay rooted in what the cards say and how you make a reading. You do commonly see the attempt to give it its greater philosophical form.

Oddly, in astrology, it is taken for granted that there is a greater spiritual/philosophical form, and Plato is vaguely invoked, without anything being done about it. Not well invoked, either. It's taken for granted, as if it is there, just by doing our astrology.

Having said that, I'll say something paradoxical. There is something which does, I think, unite all who have tasted astrology; there is something about doing it that is, in itself, important to do. The practice of astrology is important to do, *as practice*. Just doing it. So, having said all these other things, going on and on about this need for greater understanding, it's also essential that one does keep alive symbolism – because something can at least move and show, by doing this.

I feel that astrologers believe that there is something good and holy in the very act of doing their astrology – they won't often articulate this, but they really do believe this is so. I too, think this recognition is – on the whole – true.

1.8

Q: It pulls one out into a broader frame of reference.

A: It does, doesn't it? It's amazing how otherwise locked human situations, where people get themselves into a trap in how they are thinking about things, are lifted by the use of a symbol. Even the most elementary piece of symbolism will suddenly produce that light in a situation, and laughter. Even in grim situations, seeing a symbol for it, you can laugh. You say, 'Ah, yes...' and can laugh.

1.9

Q: Hmm, there's the story in Maggie's book about ancient Egypt where, if someone was bitten by a snake, a priest would read him a story about a god who was bitten by a snake, as a cure.<sup>6</sup>

A: Yes, that's right. That takes you to another level altogether, and that is healing. That observation is from Jung. I think that *you* have to write a book on astrology, Garry, using – if you like - all your transcribers, but the point being for you to begin to reveal these questions; that's what it sounds like to me. You're asking pertinent and central questions... but I mustn't try to flatter you!

## **Part Two: Practice, Biography and Major Influences**

2.1

Q: When you look at a chart – say you're doing a natal chart reading for somebody – what techniques do you look at?

A: With clients, I try to encourage work that is based on current decision-making. I'm interested, where possible, in taking up a horary – but then I'll use horary with natal, and where the horary isn't clearly wanting to show, then I'll certainly use natal.

I'm not generally willing to do a whole life-reading, or a psychological reading – it's more, 'have you got a problem, and what's the problem?' and we can go into it, and then I tell them that, with the sort of astrology I do, it might be taken from the time that we are asking – i.e. horary – and that I'd also like the birth details; and then I'll look at the birth horoscope.

I normally work back from the horary to the birth horoscope, and on any serious matter I wouldn't want to simply rely on a horary – I'd want to see it confirmed in the natal chart. So, I do work with the natal chart, but trying always to avoid simply 'giving a reading'; I never want to do that.

I work basically with secondary progressions. I'll get a couple of dates off the client, if I'm going to do a piece of work where I'm going to study the natal chart thoroughly for the current situation they're involved in. I'll ask for a couple of important dates, perhaps relating particularly to the issue they're talking about (but if not, any dates of importance) in order to confirm my understanding of the chart.

My method is standard and conventional. I bring transits in on top of the progressions – I don't normally employ many other techniques. I might occasionally employ a solar return, but really I use a basic method. Nevertheless if the situation is highly focused, and it emerges in a form that can be taken as a horary, I will make a horary.

I did attempt for a period to make a straight horary practice, but that didn't really work. It was imposing upon the client to try to do that. In my view, horaries are occasional phenomena, of great power and interest on those occasions where they do wish to show – but often one must have recourse to the natal chart.

---

<sup>6</sup> Maggie Hyde *Jung and Astrology* (1992: Aquarian / Thorsons) p.68.

There has been a phase I think, in the recovery of the tradition, where people were trying to force horary to be the whole story, their main method. In my view, that isn't really satisfactory.

## 2.2

Q: And yet – this is one of the themes of *The Moment of Astrology* – you also believe that too much emphasis has come to be placed on natal astrology, and the idea of one moment where rails are laid down for the life to run along. Is there a balance to be struck here? And if so, how?

A: In *The Moment of Astrology* I am attempting to counter the Ptolemaic *theory* usually taken to justify natal astrology, namely the idea of 'seed moments' stamped out by the heavens, rather than the actual practice of interpreting natal horoscopes. I use horary as a means of challenging this theory - but not to challenge the practice of nativities, which I would hope to liberate from false theory and determinism.

