



Practicing Traditional Astrology in the 21st Century: Ethics and Authenticity

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Introduction

- Over the past 40 years, the revival of traditional astrology has led to a vast improvement in our knowledge of the techniques of ancient and medieval astrology
- However much less attention has been paid to integrating these techniques into modern practice
- In this lecture I want to open a dialogue and share my perspectives on how to practise traditional astrology in the 21st century, in a way that is both ethical and authentic to the tradition of astrology



The background is a deep blue gradient with a subtle pattern of white stars. Overlaid on this are several faint, white astrological diagrams. On the right side, there is a large circular diagram with concentric rings and numerical markings (100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 210) along its outer edge. In the bottom right, there is another circular diagram with dashed lines and arrows indicating a clockwise path. In the bottom left, there is a partial circular diagram with a dashed arrow pointing left. At the top center, there is a small, simple circular diagram.

Part One: The Hazards of Traditional Astrology

Case Study: Predicting Health Issues

- The client wanted me to utilise predictive techniques to examine a few topic areas, one of which was the topic of health
- I identified that in the next few years they may face a challenging time in relation to health
- I asked if they had experienced serious health issues in the past and they confirmed they had
- When I mentioned potential health challenges in the future, they became visibly concerned...
 - ... and asked me if they were going to die



The Heart of the Issue

- Traditional astrology is primarily focused on the concrete prediction of future events
- The toolbox of traditional astrology enables the prediction of both **positive** and **negative** events
 - **Positive events** are events that most people would prefer to experience, if given the choice
 - **Negative events** are events that most people would prefer **not** to experience, if given the choice
- It is the ability to predict negative events that poses the greatest ethical challenge



The Challenge of Negative Predictions

- The role of the traditional astrologer includes predicting negative events – it would be dishonest or inauthentic to only predict positive events
- But predicting negative events can be frightening for the client and lead to anxiety about the future
- This issue becomes particularly acute when the nature of the predicted event is something that the client **already** fears
- We then run the risk of confirming the client's worst fears, reinforcing unhelpful thinking styles, and producing feelings of despair or hopelessness



Some Relevant Unhelpful Thinking Styles

- **Negative mental filter**
 - Focusing only on negative predictions
- **Catastrophising**
 - Jumping to the worst-case scenario
 - “Challenges with health” means “I am going to die”
- **Black and white thinking**
 - Seeing only extremes – “good” vs “bad”
 - No in-betweens or shades of grey
- To mitigate these issues, discuss the range of possible manifestations of a negative prediction



Prediction and Fatalism

- The ability to predict future events implies that future events are, at least to some extent, predetermined or **fated** to occur
- Beliefs about fate vary, but they generally fall within a spectrum between two polarities:
- **Limited fatalism:** the future is predetermined, but humans can alter outcomes through their free will
- **Hard fatalism:** the future is predetermined, free will is an illusion, and humans cannot alter their fate by any means



