Introduction: Origins and Background

Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and the more steadily we reflect on them: the starry heavens above and the moral law within.

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This book is the sequel to the first volume, which considered the history of astrology from the earliest prehistoric speculation and concluded with the triumph of Christianity in Europe in the fifth century CE. This volume runs from the fifth century to the present day and, together with Volume I, draws connections between prehistoric mentalities and modern. This is far from being a controversial statement for the evidence suggests that many modern people experience the cosmos as a potential source of order, meaning and significance, exactly as did their stone-age ancestors. The connection between widely separated times and cultures is possible if we adopt a broad definition of astrology. In this respect I follow Patrick Curry who argued that 'Astrology is the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated.'[2] It will be instantly clear that such a liberal view allows astrology to include not just the casting and interpretation of horoscopes, but calendar construction, archaeoastronomy (the creation of buildings embodying astronomical alignments, orientations or symbolism), astral religion, magical ritual and other forms of divination or inquiry into the cosmos which may use astrological symbolism or astronomical cycles.[3] I don't deal with calendars and archaeoastronomy, but a central theme of my narrative is religious. It is impossible to deal adequately with medieval and Renaissance astrology without considering the collision between astrology, which suggested that the individual has a direct relationship with the cosmos, and Christianity, which insisted that this must be mediated via the Church. The, as yet unresolved, argument between the two has shaped, informed, obstructed and encouraged the practice and philosophy of astrology in the West over the last 1500 years.

There is a simple narrative running through this volume. I am proposing that the period from the fifth to eleventh centuries was a period of collapse after the sophistication of the classical world. Few historians would disagree with this. There then followed half a millennium during which astrology was a central part of European culture. It rested on two fundamental hypotheses, with which it was impossible to disagree. The first was that God spoke to humanity partly through signs in the sky. This was an obligatory article of faith for every Christian. The

second was that earth and heavens were linked in a series of interlocking natural influences. This was self-evident to anyone who experienced the heat of the sun or observed the relationship between the moon and the tides. The arguments and debates over astrology rested not on its fundamental premise. The first objection to astrology was theological, that only God could know the future. The second was evidential: some critics accepted the principle of planetary influence or significance, but doubted whether astrologers could speak in detail on all matters, great and small, with the precision which they claimed. The arguments against such practices intensified in the seventeenth century and, since around 1700, astrology has struggled to find a recognized role and has been largely excluded from educated discourse. The present situation finds astrology an accepted part of popular culture, but subject to ridicule and overt hostility from both religious and scientific arenas. The last three centuries have been more like an iron age than a golden one, so I offer simple narrative, with just a hint of repetition. In the fifth century astrology collapsed, in the twelfth it revived, and in the late seventeenth it collapsed again. Or did it? As we shall see, the truth is rather more complex, with some forms of astrology thriving and others disguising themselves behind other names. The book concludes with the question of whether astrology's current popularity in any way constitutes a second revival.

Astrology is not a single practice or idea; it includes multiple narratives about the nature of the world. If we examine its history carefully we can see that it is, variously, a form of magic, a system of prediction, a model for psychological growth, a science, a spiritual tool, a religion and a system of divination, definitions which are not mutually exclusive. It has competing rationales and a variety of technical systems. It may be directed towards sacred goals (the soul's union with the divine) or profane (the making of profit or seizure of one's enemy's castle), the trivial (the location of lost property) or deeply serious (the length of one's life). It depends on the blurring of the distinction between matter and consciousness, the distance between near objects and far-away ones, and on what the philosopher Ernest Cassirer called a 'grandiose, self-contained intuition of the spatial-physical cosmos'.[4] It provides a grand narrative, a 'meta-narrative', which it claims is capable of explaining anything from one's emotional state and destiny, to the fluctuations of popular culture, the condition of the stock market, the identity of the next US president and the quality of one's last incarnation. Within the community of astrologers there are vigorous debates over what the practice can actually achieve: for over 2000 years astrologers have argued over such questions as whether it can predict the future and, if so, in precise detail or in only general terms?