Horary therefore breaks up Ptolemaic theory; and likewise as a matter of educating astrologers, horary and other 'katarchic' forms, properly understood and practised, soon break up the prevailing idea of determinism and throw the astrologer back onto the here-and-now as shown in symbolism.

In work with clients, the immediate nature of horary allows a more direct questioning of motive in a particular concrete situation than is usually available to the natal astrologer, and helps to strengthen the idea of choice, which may otherwise be subtly subverted by a character-determinism which can be implied by even quite humanistic approaches to the natal chart. The right balance depends on the client as well as the astrologer - but this balance becomes impossible if the astrologer is still clinging to a type of pseudo-causality from the natal chart.

## 2.3

Q: Who do you admire in the astrological world – past and present?

A: The present is always difficult isn't it, if you talk about contemporary figures. Past figures are considerably easier. In terms of the craft, the method of astrology, definitely Lilly. Derek Appleby was a great influence on all of us in the Company – a tremendous influence on my horary, so he's definitely someone who has moved my astrology. I suppose I came up, broadly, in that solid middle-ground of English astrology that comes through people like Carter – so that's where I drew my main practical approach to astrology; Carter, Ron Davison – their influence is clearly there, behind me.

After that, discovering Lilly brought quite a revelation about the method of astrology. I experienced that a little, also, in looking at Morin de Villefranche; I recognised a clarity and method in the symbolism that I admired, and tried to follow a little bit.

In terms of ideas, and thinking about astrology – as opposed to the craft of astrology – that introduces another range of figures. Marc Edmund Jones has been quite an influence in terms of one further step in thinking about what you are doing in

astrology (actually, in terms of method, too, though it's sometimes difficult to follow). And Rudhyar was important for me to cut my teeth on, in terms of thinking about astrology.

Then there are people of my generation. It's difficult, because they haven't so directly influenced me, I've responded to things that they have done in certain ways, but it's less of a direct influence. Dennis Elwell's astrology I much respect, although I disagree with him philosophically. I so love that move of symbolism, the pure joy of symbol; Carter had that, and Dennis Elwell definitely has it in great measure.

I admire various astrologers for various things; Rob Hand for his dedication to the task he has set himself, and his range – I absolutely admire the work of Rob Hand (though once again, I do disagree with him on important things).<sup>7</sup> One other person who was very influential at a level of understanding what technique was all about in astrology was Chester Kemp.

Then we go to the inspiration that came from the *I Ching* and the Chinese philosophers – rather branching out beyond the realm of astrology at this point, but Confucius has been a great influence!

Of course I'm missing out a completely seminal character – Jung. Very directly in terms of understanding what astrology is about, Jung was an important influence. It was the same for me and a number of friends in the Company – we then had to get out from under Jung's shadow, and for me, discovering a little of the philosophy of Heidegger allowed me to escape from the overwhelming power of Jung. He balanced it out somewhat. But I'd regard Jung as an overriding influence lying behind virtually any serious-minded person in western astrology.<sup>8</sup>

## 2.4

Q: How did you get interested in astrology in the first place?

A: It's revealing, this sort of thing, isn't it?

Do you know the book by L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between*, and the film that was made of it? There's a little boy of about twelve in it; he's on his summer holidays. He acts as a go-between in a disastrous love-affair. And he's into making little symbols and little bits of magic, and that's all part of the plot – because things go wrong for his symbols and magic. It's an interesting motif, because I think that a certain type of male consciousness, at a certain age, gets interested in the symbolic, the occult and spooky things. I did; I made little symbol systems for myself, and did all sorts of things – I tried scrying, all sorts of magicky, telepathy, weirdy things. I discovered the tarot quite early, and I made my own tarot symbols, tried my own systems – I was into that trip early. I can detect it in someone immediately; that thought-form, that

---

<sup>7</sup> I should observe, in deference to Rob Hand, that I have come to see that my disagreement has been more apparent and circumstantial than essential and substantial.

<sup>8</sup> Concerning Jung: this comment was extreme, and would, understandably, be resisted by many astrologers. It would be better to say that whether his models and approach are accepted or rejected, Jung's influence, and the challenge he raises, can hardly be ignored by any serious modern thinker in astrology.

state of mind. I can now see it quite clearly, and see how that thought-form actually develops into full-blown occult systems.

