

Astrology and Truth:
A Context in Contemporary Epistemology

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Abstract

This thesis discusses and gives philosophical context to claims regarding the truth-status of astrology – specifically, horoscopic astrology. These truth-claims, and reasons for them, are sourced from advocates and critics of astrology and are taken from extant literature and interviews recorded for the thesis.

The three major theories of truth from contemporary Western epistemology are the primary structure used to establish philosophical context. These are: the correspondence, coherence, and pragmatic theories. Some alternatives are discussed in the process of evaluating the adequacy of the three theories. No estimation of astrology's truth-status was found which could not be articulated by reference to the three. From this follows the working assumption that the three theories of truth suffice as a system of analysis with which to define and elucidate the issues that have arisen when astrology's truth-status has been considered.

A feature of recent discourse regarding astrology has been the argument that it should be considered a form of divination rather than as a potential science. The two accounts that embody these approaches – astrology-as-divination, and astrology-as-science – are central throughout the thesis. William James's philosophy is discussed as a congenial context for astrology-as-divination. This includes his understanding of the pragmatic theory of truth and other elements, such as radical empiricism, which comprise his pluralist pantheistic philosophy.

Compelling reasons from numerous commentators are presented according to which astrology should be judged not true. These generally presuppose that contemporary scientific modes of analysis suffice for such an evaluation. A case could be built upon James's philosophy under which the individual would have a right to believe in astrology as a source of truth – albeit, this would not be the intersubjective or scientifically-validated truth which critics typically insist upon.

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