The astrological universe has been described as a 'cosmic state' or a 'republic of heaven', in which the 'up-there' and the 'down-here' are inseparable.[5] It offers a framework consisting of patterns within which otherwise random events may be interpreted as having a purpose. It also provides what the sociologist Max Weber calls a 'theodicy', in which apparently inexplicable events, good or bad, can be seen to make sense.[6] Its cosmos is beautiful and perfectly ordered – as in our word

cosmetic – and, in its own terms, it enables people to develop survival strategies, negotiating with the heavens in order to better manage their daily affairs. It is 'imaginal' not in the sense of imaginary, meaning false, but in the sense that the cosmos is psychically as well as physically linked to the mind of every human being.[7] Astrology is, above all, difficult to pin down to a single set of ideas or practices, and this is a problem for historians. In the final analysis I follow Ann Geneva who, denying attempts to define astrology according to its relationship to scientific or religious mentalities argued that 'it is first necessary to locate astrology within its own universe of discourse before historians can attempt to compare it with other explanatory systems'.[8] So, the question before us is, what, exactly, is 'astrology's universe of discourse'? This is a question I explore largely through the claims of some of the leading protagonists, both sympathetic and hostile. And here we have to acknowledge our source problems. We can trace the literary tradition, but that might not conform exactly to the lived experience. We have astrological texts surviving from the Middle Ages which tell us the complex rules that astrologers could apply if they wished, but we do not know which ones were applied or how widely. No doubt itinerant fortune-tellers would have found it easier to refer only to the moon's position, perhaps, or rely on a form of geomancy, an oracular practice in which the casting of stones bearing astrological symbols negated the need for calculating a horoscope at all. Neither do we have much idea of what it might have been like to visit an astrologer.

All of the above suggests that we can analyse astrology according to its competing technical or philosophical schools – or its social contexts. This being a cultural history, I deal only peripherally with the development of astrological technique, which awaits an authoritative study. That does leave us with the question of what exactly constitutes 'culture', a word which Terry Eagleton described as 'one of the two or three most complex' in the English language.[9] Some definitions of the term are, though, particularly helpful to the history of astrology. The anthropologist Clifford Geertz served the subject well when he wrote that culture is 'an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form'.[10] Such a definition could function equally well as a description of astrology, which itself becomes a vital means of the transmission of knowledge seen as symbol rather than, as would be the modern view, factual information.

In the past, histories of astrology have tended to be 'external' in the sense that they have documented its social or political use. This is a perfectly valid exercise, and it is one in which I am engaged in this book. However, to try and understand astrology's appeal, which at times has been intense and widespread, we need to try and penetrate its inner language, the means by which its claims and practices were lived and experienced. One means of approaching the inner experience might be through the language and development of interpretative technique, a task which must be left until later. My concern is with philosophy, especially the ebb and flow of debates about fate, destiny and free choice that form, perhaps, the most consistent linking thread in arguments about astrology's role and legitimacy

from the fifth century to the present day. The key issue for anyone engaging with astrology in a Christian context, which means most people in Europe from the early-Medieval to early-modern periods, then becomes the extent to which the reading of destiny in the stars is entirely compatible with the making of moral choice, or militates against it. The issue was profound, and confronts the user with two possible futures: an eternity of bliss in the former case, or of torturous damnation in the latter. The stakes could not have been higher.

As so often happens, the issue revolves around exactly what astrology is: a form of divination (and, if so, legitimate within a Christian context or not) or of natural philosophy (and, if so, counter to scripture or not). Central to such debates is a useful modern distinction made by some historians between 'natural' and 'judicial' astrology. Natural astrology required no more than the observation of natural influences deriving from the planets, and was universally accepted in the medieval and Renaissance worlds. Judicial astrology, requiring the astrologer's judgement, depended on complex deductions made from horoscopes and was widespread, but never entirely accepted by theological and sceptical opponents. This distinction is essential for understanding astrology's sometimes contradictory position in the West, especially denunciations of it, which invariably referred to the judicial variety, not the natural. I have also adopted Patrick Curry's hierarchical model of three forms of astrology forming a rough analogy with the three social groups, upper, middle and lower class.[11] The first, high astrology, is the astrology of the philosophers and theologians, concerned with speculative matters such as whether the theory of celestial influence leaves room for moral choice. The second, middling astrology, is characterized by the casting and interpretation of horoscopes, a practice requiring a considerable level of literary study and mathematical skill. The third, low astrology, is the astrology of street fortune-tellers, of almanacs (after the fifteenth century) and, in the modern world, newspaper and magazine 'sun-sign' columns.

