

It is always a pleasure to have one's work published in a foreign language. There is all the delight of new birth, with none of the labour-pains of publication in one's native tongue. I am especially pleased to have this book – a collection of articles that has not appeared in book form elsewhere – published in Russian, because I hear much of how warmly *The Real Astrology* and *The Real Astrology Applied* have been received by Russian readers.

Warmth, in some quarters, of joyful embrace. Warmth, in other quarters, of quite a different kind. But this is exactly as it should be. Where would be a problem is if these ideas were to be received without warmth of either kind. That could mean only that they have not been understood. For the idea of tradition is a challenge: the idea that there is a living entity stretching through time, not subject to the ephemeral demands of the age through which it flows. An astrology rooted in such a tradition must be a challenge to any astrology rooted in the philosophies of the age.

The astrology of which I write is traditional astrology; but what is this 'tradition'? The distinction between what is traditional and what is not is often seen as a temporal one. Old stuff is traditional; new stuff is not. This is an error – a fact that I see more clearly now than when writing *The Real Astrology*. Traditional astrology did not finish at some point in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The book you hold in your hand is evidence of that. This is not secondary literature, a book about the tradition. It is as much a living part of that tradition as anything written by William Lilly, Abraham ibn Ezra, or any other of our illustrious forebears.

Nor is it true that anything written a long time ago is part of that tradition. The western tradition of astrology is a monotheistic tradition. It is the astrology of the Jews, the Christians, and the Moslems. As such, it stands over and against any astrology rooted in relativism. Egyptian astrology; Hellenistic astrology; Vedic astrology; the astrology generally practised today: these are not part of the western tradition of astrology, and, because of the philosophies within which they are framed, have far more in common with each other than they do with that tradition.

This tradition is not a yearning for some past age when things were better than they are today. There is a traditionalist literature outside the world of astrology which holds such a view, and traditional astrologers are often accused of espousing it, no matter how few there are who do so. There was once a golden age, and life has been getting remorselessly worse ever since. No matter with what intellectual gravitas this view is expressed, it always reminds me of my grandmother's firm belief that civilization came to an end when postmen stopped wearing hats. This view is profoundly untraditional, owing much to a nostalgia for lost youth, nothing to an understanding of what tradition is.

Tradition is a living thing. It lives and breathes, moves and changes. A tradition that does not change is dead – and what interest does that hold for us, other than as a piece of sterile

intellectual archaeology? This change is what the Catholic Church refers to as ‘the operation of the Holy Spirit’. This is no theological abstraction, but the recognition that a tradition, like an individual, can grow in wisdom. Things are learned, things are realised.

Coming from a different direction than the traditionalists to whom I referred above, the theologian Josef Pieper writes that tradition must be passed on exactly as it was received.<sup>1</sup> This too is an error. If tradition were a material artefact it would, of course, be true: if I inherit the *Mona Lisa* from my father, it is my duty to pass it on to my son without adding any embellishments of my own. Tradition is not a material artefact. It must change, must be changed. The vital thing is, these changes must always preserve its pure essence. So long as that essence remains – so long as its philosophical truth does not become corrupt, does not slide into an easy relativism to suit contemporary trends – the external form of that tradition must adapt to the demands of the time, else it becomes mere anachronism.

It behoves us also to work to conform the tradition as we receive it more closely to its essence. Not all that is passed down to us is of value. We stand on the bank of this broad river of tradition; inevitably, it carries its share of detritus as it flows. It is of no matter whether a piece of rubbish fell into this river 100 yards upstream or 1000 miles upstream: it is still rubbish, and does not belong in the river. The modern world has no monopoly of nonsense, any more than the ancient world has of wisdom.

An example of this, I have recently realised, is the idea of hyleg, anareta, and alchohoden that plays so large a part in traditional natal astrology. It is an irrelevant add-on. That it was added on a long time ago does not mean it belongs. This is why the ancient writers have such trouble describing how we identify the planets that play these roles, and what we should do with them once we have found them. Back we know not when, some ancient smart-alec tried to fit the image of the Fates into astrological judgement. The Fate who spins out the thread of life, he named the hyleg. The Fate who measures out that thread, he named the alchohoden. The Fate who cuts it off, he called the anareta. The idea of the Fates is a nice image. It works well in poetry. But it is exactly that: a poetic metaphor. Metaphor is, by definition, not real. What concerns us in astrological judgement is only that which is real.

We cannot, of course, attempt to cleanse the river of tradition until we have made some effort to truly understand that tradition for ourselves. This is a life-long, endlessly fascinating, process of learning, of soaking ourselves in the philosophic truth at the heart of this tradition. I must make clear to even, or perhaps especially, my most enthusiastic readers, that I did not descend from Mount Sinai carrying the Laws of Astrology engraved on two stone tablets. We can only ever see as through a glass, darkly. If we wish to learn, we must strive gradually to clean that glass.

Some stages in my own glass-cleaning can be seen in the articles in this book. They contain techniques, such as midpoints, that I would never use today. I first studied horary astrology with Olivia Barclay. Olivia did most valuable work in pushing for the republication of William Lilly’s *Christian Astrology*, which was for 200 years the centre of English

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<sup>1</sup> *Tradition: Concept and Claim*, ISI, Wilmington, 2008.

astrological writing, but had been long neglected. Her own astrology, however, and what she taught were permeated with what she had learned from theosophical and other modern sources. It took me a while to clean these from my glass.

There is no flawless source. Any astrologer is only human and is, as such, fallible. As Nicolas Culpeper advised, we must keep our wits about us as we read their books. Every now and again, for instance, I am asked by some particularly hard-working reader of *The Real Astrology* how I calculated Hitler's temperament as being choleric. The answer is quite simple: I got it wrong.<sup>2</sup> I was following Lilly's method far too closely, and Lilly gets it wrong, for reasons I have discussed in *The Real Astrology Applied*.<sup>3</sup> There still remain points in this method that I hope one day to understand better.

This increased understanding, for any astrologer, will come not from reading many books, but from gradually shifting the perceptions so that we see what is before us, not merely manifestations of our own self. This demands a willingness to change ourselves so that we may understand, not a readiness to change the astrology so that it may be understood. It is for this reason that the words with which ibn Ezra began his textbook are the most important words ever written on astrology: *The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord*.<sup>4</sup> It is this that is the heart of the western astrological tradition.

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<sup>2</sup> Chapter 1. This error does not invalidate the main thrust of my argument there.

<sup>3</sup> Section 5: *The Assessment of Temperament*.

<sup>4</sup> Abraham ibn Ezra: *The Beginning of Wisdom*.