Origen and Astrology

Claire Hall, All Souls College, Oxford, UK

Abstract

Origen's discussion of astrology in *Philocalia* 23 – usually considered as an odd jumble of exegetical considerations – provides a key to understanding his position on many contemporary Alexandrian debates: the distinction between divination and prophecy, the question of human free will, and the reception of astrology in Ptolemy's own city. This article will argue that Origen provides the first distinctly Christian treatment of the subject by embedding Greco-Roman philosophical discussion of the questions of free will and foreknowledge into the framework of scriptural exegesis. In doing so, he recasts scriptural instances of reading the stars not as pagan astrology, but as part of the conversation about prophecy and prophets. Through a lengthy discussion of free will and God's foreknowledge, Origen concludes, in explanation of *Gen*. 1:14, that the stars are a form of 'writing in the sky', an outpouring of the mind of God for 'astral powers' to read and enact. In special cases, Origen suggests, extraordinary human beings can read the stars too – human beings including the Magi in *Matt*. 2:1-2 and Jacob in the apocryphal *Prayer of Joseph*. However, this process is distinct from Greco-Roman astrology as it requires divine inspiration, and is thus closer to Judaeo-Christian prophecy.

Astrology in patristic thought has not received a great deal of attention.[1] The subject of astrology in Origen's work has often been overlooked in favour of his more general discussion of astral ontology, particularly the question of the stars' rationality or ensoulment.[2] However, I would like to make the case that, far from being a footnote or a side issue, Origen's discussion of astrology in *Philocalia* 23 is actually central to understanding his thought on a number of

[1] Tim Hegedus, *Ancient Astrology and Early Christianity* (New York, 2007) is the only thorough comparative examination of patristic attitudes towards astrology.

[2] Alan Scott treats this issue definitively, situating Origen's beliefs within their Greco-Roman and patristic contexts, Alan Scott, *Origen and the Life of the Stars* (Oxford, 1992). Yet Scott has very little to say on the discussion of astrology in *Philocalia* 23, a discussion which surely must shape any consideration of the stars in Origen's thought. Similarly, Henri Crouzel's thorough doctrinal comparison of Origen and Plotinus on this issue is uncharacteristically brief, Henri Crouzel SJ, *Origène et Plotin: Comparisons Doctrinales* (Paris, 1991); he states that the only major difference in the two writers' views on the stars is that Plotinus argues that human beings are capable of reading the heavens, whereas Origen maintains that this role is open only to 'heavenly powers' – and indeed, that we humans are sometimes led astray by demons who convince us that we can access that which is beyond our knowledge.

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other important philosophical questions: the notion of free will, cosmology, and the question of true and certain knowledge through prophecy.[3] I will argue that Origen collapses the distinction between Greco-Roman notions of free will and foreknowledge and Old Testament concepts of the stars to create a new, distinctly Christian treatment of the subject of astrology – the first, and perhaps only, of its kind. This argument has two strands.

First, Origen's discussion of astrology embeds traditional concerns of the Greco-Roman philosophical tradition into a framework of scriptural exegesis. The entire discussion, even at its most classically Platonic or Stoic, follows from *Gen*. 1:14 ('let [the lights in the dome of heaven] be for signs' (NRSV)). The dichotomy sometimes drawn between Christian mysticism and (neo)-Platonic philosophy in Origen's thought[4] cannot be sustained in *Philocalia* 23, which interleaves the formal commentary-style presentation of Scriptural exegesis quite naturally with traditional Greco-Roman philosophical discussion. Indeed, unlike many patristic discussions of astrology, which tend to rehearse well-established Stoic or Cynic anti-astrological arguments,[5] Origen reworks such

[3] *Philocalia* 23 consists of a long passage from Book 3 of the lost *Commentary on Genesis*, and a shorter excerpt of a section, section 20, from Book 2 of the *Contra Celsum*. The context of this chapter within the *Contra Celsum* is Origen's response to Celsus' criticism that, had Jesus really known Judas would betray him, he would have prevented it happening. Thus the compiler of the *Philocalia* appropriately placed this section along with argumentation from the *Commentary on Genesis* which also revolves around Judas.