Astrology's history presents us with certain terminological difficulties. J.R.R. Tolkein spotted this in his discussion of enchantment and magic. 'Supernatural,' he wrote, 'is a dangerous and difficult word in any of its senses, looser or stricter.'[12] The word's main problem, Tolkein saw, was its assumption that there is a world, a sphere of existence we might say, which is automatically and utterly distinct from the natural, a belief which then sets up a false view of the natural world itself as entirely physical, easy to weigh and measure and readily susceptible to scientific analysis. The supernatural is, by contrast, mysterious, remote and, quite probably, non-existent. Similarly, astrology is often described as 'occult', meaning hidden and, by inference, sinister. The word 'occult' in the meaning of hidden knowledge was promoted by Henry Cornelius Agrippa's sixteenth-century *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, a summation of medieval astral magic, but seems to have entered the language as an umbrella term for the secret, mysterious and potentially dangerous after the French esotericist Eliphas Lévi published *Le Grand Arcane, ou l'Occultisme Dévoilé (The Great Secret, or Occultism Unveiled)* in 1868.[13] The word can be used simultaneously by occult

practitioners to surround themselves with an aura of mystery, and by its critics to signify automatic condemnation.[14] I use the term 'occultist' in the final chapters because it entered the language of the people and groups I am discussing, but we have to be careful not to read pejorative meanings into it: the historian must remain methodologically neutral, observing, explaining and analysing, but neither condemning nor promoting.

The term esoteric, meaning inner wisdom, as opposed to knowledge of the outer world, also seems to have come into common use in the modern period, partly as a reaction to the increasing concern with a purely material view of the natural world.[15] Hedged about by such terms, astrology is removed from what it was – a central feature of European life – and is – a fundamental part of popular culture – into a fringe activity, in which its practitioners were deluded dabblers. What terms like supernatural, occult and esoteric try, but fail, to invoke is that sense of complete integration with the cosmos which I argued in Volume I was the goal of the astrological experience, namely Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's *participation-mystique*.[16] The nature of astrological knowledge-claims is often difficult to pin down and there is a slippage between ontology, the assumption that astrologers are really examining the real underlying nature of the universe, and the more modern notion of analogy, that the world is being described not as it is, but in terms of what it is like. An event which takes place under the planet Mars, for example, might no longer be essentially Martian in its character, but merely described by Martial qualities.

I have also tried to steer my way around the modern distinction between astronomy and astrology. The fact that the two terms were once interchangeable is acknowledged by most historians of astronomy. To consult a modern Latin dictionary we find that *astrologia* is defined as astronomy while the practitioner, the *astrologus*, is either an astrologer or an astronomer, while the first great text of medieval astrology was Guido Bonatti's *Liber Astronomiae*.[17] When Aristotle, whose work was the ultimate authority on such things in the Middle Ages, used the word *astrologia*, modern translations render this, with no explanation, as astronomy.[18] This might suit modern scholars, but completely obscures and distorts Aristotle's importance in the Middle Ages from the twelfth century onwards, when his prestige did so much to confer legitimacy on astrology. The most influential of medieval and Renaissance astrologers, those who served at court, were more likely to be known by other names entirely; in the 1600s Johannes Kepler was neither astronomer nor astrologer to the Holy Roman Emperor – he was the Mathematician. The medieval study of astronomy was more likely to be known as the study of the *sphaera*, the spheres on which the stars and planets revolved, than of the stars themselves. Various people have suggested solutions to the terminological problem: Edgar Laird suggested the term 'Star Study', Roger Beck 'Star Talk'.[19] I generally follow Claudius Ptolemy's second-century distinction in which astronomy is divided into two stages: the first measures the positions of the stars and planets, the second their effects.[20] So, Ptolemy's second form of astronomy is generally what we would know as astrology. Except, of

course, 'effect' implies a causal relationship between planets and people, which is by no means necessary. For most of the period we are studying, the significance of astrological patterns, their ability to impart meaning to humanity via celestial signs, was equally important. The two rationales, influences and signs, went hand-in-hand as equal and complementary justifications for astrology. There are, though, forms of astrology that rely on celestial symbolism together with the general principle of divination – that by looking at one thing, a tarot card, for example – one gains an insight into another which is entirely unrelated. In the Middle Ages onomancy allowed the practitioner to construct a horoscope by converting the numerology of an individual's name into planets and zodiac signs, while in the 1980s one could purchase a set of astro-dice; by rolling the dice while asking a question, an answer was provided by the resulting combination of planet with zodiac sign.

