Divination

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dissonance may be too invidious a term for any attempt to deal with failed predictions. There is nothing irrational about the attempt to retain a belief. Contemporary philosophy of science, as espoused by W.V.O. Quine and Imre Lakatos, stresses the rationality, not the irrationality, of retaining belief in the wake of falsification. One must therefore distinguish between an intellectual response to falsification—revising belief, working out a theodicy—and a nonintellectual one—seeking converts.

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Simon Dein

Divination

The term "divination" refers to the varied forms of communication between humans and the supernatural. Divination seeks to acquire knowledge that is otherwise unattainable because it is hidden. Divination can be part of any culture. There are innumerable methods of divination. They tend to wax and wane in history, mostly because of changing fashions and reforms. Philosophically-oriented religions often view divination as superstitious and accord it scant intellectual status. Since Plato (*Phaedrus* 244b), divination has been divided into intuitive and inductive kinds. The first involves the direct reception of information. The second involves the observation of signs, from which meanings are inferred.

There are other ancient classifications. Cicero quotes the opinion, which is "both very old and is corroborated by the unanimity of all peoples and nations," that "there are two kinds of divination, the one involving a technique, the other involving nature" (*De div*. 1.12). In technical divination the gods communicate with humans indirectly through different signs. In natural divination the gods communicate directly, such as through auditions and visions (see Wardle 2006: 126). In technical divination the divine sphere supplies the data through analyzable prodigies. In natural divination there is a direct input of divine knowledge into a human being, with no need to extrapolate the meaning. An ecstatic state of mind is sometimes considered necessary to natural divination, such as when delivering oracles. Analytic methods usually do not require possession of the diviner. While deficient, these ancient divisions remain helpful in classifying divination.

Divination borders closely on other kinds of divine and human interaction, such as magic and witchcraft. All kinds of divination strive to know the hidden in the past, present, and future. Divinatory methods are used to reduce anxiety toward the unknown. Insofar as exploring the sources of misfortune and the ways of repairing a situation is at stake, a component of natural or inductive divination is involved. When a method is used to divine the end of world, it is tied to eschatology.

The natural kind of divination takes the form of a dream or consultation with supernatural beings, and it can be divided according to whether the human or the divine participant takes the initiative to communicate. If the human diviner initiates the contact, the process can be called empathizing with the divine. If, alternatively, the divine agent possesses an individual, and ordains a human person to become an intermediary, the process is inspirational. This contact can come as a reward for extraordinary learning, for piety, or for asceticism. The inspired divination borders on other areas of religious phenomena, such as prophecy, shamanism, and apocalyptic revelation.

Both technical and intuitive kinds of divination are carried out by experts, who either have gone through training in inductive divination or have special means of communication with the divine sphere. Initiation into a circle of specialists may transform the identity of the person involved (see Holbraad 2012: 231–236). The Babylonian Chaldeans and the Persian Magi are examples of divination specialists. The highest echelon of diviners can be active in the execution of political power, such as by belonging to the royal court. Through them divination serves the ruling elite by justifying the current political order. If not integrated into a political system, uncontrolled divination can threaten that order. In strictly monotheistic cases the analytical side of omen divination is not encouraged; every historical and natural sign becomes a portent of God's greatness (see Annus 2010: 13). Knowledge attained through divination in a traditional society is comparable with classified information in modern times. The "secrecy" of information is prone to political use. This practice may have its ancient counterparts (see Richardson 2010).

Divination as the Systematizing of Patterns

Divination of the inductive kind is a cognitive process based on analyzing patterns in the flow of information. The phenomena interpreted as significant in divination can be trivial and everyday occurrences. But more often they are unusual, anomalous, and extraordinary events. Inductive divination consists of various forms of systematizing the world through its components, separating the non-random information changes from random changes that occur. This faculty of the human brain is based on the activity of the *systematizing* mechanism, the non-empathic network that is engaged in constructing and analyzing systems. The psychologist Simon Baron-Cohen has defined seven different settings of the single systematizing mechanism in the human brain, tuned from high to low (see Baron-Cohen 2011: 112). The systematizing mechanism consists of those parts of the brain

that perceive patterns and can thereby figure out how things work and then make predictions.

There is a distinction between the so-called unprovoked and the provoked omens in divination. This distinction reflects the two ways by which the systematizing is made possible: by observation alone and by the search for a pattern in the data when manipulating one variable. The patterns enable a diviner to suggest experiments to confirm predictions, which involve active participation of the cognitive agent—the experiment consisting of observation plus operation. Both forms of systematizing end up with rules of the conditional form "if p, then q" (see Baron-Cohen 2011: 110–112). The conditional format is the way that many divination manuals have been written down through ages, including the earliest collections of rules from ancient Mesopotamia (see Rochberg 2009). But the format of antecedent and consequent does not dictate that the pattern described is correct, since every kind of content is expressible in conditionals (see Annus 2010: 5).