Belief in Hard Fatalism

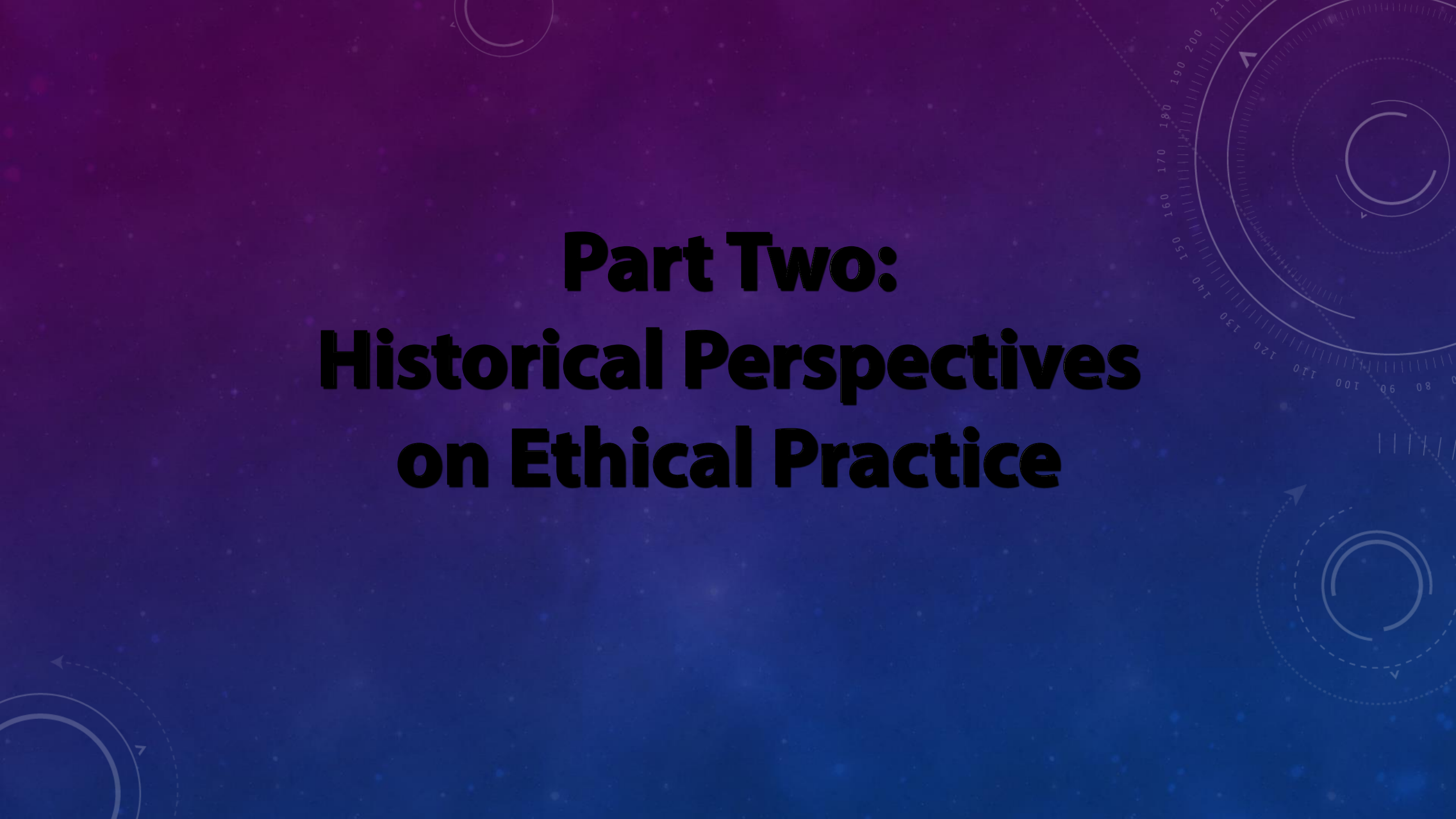
- It seems to me that hard fatalism is becoming a popular philosophy among traditional astrologers
- As a philosophy, hard fatalism is not inherently harmful – it is a personal choice, and can promote a kind of stoic acceptance of life's ups and downs
- But it is important for traditional astrologers to recognise that hard fatalism is not a common belief among ordinary people - according to neuroscientist Robert Sapolsky, over 80% of people believe they have some degree of free will
 - *Determined*, R. Sapolsky, 2023



Some Challenges with Hard Fatalism

- If the client is not predisposed to hard fatalism, they may find this philosophy challenging
- Today, many clients seek a reading because they are dissatisfied and want to effect some change in their life, or they want help with a decision they have to make - these goals are incompatible with an astrology grounded in hard fatalism
- For ordinary people, negative predictions can be rendered even more frightening if they are delivered within a context of hard fatalism



The background features a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of white stars and constellations. Overlaid on this are several technical diagrams: a circular gauge with a scale from 80 to 210 and a needle pointing to approximately 190; a circular diagram with concentric dashed lines and arrows indicating a clockwise cycle; and a partial circular diagram at the bottom left with a dashed arrow pointing left.

Part Two: Historical Perspectives on Ethical Practice

The Caricature of the Historical Astrologer

1. Believes that everything is fated and that the client cannot avoid negative predictions
2. Delivers brutally honest and unkind assessments of the client's character
3. Issues terrifying predictions about the future without any concern for the client's state of mind
4. Unapologetic about the impact of the reading upon the client

... but is this picture accurate?