[4] See Mark Edwards *Origen Against Plato* (Farnham, 2002) and Ilaria Ramelli, 'Origen, Patristic Philosophy, and Christian Platonism: Re-Thinking the Christianisation of Hellenism', *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009), 217-63 for the terms of this discussion. Origenic scholarship has long been divided between those who argue that Origen was, in essence, a Platonist with a veneer of Christianity, and those who argue that his is fundamentally in the Christian mystic tradition, with a cursory engagement with 'un-Christian' Greek philosophy. The former view prevailed for much of the early 20th century, especially among German-language scholarship – see Anna Miura-Stange, *Celsus und Origenes: Das Gemeinsame ihrer Weltanschauung, nach den acht Büchen des Origenes gegen Celsus* (Giessen, 1926); Hans von Campenhausen, *Die griechischen Kirchenväter* (Stuttgart, 1955); Endre von Ivanka *Plato christianus: Uebernahme und Umgestalttung des Platonismus durch die Väter* (Einsiedeln, 1964); and still occasionally more recently, e.g. John Paul II *Encyclical Letter Fides et Ratio* (Vatican City, 14 September 1998). The contrasting view, that Origen is primarily a Christian mystic, is taken by Festugière among others, and nuanced by the careful research of Crouzel, in particular.

[5] Hegedus (2007) categorises the arguments made against astrology by the Church Fathers into five groups. Most of them deal with the five problems outlined above, but, interestingly, of the five groups of anti-astrological argument, all five are attested in pagan writers, predominantly Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Astrologers*. They are as follows:

1) The argument of modal impossibility: It is not possible to cast horoscopes accurately: it is not clear exactly what constitutes 'the moment of birth', and even if it were, it would not be possible for astrologers to take readings of the fast-moving heavens with enough accuracy for the horoscope to be meaningful. Found in Gregory the Great, *Sermon* 10, Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies* 4.3.5 - 4.5.3, and Basil of Caesarea, *Hexaemeron* 6.5.

2) The argument of different destinies: People who have the same or very similar times of birth end up having very different fates. Conversely, people who have quite different times of birth end

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arguments, furnishing them with Scriptural examples; occasionally his arguments are innovative, and his knowledge of astrology is quite extensive.[6] Over the course of the discussion, Origen generalises the traditional anti-astrological arguments into a wider discussion of free will and foreknowledge – again, furnishing his arguments with Scriptural examples. As such, Origen is using the epistemological questions surrounding astrology not just as a cursory engagement with Greek traditions, but as a vehicle for comparative exegesis.

Second, Origen considers divination by the stars as practised by human beings, in the rare cases that it occurs in scripture, to be an arcane form of prophecy. This is never explicitly stated, but can be argued quite clearly from his discussion. Origen rules out astrology *qua* Greco-Roman τέχνη, yet accounts for Scriptural references to 'read[ing] in the tablet of heaven',[7] 'observ[ing Christ's] star',[8] the heavens 'roll[ing] up like a scroll'[9] and 'Balaam's oracle'[10] by considering these as instances not of divination in the Greco-Roman sense, but of inspired prophecy. Thus, in Origen's view, the 'book'[11] of the stars is recast; it is not a book legible to anybody with the correct skill, as in the traditional astrological view, but a piece of scripture, legible only to those who receive specific divine inspiration – that is to say, legible to the heavenly powers, and to a handful of select, exceptional human beings, just as with the gift of prophecy.

up having very similar fates. Found in Basil, *Hexaemeron* 6.7, Procopius of Gaza, *Commentary on Gen*. 1.14 and Gregory Nazianzen, *Letter* 101.

3) The argument of νόμιμα βαρβαρικά: People of different cultures and nations have different national characteristics, manners and customs which are not accounted for in individual natal horoscopes, so that two people born at the same time from different cultural backgrounds might be very different, Bardaisan, *Book of the Laws of the Countries*.