There are no limits to the objects that divination can observe and experiment with to systematize the unknown. The mechanical instruments to carry out experiments are often believed to have supernatural qualities. The content of divinatory patterns derives from the intellectual traditions of the culture in which the particular form of divination emerges. The phenomena under observation are thought to represent realities in human life. This factor indicates a significant presence of synaesthesia, or multisensory perception in divination, which enhances the faculty to perceive hidden patterns (see Cytowic and Eagleman 2009). Particular signs of different origins, like heavenly and earthly portents, can be regarded as related to the same events, according to the Babylonian *Diviner's Manual* (see Annus 2010: 2). The pattern that a sign exhibits can represent a generally accepted theory of correspondence or a multisensory experience of a particular diviner.

There are many ways in which the realms of divination and everyday life are connected. The inductive divination can exhibit a reflexive rela-

tionship between a whole concept and its part within the same cultural space or time frame. Here both antecedent and consequent occur in the same locality, such as the house of a man, where an unusual change of information is observed. Reflexive pattern in divination means that a nonrandom event at a local part conveys something new for the whole. The things themselves remain the same, but local changes observed can yield something globally, according to stabilized patterns (see Holbraad 2012: 228). The particular shape of a limb forecasts something for the entire person as a physiognomic omen. In a cultural universe all details and singular movements can be invested with the significance detectable by divination.

Otherwise a systematizing divination method works out a special medium, which may be a part of the physical space to observe and possibly to manipulate—for example, of the stars, the liver of a lamb, a sacrificial altar, or Tarot cards. This kind of medium is already a systematized field invested with meanings, and it therefore functions as a map or game board for divination. For example, heaven may be divided into zones, as is the animal's liver in sacrificial divination, to correspond to certain phenomena in human life. The patterns observed in these special areas relate to predictions about important matters of state, politics, natural conditions, or notable families.

The production of these mediums and maps takes much time. The horoscope is a good example of a innovative divination device, which emerged from the preceding Babylonian date-of-birth omen, the personal omen, the celestial omen, and the nativity omen during the Persian Empire in the fifth century BCE (see Rochberg 1999: 240–241). Only for political reasons did celestial divination lose its importance for the state and instead become connected to individual lives and bodies, as it remained later in Hellenism. Islamic authors often alluded to the dictum of Hippocrates that "the science of the stars is no small part of the science of medicine" (Pormann and Savage-Smith 2007: 154). Celestial divination became gradually

disassociated from the state and became ever more linked to elaborated theories of sympathy that connected the microcosm to the macrocosm.

Divination as the Pursuit of Truth

The scholarly study of divination has a long history. In early anthropological literature the forms of divination were often described as primitive thinking, which lacked rationality. Contemporary scholarship strives to be more sensitive and studies the social and intellectual principles of divination systems. Divination as a category of religion is studied by historical and anthropological disciplines. The term is usually understood as denoting pre-modern and traditional kinds of thinking.

It is true that the principles of a system in divination can be very difficult to understand. The systematizing mechanism of the human brain, when operating within the symbolic world of a traditional culture, is able to work out a pattern unreachable to outsiders, including even anthropologists doing fieldwork. The pattern, even if inscrutable, remains a credible pattern not devoid of content. Consequently, there is no lack of rationality in divination. The world is simply systematized differently.

No formal rules can be given to distinguish the "irrational" production of patterns from rationality. Inductive kinds of divination differ from "true science" only in terms of their content (see Annus 2010: 14). For example, both astronomy and astrology are systems for observing the night sky. Astronomy is part of modern science. Astrology is part of divination and belongs to the history of science. The debates over rationality in astrology are not relevant to the *raison d'etre* of divination.

To assume that "divination is a science gone wrong" is culturally biased. Many kinds of patterns, laws, and rules can be doubtful, misconceived, or arbitrary. Interpersonal consensus about the validity of patterns is attained through social agreement. If the social control mechanism is not shared across cultures, the systematizing brains work out different worlds of patterns by necessity.

In the realm of divinatory patterns by which the human mind interacts with nature and society, the correct pattern is socially agreeable through the solutions that it provides. Practitioners of divination take the patterns they establish to be the kinds of things that could not but be true (see Holbraad 2012: 55). Yet the non-functionality of and dissatisfaction with the results of divination may often be the case.

Divinatory verdicts are inherently open to doubt, not only by exceptional analysts like Cicero in *De divinatione*, but also by skeptical practitioners (see Holbraad 2012: 68). Yet skepticism is always a satellite of science. Should an omen or oracle turn out to be false, the correctness of the divinatory discipline itself seldom gets challenged. In a traditional society there is often no alternative to the science that divination represents. Every system of ideas obtains the status of science if it begets a triple validation by a given society—by political, social, and psychological supports (see Jean 2010: 268). The status of representing the truth confers institutional authority on the system. The question of truth in divination is not only about how things may appear differently to various persons but also about the different ways of thinking what those things are. The logic of divination obliterates the distinction between word and world, concept and thing (see Holbraad 2012: 222). Therefore divination systems are often unaware of the incompatibility between reality and beliefs about it.