Views on Fate in Hellenistic Astrology

- Some Hellenistic astrologers, such as **Vettius Valens** (2nd century CE) believed in hard fatalism
- But the existence of **electional astrology** in the Hellenistic tradition demonstrates limited fatalism
 - Selecting auspicious times to alter future outcomes implies some degree of free will and a mutable fate
- So, from early in the tradition, there were different schools of thought about the extent to which fate is negotiable, and the extent to which we can work with the planets to improve or alter outcomes



Views on Fate in Medieval Astrology

- In the medieval tradition, it seems belief in limited fate was widespread
- The popular **Centiloquium of Pseudo-Ptolemy** (10th century CE) demonstrates limited fatalism:
 - “5. A skillful person can avoid many of the effects of the stars when they know their natures”
 - “8. The wise can improve upon the operations of the planets, just as the wise farmer improves upon nature by ploughing and fertilizing the soil”
- The flourishing of astrological magic in the medieval tradition also implies a limited fatalism



Codes of Practise in Traditional Texts

- The caricature of the historical astrologer is challenged by the existence of codes of practise that can be found in historical astrology textbooks
- These codes set out guidelines for how to practise astrology responsibly, and how to conduct yourself to improve the public image of astrology
- An early example of such a code was written by Julius Firmicus Maternus (4th century CE)
- Later examples appear in the works of famous astrologers such as Girolamo Cardano (16th century CE) and William Lilly (17th century CE)



Codes of Practice: Julius Firmicus Maternus

Study and pursue all the distinguishing marks of virtue... Be modest, upright, sober, eat little, and be content with few goods, so that the love of money does not defile this divine science... And when handling someone's birth chart, do not discuss the bad things in the chart too readily, but, whenever you come to these subjects, suspend your response with a certain reticence – not so that you hold back from the truth, but so that you don't seem to approve of what the evil courses of the stars decree for the client.

Mathesis, Book II.30 (c. 335 CE)



Codes of Practice: Girolamo Cardano

When making a prediction, communicate it only to your client, do not publish your predictions widely... Do not give answers about insignificant things, but only about very important and clear ones, and do it briefly, not trying to fill up whole pages, and do not give them in ambiguous or contradictory form. But do it purely, neatly, chastely, cleanly, briefly, clearly... and to every prediction you make, add these words: "If he does not rashly expose himself to the risks posed by common disasters..."

De Interrogationibus Libellas (1555 CE)



Codes of Practice: William Lilly

Afflict not the miserable with terror of a harsh judgment; in such cases, let them know their hard fate by degrees; direct them to call on God to divert his judgments impending over them... be modest, conversant with the learned, civil, sober... give freely to the poor, both money and judgment; let no worldly wealth procure an erroneous judgment from you, or such as may dishonour this art, or this divine science... betray no one's secrets... never divulge, either to friend or to enemies, trust committed to your faith.

Christian Astrology (1647 CE), p. xxxi



A Revised View of the Historical Astrologer

1. May believe in some degree of free will, and tells their clients they may be able to influence or mitigate the outcome of negative predictions
2. Strives to live well, and conducts their work in a manner that upholds and enhances the reputation of astrology in the community
3. Pays attention to the state of mind of the client during readings and adapts their approach and their communication style accordingly
4. Handles negative predictions with care and makes efforts to not upset or terrify the client



The background features a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of white stars and constellations. Overlaid on this are several technical diagrams in a lighter blue color. On the right side, there is a large circular gauge with a scale from 0 to 210 and a needle pointing towards 180. Below it is a smaller circular diagram with concentric circles and arrows. In the bottom left, there are dashed circular lines with arrows. The overall aesthetic is clean, modern, and technical.