So I was always into that type of symbolic world. Of the formal symbol systems, I suppose that tarot was the first I got interested in. I did quite a bit of tarot-reading – while other people were going out being normal teenagers, I was into this sort of thing! I got interested then in kabbala through tarot, and that's when I read Dion Fortune and such things.

Like many earnest young people, I was seeking for the meaning of life. That's when, around 19-20, Jung came in. I was totally blown away by Jung, who seemed to encompass all of this area completely. I'd come across astrological symbolism, and realised that there was such a thing, but it made no impact on me. I then encountered the *I Ching*, and got interested in all the surrounding philosophy of the *I Ching*, tried to read up a bit of Chinese philosophy. So that's the background, before I ever got involved in astrology.

I was on holiday in Wales – at my Buddhist friend Jane Hope's little cottage in Wales – and there was a girl there who did astrology; she had an ephemeris, and asked for my date and time of birth. She said, 'Oh yes, your Moon's in Capricorn as well as your Sun...', and began to say a few things about my Moon, and something else in my chart. I was quite surprised at what she said, it seemed perceptive (very simple, the things she was doing). My response was absolutely dreadful, actually – I remember thinking, 'Hmm – that's interesting, if *she* can do that, I certainly can...' That was the moment. I don't have the exact time or date, though I could research it and one day probably will.

That really was the moment; I thought, 'Yes, I must look at this astrology'. And then I did what a certain type of intense young man does - I plunged in, consumed everything. Within six months I was studying Indian astrology, I was studying house systems, the astronomy of it, techniques... that sort of total thing that you do, just totally wrapped up in it.

I did ask the *I Ching* whether I should study astrology – it gave me a guarded response. Typical really for the *I Ching* – 'proceed with caution'.

Then I encountered the Astrological Lodge, and started going to their meetings – that's where I really started to talk astrology, and imbibe it. Chester was there, very active; Ron Davison was the president at that time, and his little book (*Astrology*) was important. For a generation of people that was an influential book; I've heard that amongst many people, over in the States as well, because of the lovely straightforward simplicity of his readings. It was beautifully laid out – he had tables of each of the planets in each of the signs, so you could read it quite quickly. Slightly different approach for each of the planets, appropriate to the planet – like, for Saturn, there would be a category 'What you fear'; very pithy. That was the first strong interpretative text I read which made real sense to me. I could read my chart from it.

I had the experience of many people, when I first did my horoscope – I remember seeing some key placings in my chart, and I was so struck, I thought, ‘My God, how true that is’. I had that quickly off one or two factors in my natal chart.

So I got involved in the Lodge – I started in ’71, and was at the Lodge within a few months, and before I knew what I was doing I’d enrolled in the committee. Within three years, because of other moves in my life, I got the chance of teaching in adult education and I set up an astrology course in Inner London. Zach Matthews had got one off the ground, a couple of years before – but really I was in the first wave of people breaking through into ILEA (Inner London Education Authority). Because I was actively involved in adult education, I used the opportunity and so was teaching astrology less than three years after starting myself. Enthusiasm!

### **Part Three: Divination and magic; astrology and the academy; miscellaneous.**

#### 3.1

A: (Continuing the theme of coming into astrology). The important element of my own progress into astrology was that I got in from a background of symbolism and divination – I’d always been into divination and symbols, which is why I took up astrology. It took me some time to realise that many people don’t come into astrology with that as their background; astrology is in fact the first step towards that world that they have ever taken. I was coming from that world, taking that for granted, and taking astrology as that world. So I was rapidly interested in horary, as soon as I heard about it.

For some years I’d timed and dated tarot and *I Ching* divinations, and written records of them to see how they worked out; then I started horoscopes of tarot and *I Ching* divinations. So I was doing, in a sense, proto-horary – but early on. As much as I was doing anything natal, I was doing this kind of investigation of moments – which was more like horary, but I didn’t have a clear horary method. That’s where Derek Appleby turned up, and that was a complete revelation – the way he made the symbolism come to life. Derek really turned me on to the power of traditional horary method.<sup>9</sup>

#### 3.2

Q: I’m interested in this business of the times when *I Ching* readings are made (for I, too, have such a list) – and I wonder, would the charts actually be valid as horaries, given that I wasn’t posing the question to astrology?