The social aspect of divination is carried out by the diviner. Divination has a practical application in traditional culture, which unlike modern science, is expected to have a solution or answer to any possible problem or query. The diviner should be able to respond to all the needs of clients. Therefore the diviner is expected not only to quote the rules of divination assertively but also to master the system by creating new patterns performatively. The diviner holds the interpretative keys to the divinatory code. The rules of divination can have normative force, just like laws in a legal system. Both may have empirical foundation in certain historical cases, in which a sequence

or conjunction of two events has been observed. Reciprocally, a legal system can contain a divinatory method as its component, as in water ordeal.

Sometimes the forms of natural divination produce utterances that have no apparent meaning. Questions about the significance of ancient sayings often emerge that could be found out by interpretative reasoning, as in the tradition of ancient Greek compilers of oracles (see Johnston 2008: 137–139). The texts, which originally had a literary or oratory value, were taken to represent divine truths that, if correctly interpreted, were applicable to different kinds of historical situations. For example, textualization and reinterpretation of biblical prophecies in later periods brought prophecies very close to the realm of omen divination (see Nissinen 2010: 344). Auspicious historical moments could also be viewed as ominous. This aspect was particularly important for the ancient Near Eastern prophecy (see Scurlock 2010).

Despite its aspiration to truth, divination can be legitimately fallible. In ancient Mesopotamia the only remedy for unfavorable sacrificial divination was to perform another, up to three times (see Koch 2010: 45). What was sought was the pattern. While two occurrences may be a coincidence, three make a pattern. In some societies the oracle questioning may last until a favorable answer is received. Or the function of the oracle may be to confirm a human decision already taken. Because of the role of divination as a mutual source of comfort for both diviner and client, the divinatory verdicts are assumed to be indubitable for practical reasons (see Holbraad 2012: 244).

Divination and Fatalism

Fate is not always considered absolute in various divination systems. There can be a fatalistic world view involved in divinatory pattern thinking, which says that whatever is predicted to happen must happen. But the sentence "if p, then it cannot fail to be the case that q" can mean two things. It can mean that in any possible situation both p and q occur. In terms of the modal logic of necessity

and possibility, it can also mean that both p and q occur in a situation or in a set of possible worlds not in all of them (see Priest 2003: 43–44). The actual situation described by the conditional "if p, then q," in which both p and q occur, is possible but not necessary. There may be possible situations in which the two do not co-occur (see Priest 2003: 49). Therefore the logic behind divination is not necessarily fatalistic, though this position depends on the closer examination of the content in conditionals.

Some more sophisticated divination systems seem to be aware of the ambiguity of different situations. The format of conditionals can be put to express common sense truths with no intention to represent rigid patterns (see Annus 2010: 5). There are many different ways to interpret the conditionals as patterns of causality, implication, conjunction, co-occurrence, and even of mere possibility. For example, the world view represented by the Mesopotamian omens is not irrevocable determinism in the sense that the predicted event is causally provoked by an unbroken chain of prior occurrences. The omens reveal a conditional future, one best described as a judicial decision of the assembly of gods concerning the course of world's affairs and the fate of human beings (see Annus 2010: 3). The antecedent and consequent reveal a pattern that can be interpreted in multiple ways. It can be argued that the conditional sentence used in Babylonian divination—"if p, then q"—represents *modus ponens*, which is the most common rule or inference. If p is true, when it is observed, it is concluded that q is true as well (see Rochberg 2009: 14).

Yet divination often serves as a guide to action, often of a ritual action to counter the prediction (see Koch 2010: 45). There was a complex ritual in ancient Mesopotamia called *namburbi*, which was used to divert the evil omen that was observed from fulfilling the pattern—namely, implementing the consequent. In the Mesopotamian system of sign interpretation the portent that, for example, predicted the king's death was only the sign warning of the latent danger in the process

of coming into being, and appropriate measures could be taken to avoid it (see Annus 2010: 3). If *p* was observed, it did not necessarily imply that *q*. In terms of modal logic, the occurrence of *q* is possible, true in a certain situation.

The Study of Divination as Itself a Form of Divination

Divination is so complex a phenomenon that it would be simplistic to try to explain it by a single theory (see Koch 2010: 44). Natural divination can often be described as empathizing with divinity, and inductive kinds consist mostly of the collecting and systematizing of patterns. Divinatory verdicts look like ordinary statements of fact (see Holbraad 2012: 245). But the facts belong to a system of thousands of different cultural and symbolic associations. Therefore to disagree too much is to reject the whole system as meaningless—a position that is not acceptable in any society. The fieldworker is often not sufficiently trained to be able to capture everything that practitioners of divination believe or think (see Holbraad 2012: 246). Divinatory statements represent a thought-system that is firmly rooted in the symbolic world of a traditional culture but that can also be innovative. Therefore a practitioner of divination is always one step ahead of the fieldworker. The pursuit of integrity in the anthropological study of divination can render it similar to the pursuit of truth in divination itself.

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Amar Annus

Divine Kingship

Divine kingship, here understood as the deification or self-deification of kings during their lifetimes, lies at the nexus of several disciplines: history, including religious studies, anthropology, linguistics, and archaeology, thus making it a truly interdisciplinary topic. The study of this topic also offers a starting point for analyzing religious beliefs of a culture, because it allows us to make inferences about notions of divinity and humanity.