Part Three: Modern Perspectives on Ethical Practice

Modern Codes of Ethics

- Today, most astrological associations have codes of ethics that they require members to uphold
- These codes have similar goals to the historical codes of practice we just explored – ensuring astrology is practised responsibly and in a way that improves public perceptions of astrology
- Much thought has gone into creating these codes of ethics, and I would encourage traditional astrologers to give them serious consideration
- Let's take the FAA Code of Ethics as an example, and discuss the areas of the code that are most pertinent to the practice of traditional astrology



“Consider the wellbeing of the client, and place their welfare above your self-interest”

- “Self-interest” can mean our desire to make money and have clients come back for further readings
- But it can also include more subtle interests, such as the desire to appear knowledgeable, to be right, or to make accurate predictions
- These desires should all be secondary to helping the client and supporting their wellbeing
- Putting the client’s welfare first can mean holding back on a prediction, or admitting you lack expertise and referring them to another astrologer



“Deliver information in a helpful, constructive manner, having regard to the state of the client”

- Before starting the reading, check in with the client and ask them about their concerns, their hopes and fears, and identify any triggering topics they would like you to avoid or handle with care
- Then adjust your reading accordingly, altering the statements you want to make, and the tone in which you deliver the information
- Remember that the client came to you because they want your help, and they expect the information to be delivered in a helpful manner



“Ensure your astrological advice is directly concerned with the charts under consideration and is expressed simply and unequivocally”

- Your primary role is as an astrologer
- All the information and advice you provide should be grounded in the astrology – this is your area of expertise, so do not stray too far from it
- As a consulting astrologer, your role is not just to analyse the astrology, but also to deliver the information in a way the client can understand – this is the real service you are offering



“Ensure that the client is aware of the distinction between the astrological event and its interpretation, which depends on the judgement of the astrologer”

- This distinction is not just a modern perspective, it was noted by historical astrologers too
- For example, the author of the *Centiloquium* wrote:
 - “Judgment comes both from yourself, and from the science of astrology. It is impossible for an astrologer to make specific predictions: our mind can conceive the general idea of the event, but not its particular form. For this reason, it is necessary for astrologers to use inference. Only those inspired by God can predict particulars.”



“Ensure that the client is aware of the distinction between the astrological event and its interpretation, which depends on the judgement of the astrologer”

- The 13th century astrologer Guido Bonatti said:
 - “... To predict the future is very difficult, and it cannot be done precisely, or to a fine point; however, predictions can come close to approaching the truth, and often our predictions will not differ from the truth by much – sometimes, almost imperceptibly ... and because the motions of the planets can be known ahead of time, we can make judgements about things that will happen in the future, and which of those motions falls together with it, and predict what is to come.”
 - *Liber Astronomiae*, 5th Treatise, 1st Aphorism



“Do not claim to be infallible”

- I want to make a point that I hope is not too controversial, but sometimes gets forgotten:
No one truly knows what the future holds
- We sometimes flatter ourselves into thinking that astrology allows us to **know** the future, but what it really does is enable us to **try to predict** the future
- Making this admission may feel disempowering, but infallibility is a mask that must be shattered, and it puts our predictions in their proper context



The background is a dark blue gradient with a subtle pattern of white stars and technical diagrams. On the right side, there are several circular diagrams resembling gauges or dials with numerical scales (e.g., 100, 110, 120, 130, 140, 150, 160, 170, 180, 190, 200, 210) and arrows. There are also dashed lines and other geometric shapes scattered across the background.

Part Four: The Importance of Counselling Skills

Learning from the Masters

- The integration of counselling skills into readings is an area where traditional astrologers can learn a great deal from our modern astrology colleagues
- Psychological astrologers have long been aware that the astrology reading is similar in many respects to a counselling session
- The counselling dynamic comes with unique challenges, and it pays to be aware of them
- But within these challenges lies a great potential – the potential for the reading to have a positive and transformative impact on the client's trajectory



Risking the Potential of Astrology

- “Even when... astrology is studied sincerely in the great tradition from Babylonian times through the Egyptian and Hellenistic worlds, and is explored and validated, the danger becomes that astrology is venerated as a prized antique within a collection. **What is in danger of being lost is the living potential of astrology;** the understanding of the birth chart that might utterly transform an individual’s life, right now.”
 - Mark Jones, *The Soul Speaks* (2015), p. 224



Astrology as a 6th House Practise

- When a client comes to you for a reading, they are implicitly seeking your help with something
 - Help in understanding their birth chart
 - Help in overcoming an issue or challenge
 - Help with making a decision they are faced with
 - Help in their quest for self-knowledge
- The only appropriate response is to orient the reading towards **helping the client** and **serving their highest interests**
- In my experience, the greatest barrier to achieving this orientation is often the ego of the astrologer