There is a certain amount of information in this volume for which a full explanation is provided in Volume I. That said, it is necessary for me to give the briefest of brief summaries of the salient points of ancient astrology. The distant, textual origin of modern Western astrology lies in the cuneiform tablets of Mesopotamian civilization, which indicate that, from around 2000 to 500 BCE, astrological rules were constructed in two ways, whether on the basis of theoretical speculation about the nature of the cosmos, or direct, empirical observation of the coincidence between celestial occurrences and earthly events. The practice of astrology was based on the assumption that the cosmos was repetitive – that when the same astronomical pattern recurred in the future the corresponding terrestrial events would be similar in nature. The system was divinatory in nature in the sense that it required communication with divine beings, and destiny itself was negotiated via ritual acts designed to appeal to or propitiate such beings. A process of codification is evident from the fifth century in which the 12-sign zodiac was devised and the practice of casting birth charts (or horoscopes in modern terms) for infants was developed. From the fourth to first centuries BCE Mesopotamian astrology entered into a series of creative interactions with Greek, Egyptian and Indian culture which led to the development of the highly complex mathematical and interpretative system which survived in Europe until the seventeenth century and is still practised in India. A number of different systems of Greek thought fed into astrological theory and practice, fracturing the Babylonian model into different schemes. From the works of the seventh-century BCE poet Hesiod came the concept that the passage of the stars through the year is directly related to the seasons. Pythagoras (sixth century BCE) contributed the idea that the cosmos is constructed mathematically, its motions directed by numerical laws. Plato (fifth–fourth centuries BCE) followed Pythagoras in his belief in perfect mathematical order, but gave detail to the idea (which was already current) that the cosmos is alive and conscious, is created by a 'God' who is conceived of as good, supreme and conscious, and that the human soul originates in the stars, to which it returns after death, having an innate desire to reunite with its creator. Destiny might be negotiated and the future improved

if one led an upright, moral, scholarly lifestyle. All things in the visible universe are based on 'archetypes', or 'Ideas', original models which inhabit an eternal, unchanging, perfect realm. Physically, the universe was structured in concentric systems of crystalline spheres, on which the planets orbited around a stationary, spherical earth. The soul travelled down through these spheres before birth and returned up through them, after death. Plato's student Aristotle retained some of his master's ideas, but emphasized natural influences and causation. God was reconceived as little more than a 'first-mover' who started the universe in motion, and the planets operated as 'secondary causes' which transmitted the intent of the prime-mover to earth. Other causal mechanisms might include light, as well as the archetypes, which manifested as 'formal' causes (form being a synonym for archetype). Also of significance for astrology was Aristotle's concept of the 'final' cause, the future condition which draws the present towards it: in a simple example, an acorn becomes an oak tree, the oak being the acorn's future state and final cause. Aristotle also argued that the earth and the area of space between it and the moon was imperfect, in a state of constant change and made of four elements – fire, earth, air and water. The space above the moon was perfect and filled with the fifth element, ether. Another of Plato's students, Eudoxus, took Plato's statement that all perfect movement must be circular and developed a model for planetary motion based on perfect circles, which was to have a direct impact on astrology much later: when the system was discredited in the seventeenth century, astrology, too, lost credibility. Plato's universe moved according to predetermined mathematical and geometrical laws but each individual could exert moral choice. Around the year 300 BCE the philosopher Zeno developed his fatalistic Stoic philosophy, in which moral choice was (almost) as predetermined as were planetary motions. The astrology which is evident from the first century onwards tended to be Pythagorean and Stoic, fatalistic in tone and assuming that people move like planets, in line with mathematical law. However, it is unlikely that such work existed independently of Greek religion, in which it was taken for granted that the future was negotiated by prayer and sacrifice. In addition, the so-called Hermetic texts, composed at the same time as the first Greek-language astrological works, laid the foundation for initiatory practices in which the soul was prepared for death by the acting out of rituals corresponding to the planetary spheres. We also know that astrology was used to cast spells and create talismans, familiar ways of influencing the future. The people who visited temples, participated in initiatory Hermetic rituals or wore talismans to enhance their love lives were the clients of the astrologers. We should doubt then, that the deterministic tone of the texts was reflected in the actual practice of astrology, and we may suspect a disconnection between the literary tradition and the lived experience. In the second century CE, a further development took place when Claudius Ptolemy, the leading astronomer of his day, reformulated astrology within a natural, Aristotelian context. Destiny was now to be negotiated not through propitiating the gods or leading a virtuous lifestyle (although neither activity was ruled out) but, for example, by taking care of one's body.