A: Exactly. I only really understood what’s implied in what you’re saying, later on in my astrology. It’s not at all the same thing; it becomes the horoscope of what you now see to be a reading already made, of a divinatory act. Not, itself, a direct horary, because you’re not giving that horoscope the status of answering you. I didn’t clearly understand that, and so I was puzzling myself by trying to understand what was happening. It’s only much later that I’ve begun to see what you are saying; yes, it’s

---

<sup>9</sup> see Derek Appleby *Horary Astrology – the Art of Astrological Divination* (1985: Aquarian Press). I have written a Foreword to the reprint by David Roell (2005: *Astrology Classics – Astrology Center of America*) with a discussion of Appleby’s largely unacknowledged role in the recent resurgence of horary, especially in the UK.

an entirely different thing. In fact, in one sense, it will throw *no light at all* – why should it? And one should start from that point of view; the original divination was what was carrying the power at that place, and this is now another type of exercise altogether. It has its role, but it's not to be confused with horary – I now realise this.

### 3.3

Q: Do you think it's useful to have a knowledge of *I Ching* and tarot in addition to astrology?

A: Well I do, but I wouldn't want to get doctrinaire on this – I appreciate that people have many paths in. Nevertheless, I don't know how you can arrive at the same perception of astrology unless you do have experience in the other main divinatory forms – the *I Ching* above all. Tarot will give you the practical understanding of divination; the *I Ching* will give you practical understanding of divination *and* will give an ethical and philosophical structure to take you some way deeper. That's my general view of it.

I feel there's a danger for somebody who hasn't got that experience, of hitting an interior block in their understanding of astrology that stops them developing, unless they can make the move that these other forms give them. On a related issue, that is why there is an issue for people who have developed solely through natal astrology. It's quite important for them to practice the katarthic forms – inceptional, electional, and horary – because that will break the incorrectly 'objective' hold that natal astrology will have established over them. Natal astrology will establish a *fallen hold* over them (it becomes fallen at a certain point, if pursued to a certain limit), and at that point they really do need these other practices to break it open, to fragment their astrology, and thereby make it more fluid, less *defined*. Get away from the absolutism, the tyranny of the natal horoscope.

So of all the symbolic forms, astrology *is* potentially the most magnificent and most powerful that western culture has produced; but it is the most dangerous, because of its overwhelming illusion of objectivity. That [objectivity] isn't easily maintained with the tarot, *I Ching*, or tea leaves – there is no illusion of objectivity there, it is perfectly clear that the act is contained in this magic space. But with an ephemeris – real time, get it out on your computer – it's really there, that's absolute, it belongs to the physical heavens imposing on us. That's why astrology is so powerful, and so deadly. That is why you need other ways of divination, and other practices in astrology - like horary - to break up that hold... except for really stupid horary astrologers, who it just compounds in an even more fatalistic universe. But that's another story!

### 3.4

Q: How would it be, then (playing devil's advocate here) if astrological computer programs generated planetary positions on a random basis, instead of calculating where the planets actually are?

A: The trouble is, it's a hypothetical question; we *do have* the planets, and therefore we use them; so it would be absurd to use something that offered a shallow reflection of that. The essential nature of randomness must be understood, and then used with

the given, existing physical universe of planets that we actually have. One can't detract from that, and by their physical and temporal existence, [the planets] have a marvellous symbolic capacity for showing to us. But it doesn't make them any more *real* than the laying out of a tarot card, or the seeing of a tea-leaf – which is the odd paradox that the mind must face with astrology.

So I don't want to turn it back and do something which would be, in effect, pseudo-astrology. I take the gist of what you are saying, but no, it isn't enough. We have even tried experiments with this years ago – getting planets' positions out of a hat and things like that; it's clear that it doesn't want to play that way. But it doesn't 'not want to play that way' because there are real influences coming from planets; it's just that it would be an absurd reduction of what is a given showing for us, of the planets in the sky. Why should we weaken that? Difficult to answer, but I'm sure you get the drift of what I'm saying.