Some Common Egoic Barriers in Traditional Astrology

- The “Magician Complex”
- Hobbyists and dilettantes offering consultations
- Holding court – teaching and philosophising to a captive audience instead of helping them
- Rigidly applying a set approach to the reading



The Magician Complex

- An unhelpful performative dynamic that can arise in astrology readings
- Described by Mark Jones in *The Soul Speaks*
 - It occurs when "... the astrologer overrides the client in order to show off what the natal chart analysis can do to describe the client's experience..."
 - In this dynamic, the reading becomes more about "...trying to prove the validity of astrology – and therefore the astrologer – than it is about listening to the needs of the client..."



Hobbyists Offering Consultations

- Many astrologers start out as people who are enamoured with astrology and see it as a hobby
- At some point they decide to make their hobby into an income stream by offering readings
- But enjoying astrology as a hobby does not mean you will make a good consulting astrologer
 - The client has come to you seeking your help
 - Are you interested in orienting your astrology work towards helping and serving other people?
 - Or are you getting into doing readings because you want to get paid for indulging in your hobby?



Holding Court and Philosophizing

- Traditional astrologers are often bookish types interested in history, philosophy and spirituality
- In a reading we suddenly have a captive audience
- If we lack self-discipline, the reading can easily turn into an *ad hoc* lecture in which we teach the client traditional astrology, or ancient philosophy
- We must always remember that the client has come to us for help, in vulnerability, and has invested a large amount of money and trust in us
- As the reading only lasts a very short time, it is our responsibility to honour their investment and dedicate all the time to serving their highest needs



The Set Approach

- A set approach is not necessarily a bad thing, but we need to be aware that it tends to benefit the astrologer, and has less benefit for the client
- It makes preparation easier, but this comes at the cost of disregarding the specific needs of the client
- It also feeds into the Magician Complex – you do your “routine” for each client
- If you have a set approach it is important to make this plain to clients before they book with you
- My preference is to take a radically different approach...



The Client-Led Reading

1. Minimize prep – just memorize their chart
 2. Ask the client why they have come for a reading, and identify the presenting issue
 3. Select the appropriate astrological tools to assist them with this issue
 4. Present your findings, check in with the client, and continue adapting the reading to their needs as the conversation unfolds
- To do a client-led reading, you must be able to do complex astrology “on the fly” without prep time, but the benefits for the client make it worthwhile





**Part Five:
The Unique Challenges
of Horary Astrology**

Unique Issues in Horary Astrology

- Horary astrology is the art of answering specific questions by examining the chart for the moment the question is put to the astrologer
- Horary questions are often asked about emotionally charged topics that involve the querent's greatest fears and desires
- The nature of horary forces the astrologer to provide concrete answers to these questions – there is no “wriggle room” in horary
- As a horary astrologer you will regularly be required to provide negative predictions



Real Examples of Emotionally Charged Horary Questions and Their Answers

- “Will I ever get married?”
 - No
- “Do I have prostate cancer?”
 - Yes
- “Will my novel get published?”
 - No
- “Will my daughter ever talk to me again?”
 - No



Reflections on Practising Horary Astrology

- Horary astrology requires the astrologer to develop an excellent bedside manner
- It also requires a significant degree of personal resilience and professionalism to not let the heaviness of the subject matter effect you
- Taking regular breaks and prioritizing your own wellbeing is important so that you can bring your best self to your readings
- Horary astrology is a kind of public service and should be approached with an attitude of helping and serving others, with humility and compassion