Ptolemy brought astrology down to earth. The final classical philosophers of interest were the so-called Neoplatonists (of whom the most significant for later European astrology were Plotinus and Iamblichus) who flourished in the fourth to sixth centuries and who were concerned with the reunification of the soul with the divine, either through the moral, scholarly lifestyle advocated by Plato, or through ritual magic. By this time Christian polemics against astrology were being written and circulated, culminating with its denunciation as satanic by St Augustine in the early fifth century.

By the end of the classical period we can distinguish different varieties of astrological theory and practice. Astrology might be justified according to a variety of explanatory models, either physical influence alone, a combination of psychic and material causes, celestial signs transmitted by superior powers or divinities, or the doctrine of 'sympathies'. The latter were relationships between all things in the universe, material and intangible, which were thought to be linked in a web of relationships through similarities or differences in their essential natures. For example, the zodiac sign Aries, the planet Mars, the colour red, blood, knives, angry people and feverish illnesses were all connected. A.O. Lovejoy called this system the 'Great Chain of Being'.[21] The cosmos was regulated mathematically, but was also moral and gendered (for example Venus was a benevolent planet and female). Another very important distinction was identified by Cicero in the first century BCE.[22] The horoscope, a diagrammatical representation of the earth's relationship with the heavens, usually calculated for a particular place, date and time, was the fundamental tool of astrology. Horoscopes could be cast to analyse an individual's future, answer specific questions, choose auspicious moments in the future and assess prospects for the coming year (known respectively as nativities, interrogations, elections and revolutions in medieval Europe). The rules for interpreting horoscopes were complex and based on ever-increasing levels of mathematical division and logical procedures which were designed to relate the living personality of the cosmos at any moment in time to earthly affairs. Horoscopes were not, though, essential and some disagreed with either their validity or usefulness. All forms of astrology, though, whatever their varying attitudes to fate, appear to have been directed towards a dialogue with destiny, negotiating the future through lifestyle changes, moral virtue, magical rituals or supplication and prayer. This takes us to the end of my Volume I.

This being a history of Western astrology, which I am defining conventionally as the astrology of the European/Christian world, there are certain areas that I am unable to include. The problem is acute in that for over half a millennium, from the fifth to eleventh centuries, astrology all but died out in Christian Europe while Persia and India remained centres of creative activity. Faced with the choice, I decided to explore the tenuous survival of at least some knowledge about the sky in early medieval Europe, from the fifth to tenth centuries. In this I was encouraged by Steve McCluskey's observation that this period is now seen to have contained much of interest, in contrast with earlier opinions.[23] Yet, a number of the astrologers and philosophers of the Islamic world were to be

figures of great importance in medieval European debates about the nature of the cosmos, so a brief introduction is essential.[24] For the future, I am planning a more substantial account of astrology in Islamic culture.[25] But, for now the following must act as a summary.

In the first two centuries of the common era, and until the inauguration of the Persian Sassanian dynasty in 226 CE, we have little idea of how the astrologers of Mesopotamia or Iran conducted themselves except, perhaps, as intermediaries in the extension of trade in ideas between India and the Mediterranean. The Sassanians brought a much greater interest in foreign scholarship and the new monarchs set out to do what all self-consciously great rulers do, which is to patronize learning; they collected, translated and edited the great books of their own and neighbouring countries. According to the eighth-century scholar Nawbakht, who was one of the Islamic caliph Caliph Harun al-Rashid's astrologers, the Sassanian monarch Ardashir I (226–41) had commissioned the translation of the works of Greek and Indian astrological classics, including, from the Greek world, staple works by Claudius Ptolemy.[26] The Islamic conquest of Persia between 632 and 650 brought a brief hiatus in royal patronage of astrology, although not of scholarly activity and, certainly, public use of astrologers for all sorts of predictive and magical activities continued. It was the Abbasid caliphs, who took power in 750, who were responsible for this transformation of attitudes at the highest levels of society, and a succession of rulers established the conditions for what has come to be known as the golden age of Islam. Al-Mahdi (775–85) founded schools and patronized the arts; Harun al-Rashid (786–809) signalled his respect for pagan learning by ordering a collection of original Greek manuscripts. Caliph al-Mamun (813–33), building on the imperial library created by al-Mansur (754–75), set up the *Bait al-Hikma*, the House of Wisdom, in Baghdad, as a deliberate and very successful attempt to bring scholars together to translate Greek, Syriac, Persian and Sanskrit works into Arabic, and exchange ideas about the nature of the cosmos.