In order to expose the gist of the problem contained in your question, I do then make the move which I'm guarded about, but which has to be made sometimes, to remind astrologers that in fact they do get readings from wrong maps. They get *correct* readings from wrong maps, on sufficient occasions for it to be, clearly, an astrological phenomenon. One has to be sparing with that, because it is *so* ruthlessly undermining of the status of astrology that it can become an unskilful means – as if we could just pick a moment in an ephemeris, and that would be as true as a genuine horary moment that has come to us; no, it is not. But the genuine horary moment that comes to us hasn't become true *because of* physical planets at a certain time and space, *either*. It's subtle!

Years ago, when we were putting over some of these undermining ideas – wrong time, and things like that – there was a student who, instead of using actual moments, would just pick moments out of the ephemeris, believing they would answer his questions. It isn't that they won't answer his questions – the point is that the teaching we were giving had become corrupted to the point that it had become unskilful, because he was doing something that begins to abuse the ritual of *attending* the world around us, which is given in the physical planets, and the ephemeris, and the time and space. Instead of attending that, he is now wilfully scattering it to the winds. And you can't do that.

### 3.5

Q: The concept of astrological work being a ritual is relevant, isn't it? So whilst you can make up your own ritual, the ones which have most power are those which connect you with other people – a group and a tradition. Then the subject of 'faith' crops up again, because it works best if there is this recognition that one can't tackle the universe on one's own, but needs to connect, to respect and learn from others who have passed this way.

On a slightly different tack - I had an experience which seems somehow relevant, when I was reading Maggie's book. She talks about the symbolic origins of astrology; I mis-read 'the shambolic origins of astrology' ...!

A: And that seemed to fit alright to you – yes, it's true, I like that.

### 3.6

Q: Are you willing to part with your birth-data?

A: I always get queasy about this.

Q: It does have a purpose – that being, to try and look at the way the person approaches astrology through their chart...

A: Of course. Yes, I'll probably come up with that – e-mail me back on that. It's interesting, I've never let that be published. That came early on in my teaching – students would say, 'What sign are you?' And I realised that it's important to say, 'Why do you want to know? What sign do you think I am?' Because you start a line of conversation (I'm not saying this would happen here) which moves on to, 'where's your Moon...' and they start to tot it all up, as if they are getting information about you, and nothing is being done with it, it's a completely meaningless exercise. It's especially important for students to be pushed back at that point.

Having said that I think that, for this type of purpose, I think I would be prepared to do that. But I'll e-mail you the details. [Note: In the end Geoffrey decided not to.]

### 3.7

Q: Are you a magician?

A: That begs a lot of questions. Taking a broad view, I regard divination as the other face of magic (except that the word 'magic' is such an abused concept that it's problematic even to say that). Making an act of divination is a type of magic – it's a creative formation of the reality one is in, and that has to be called 'magic' by any account.

I would want to answer 'yes', but I would want to put in those qualifiers, so that people understood what is really meant by the word 'magic' here. Because it is a supernatural, or spirit-like, thing that one is doing, where one's soul or mind is engaged in a way beyond one's understanding, with some type of intelligence/consciousness/spirit at work in the world of things – and that one is doing this in order that the actual concrete conditions of one's life, as well as one's understanding, will be moved towards that which one feels one might desire. On all these accounts, this is correctly to be called a practice of magic. But the 'skilful means' problem enters here, because this can be discussed satisfactorily in one way, but if then a thing is made of it, it produces a wrong understanding and indeed a wrong intention in others. It is a problematic thing to discuss. And yet – put the right way it is easy for me to say 'yes' to it. Put the wrong way I have to be careful, because it immediately produces the wrong understanding.

But this goes together with the whole idea – as you will know from reading the books by Maggie and me, it's one we insist on – that the astrologer is *implicated* in the material they work with. That is fundamental. And that implication means that the astrologer is part of the moving of the situation, whether they like it or not. To imagine that they can stand back is a type of folly, a type of ignorance, in my view.

If one uses ‘implication’ instead of magic, that would be one way of drawing back from some of the problems with the use of the word ‘magic’. This is implication that is intentional, and which then carries desire into fruition.