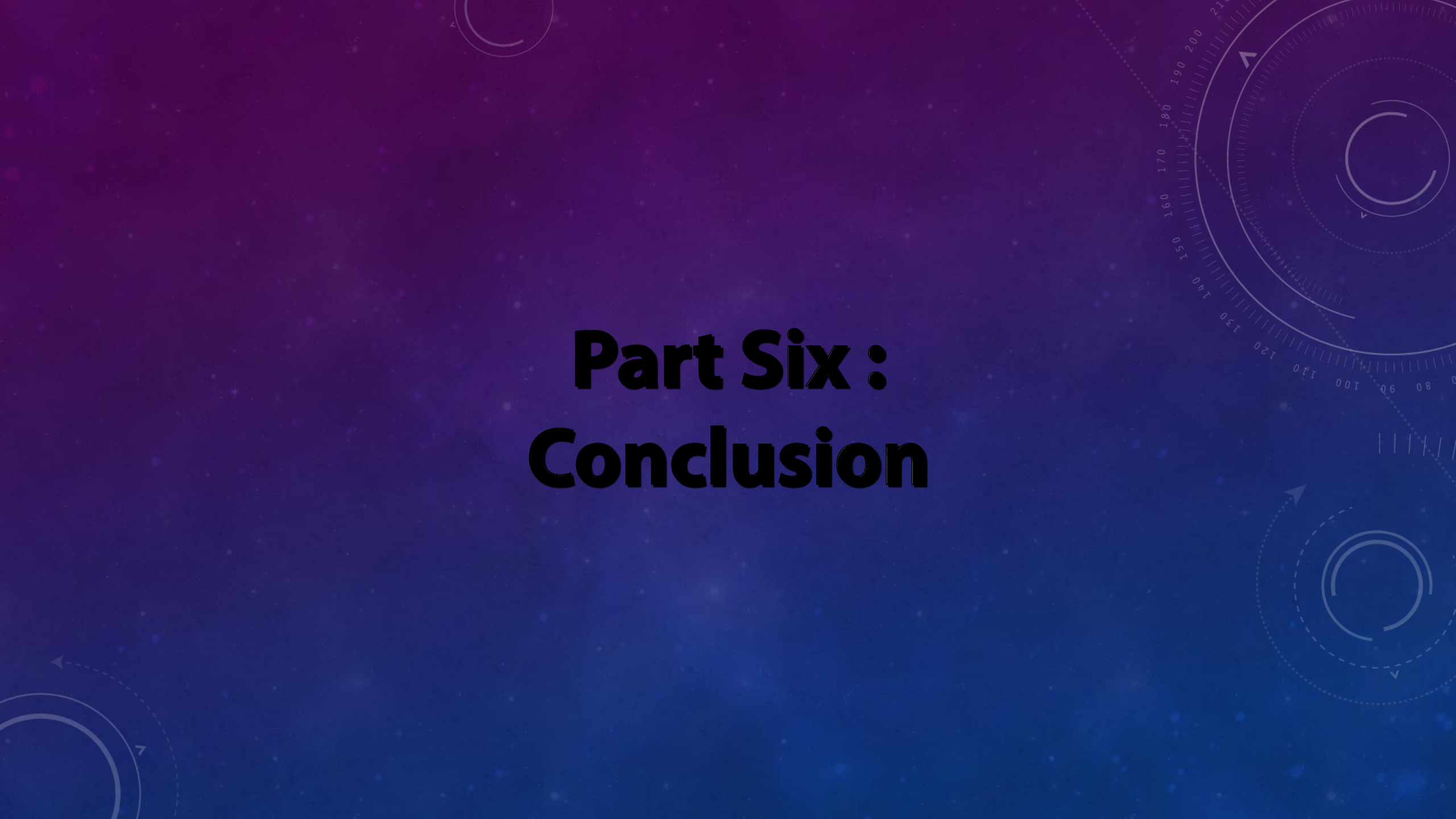


Tips for Delivering Negative Answers to Horary Questions

- You must be honest – the client has paid you to give them a straight answer to their question, and your role is to provide that answer
- But you must also take care to communicate the answer with care, compassion and empathy
 - Do not let experience make you callous or jaded
- If there are some silver linings in the chart, you can mention them to the client to soften the blow
- Admit to fallibility – nobody truly knows the future
- At all times act with integrity and professionalism



Part Six : Conclusion



Parting Thoughts

- I want to end by emphasising that concern about ethical practise is not a modern phenomena
- Rather, these concerns are just as much a part of the tradition of astrology as the techniques, as the words of Firmicus, Cardano and Lilly demonstrate
- As the custodians of the tradition, we should follow their example, and give these ethical issues the same attention that we give to the techniques
- Learning from our colleagues in modern astrology, we can make traditional astrology into a powerful tool for helping people and transforming lives





Questions?

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