At the risk of ignoring many of the distinguished achievements of the scholars of the Islamic world, I will mention just five whose work was to be critical in medieval Europe. The first was Masha'allah, a Jew who was born in Basra, in modern Iraq, around 740 and died in 815. In the course of his life, Masha'allah composed around 25 astrological texts, a number of which were to become standards in medieval Europe, where he was known as Messahala. His work was continued by Abu Ma'shar; born in Balkh, in modern Afghanistan, in around 787, he wrote some 50 books in almost 100 years, dying in 886 after what was, by the standards of the time, an extremely long life. Under his Latin name, Albumazar, Abu Ma'shar was one of the the best known astrologers of the Middle Ages in both the Islamic world and the Christian West, rated on a par with Masha'allah and the second-century Greek polymath Claudius Ptolemy.

Abu Ma'shar had supposedly been introduced to astrology by Al Kindi, a scholar whose honorific title, the 'first philosopher', points to his reputation as the man who imported classical Greek thought to the Islamic world. Al Kindi

was born to an aristocratic family in the city of Kufah, a major centre for Arab learning and culture, sometime around 795. In his long life – he died sometime between 866 and 870 – he became perhaps the seminal figure in the development of Islamic intellectual thought. He has been described as court astrologer (though of course there was no such official position) to the Caliph al-Mamun and headed the team in the House of Wisdom which translated ancient texts into Arabic. He was a synthesizer and he set out, on the basis of his readings of Aristotelian and Platonic theories, to provide a universal model, the sort of key-to-everything for which cosmologists are still searching. His interest for us, though, lies in his attempt to construct a mechanism for astrology. In *On the Stellar Rays* he attempted to identify a means by which the heavens might influence the earth through rays of cosmic sympathy.[27] The logic was fairly straightforward: all visible objects emit rays, otherwise, obviously, they'd be invisible. It was believed that each planet's rays extended a different number of degrees over the zodiac and if, to take one example, a planet was too close to the rays of one of the unfortunate planets, such as Mars or Saturn, the individual concerned would suffer ill fortune.[28] It was as if the light itself carried the nature of the planet. These rays can be seen as causal connections as long as it is remembered that all causal links in the world around us are, in fact, coordinated by rays emitting from the 'One', God. While Al Kindi's ideas play a part in the history of optics, we should always remember that he was working in the context of Hermetic teachings, in which light carries divinity: it does not just allow us to see, but enables us to be close to God.[29]

The last two thinkers were not practising astrologers, but they did lay the foundations for debates among medieval Latin scholars about the need to reconcile sacred scriptures, whether Islamic Koran, Jewish Torah or Christian Bible, with the classical philosophers, especially Aristotle. The former emphasized faith and divine knowledge, the latter, reason and inquiry into the natural world. The problems were serious ones, for the sacred texts insisted that the only authority for any kind of knowledge was God, and classical philosophy offered an alternative cosmology in which human beings could reason for themselves, and discover truth by independent logic. This challenge to the universal dominance of scriptural truth was to allow astrology to make at least a partial return to favour in medieval Europe. The first of these two scholars was Ibn Sina. Born in 980, possibly in the central Asian city of Bokhara, he is more usually known under the Latinized form of his name, Avicenna. By all accounts Avicenna was a prodigy who was, the stories say, an accomplished doctor by the age of 16 and, three years later, began a period of travel between the various courts of the Islamic world, until he died in 1037. Ibn Sina's views, which included the existence of angelic and spiritual hierarchies uniting angels, planets and humans, were challenged in the twelfth century by the Andalusian philosopher Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), better known under his Latinized name, Averroës. Born in Cordoba, Averroës lived in Marrakesh before becoming a judge in Seville and, through the accident of his geographic location, he was to have an impact on European thought as immediate as that in the Islamic world.[30] He attacked the 'cosmological argument' – that

as all things must be caused by something else, there must be a supreme cause, a Creator – and argued that only physical arguments can explain physical things.

The scholars and astrologers of the Islamic world saved classical learning for Latin Europe, but there was to be a gap of at least 500 years between the collapse of the Roman world in the West and the beginning of the rediscovery of its intellectual splendours. And it's with those centuries that the story continues, beginning with the slow death of classical learning in fifth-century Europe.

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