Another problem here, with the use of the word ‘magic’ is the tremendous hype and aggrandisement, the inflation that goes with it. You get this image of a great magus bridging heaven and earth – and of course, life is not like that. Life is much more ordinary – even if it is magic, it is all pretty dull and doesn’t know what it is doing half the time anyway. Most basically, most of the time one does not have a clue what is going on or what one is doing; we are stumbling towards something here, so it is not ‘magic’ in the sense of commanding the four elements – which is, once again, the image that goes with magic. That’s why the word is so difficult.

3.8

Q: Do you have any example of what you would consider to be conspicuous success in your work?

A: Before getting to a direct answer: most of the time with clients, even dealing with apparently quite practical matters, it’s just that moment of shifting perspective – a little bit of insight here, a little bit of insight there; that is its success. So these dramatic, all-or-nothing ‘successes’ are very rare. An explicit one (in an appendix to *The Moment of Astrology*) is the Stella pregnancy horary. That’s an explicit and obvious case, and it was also an important turning-point in my horary practice.

Nearly always, where I know a reading has been a success, it’s quite literally shifting the client from having asked one thing, where I see that’s really not on, getting them to see that they should be asking about something else, and then they agree. There are various cases from client work I could quote – but as you know, there’s a problem there, because in order to give you an actual example I’d need to lay out a horoscope and show you the exact move that was made that showed the person they should do something else, which has now been a success. But to do that I have to get the agreement of the person for me to reveal their chart and personal details – and one is cautious about doing that to clients.

A group of us got the 50-1 winner of the Grand National<sup>10</sup> – I’ve also had the odd thing like that.

---

<sup>10</sup> Grand National 1985, winner ‘Last Suspect’. I admit I took the cautious option of an each-way bet, but was still well rewarded. For the record, the Company of Astrologers, in its Queen Square heyday, ran Saturday morning workshops on ‘Gambling and Spirituality’, with high hopes of benefit, both material and symbolic. The consensus was that over its course, even without ‘Last Suspect’, the experiment left its participants somewhat ahead, though scarcely wealthy. I recommend picking horses from their names as a fine exercise in practical symbolism.

### 3.9

Q: Do you do any Sun-sign columns?

A: Yes, I do some Sun-sign work, not in my own name. I have even written for a magazine for thirteen-fourteen year old girls, so I can write to the standard and style required for that audience.

In fact, writing Sun-sign material helped my writing enormously. *The Moment of Astrology* is dense, but with that I had softened up a lot from what I used to be, as a horrible old Capricorn – such a dense style. And having to learn a journalistic lightness has helped my writing greatly.

### 3.10

Q: How easy was it to write *Astrology for Beginners*?

A: It was a difficult project to do, actually. It contains some of the ideas which we think are important. Whether one agrees with us or not, there's a level of discussion, taking up a number of factors, that one won't really find in beginners' books anywhere else. It probably doesn't quite work as a book for someone who is a complete beginner in astrology; it's more for the interested outsider who wants to get an overview of some of the intellectual ideas of astrology. Many people want it to be, 'how to learn astrology', and it doesn't really work for them at that level. It serves its purpose, I think. We wanted to convey a few ideas about Gauquelin's material, Rudhyar, Jung – pack those in, and get a cross-section of philosophical debate about 'what is astrology?'

### 3.11

Q: What changes would you like to see in astrology's position in the world – if any?

A: That's a difficult one. I did horrible things years ago, like giving a lecture called *The Decline of Astrology* – as against everyone else's belief that just around the corner there would be this tremendous flowering.<sup>11</sup> I always tended to take this Capricornian, Saturnine line of pessimism about it.

So I'm ambivalent on this question. A simple-minded 'let's get it into the universities, let's get it more discussed' isn't enough to deal with the heart of the problem – what is the nature of astrology, how do practising astrologers understand it? Questions of getting it more widely accepted are, oddly, secondary to the real question of 'what on earth is it we are doing in our practice?' So I fully accept, appreciate and respect those who are trying to take it out into the world; but my orientation is back into the community, into what the astrologers themselves are doing.

---

<sup>11</sup> I have no wish to exaggerate the singularity of this approach; however, in the 1970's and 80's there was a widespread current of enthusiasm amongst a new generation of astrologers, many of whom believed that we were on the cusp of new age for astrology in contemporary culture. This was the time of Gauquelin's remarkable results, and continuing hopes for replication of earlier Vernon Clark successes. In addition, psychological astrology and an imbibing of counselling methods appeared to offer a modern professional gloss. A counter-movement back to historical sources showed an equal but opposite enthusiasm, namely that we were on the verge of recovering the authentic roots of our tradition.

This may be stupidly negative, but I don't really see the breakthrough that many people want coming. I don't see astrology correctly negotiating intellectually what its position is, and giving it a correct form that will get it really accepted in the centres of academic and educational influence. I don't see it.

Reasonably then, the best compromise is that, like a lot of alternative/new age things, it will be broadly tolerated in a liberal society. That's what I would hope – I don't ask for anything more. There are enough threats, even to that position.

Kent University has a department of religion and mysticism, who do all sorts of things; Michael Baigent is on the course at the moment. So I've had a lot of contact with them, and have been several times to talk to them about astrology.<sup>12</sup> That's fine, but it isn't what people hope for when they talk about 'getting astrology into universities'. People currently studying religion and mystical experience are willing to hear what the astrologer's experiences are, but that's not quite the same as saying, 'we're going to do straight orthodox astrology as an academic subject'. I might be wrong, but I think that's pie in the sky. But I am a noted pessimist!<sup>13</sup>

We do need to be properly organised as a community to deal with illiberal pressures that would attack all things such as astrology. But that organisation should not then try to establish some sort of orthodoxy in astrology, that then becomes the standard. I'm not keen when it moves that far. There is a community, and that community should be able to speak coherently on certain things – that's fine; but I don't want that to go to the point of laying down a 'standard', I don't think that's a true reflection of the nature of astrology.

### 3.12

Q: Is your position that there are different astrologies, which are appropriate for different individuals?

A: There are certainly different forms and expressions of astrology – that's definitely so. I don't want to go as far as to say that there is a unique astrology for every single individual. But there are a number of different practices that go by the name of astrology. And that's why the type of work which you are doing is essential – to begin to lay out these areas, and then we actually produce more compassion between the people doing these different things; they needn't argue about this.

---

<sup>12</sup> Partly from these contacts, and with the invaluable support of the Sophia Project, a module was established as part of the MA in the Study of Mysticism and Religious Experience. This was the first step to the full MA in the Cultural Study of Cosmology and Divination. This culture at the University of Kent made my own PhD research feasible.

<sup>13</sup> I am not convinced that the various attempts to promote astrology in the academy in recent years, both in the US and the UK, run counter to my observations in 1998. Kepler College in the US was for a while the most ambitious of these programmes, but its failure to sustain academic acceptability to the level of a Master's degree is indicative. In the UK, the Sophia Project has allowed some degree of penetration, and produced a valuable crop of astrologer-PhD's, MPhils and MA's, but the major programmes it has supported (Bath Spa/Lampeter, and Kent) have had to wrap astrology per se in the folds of social science or cultural-historical studies. Astrological discourse sometimes appears naive about what is at stake. There is a radically unresolved dimension to the question of astrology in the academy, going to the heart of science and culture, and to the heart of astrology.

Astrology is actually a complex set of factors, involving a number of different practices – not an infinite number, but numerous. So it would be ludicrous to imagine that it comes under one single standard. Given that, there ought to be a flexible community that accepts its different forms, and can provide a coherent response when that is what is needed.

One of the interesting things about the community – I've realised it by seeing American astrology at UAC, and by working with the English community, where different bodies can come together, co-operate, but keep their identity. In the UK different schools like the Huber, Faculty, Company, and others can all completely keep their own, daft, identities, and do the things they do, but nevertheless come together intelligently, co-operatively and amicably to discuss common problems. That's an excellent loose format for a community, and that is the sort of element I should like to see sustained in our organisation. I'm supportive of groups like the AA who have that broad church approach – they are trying to control the centre, but allow many different things. I think that's fine, all credit to them (put that in and get me on the right side of the council!)

[End]

*My thanks to Geoffrey for this interview, and for his work in revising and updating it.*

*Excerpts from the following sections of this interview appear in Astrology in the Year Zero:*

*1.4 – p.183*

*2.4 – pp. 11 – 12*

*3.3 – p.190*

*3.4 – pp.118-9*