4) The argument from animals: If animals are also subject to the influence of the stars, why do animals born at the same time as human beings not have the same destinies as those human beings? (Augustine, *City of God* 5.7). 5) What Hegedus calls the 'moral' argument is in fact two arguments, one of them a metaphysical objection, and one of them a straightforward moral condemnation of the practice: the former, that astrology negates free will, and the latter that astrology is an art of fallen angels, or of demons. Of these two arguments, only the second is found exclusively in Christian texts, and is usually used as a piece of ethical teaching rather than any kind of philosophical argument.

[6] Origen considers the precession of the equinoxes to be a widespread and well-proved theorem, which is by no means the case. See Pierre Duhem, *Le système du monde*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1914), 191-204.

[7] Fragment B of the *Prayer of Joseph*, quoted in Eusebius, *Commentary on Genesis* 5. We know that Origen considered the *Prayer of Joseph* to be canonical, as he says so in *Commentary in John* 2.31.

[8] *Matt*. 2:1-2 (NRSV).

[9] *Isa*. 34:4 (NRSV).

[10] *Num*. 23:7 and elsewhere (NRSV).

[11] *Philocalia* 23.15.

Origen begins from *Gen.* 1:14 to explore a familiar set of arguments against Greco-Roman astral determinism. He uses the question of what it means for the stars to be 'signs' (σημεῖα LXX) rather than causes as the natural jumping-off point for this discussion.[12] He explains that many who have embraced the faith are led astray by the idea that human affairs are governed by the stars; therefore he must provide an exegetical reading of *Gen.* 1:14 which corrects this view while still accounting for the Scriptural use of the term 'signs'.

There are, Origen argues, major theological problems with astral determinism, including the *reductio ad absurdum* that true astral determinism would mean that a person's belief in God, or even in astrology itself, was determined by the stars:[13]

ἔπεται δὲ τοῖς ταῦτα δογματατίζουσιν ἐξ ὅλων τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν ἀναιρεῖν ... ἡ πίστις ἔσται μάταιος... οἷς ἀθέοις καὶ ἀσεβέσι τυγχάνουσι λόγοις ἀκολουθεῖ καὶ τὸ τοὺς πιστεύοντας ὑπὸ τῶν ἀστέρων ἀγομένους πιστεύειν εἰς θεὸν λέγεσθαι. (*Philocalia* 23.1)

From these opinions follows utter destruction of our free will… even faith would be in vain… These godless and unholy arguments demand that believers are said to be compelled by the stars to believe in God.[14]

He lists several other additional problems: Christ too would be subject to the influence of stars, likewise the prophets and apostles; prayer would be useless and moral responsibility meaningless were astral determinism to hold. The pagan notion of fate in its fullest force is clearly, in Origen's view, fundamentally at odds with Christian theology.

Having established such an incompatibility inherent in Christian beliefs in astral determinism, Origen begins to discuss what a meaningful reading of the stars as 'signs' might look like. To do so, he structures his argument around three questions:[15]

1. What is the content of the stars *qua* 'signs'?
2. Who made the signs?
3. To whom are the signs legible?

In answer to the first question Origen makes an assumption: that the stars signify the future; that is to say, that the content of the heavens is the stuff of foreknowledge. In doing so, he can shift the from a purely astrological focus to generalise more widely about foreknowledge; by establishing the signs/causes distinction through use of some conventional Stoic arguments, Origen

[12] Plotinus' (slightly) later discussion of the same problem in *Enneads* 2.3 turns on a different kind of exegesis (that of Plato), but takes the same basic signs/causes distinction as the central term of the argument.

[13] This argument is apparently novel.

[14] Greek text from J.A. Robinson, *Philocalia Origenes* (Cambridge 1893). Translations my own.

[15] These questions are not set out explicitly, but they lie beneath the structure of the rest of the text and thus I have felt it is important to elucidate them.

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maps the distinction onto foreknowledge (signs) and free will (i.e. the absence of external causes). Thus astrology, in the rest of *Philocalia* 23, acts as a case study for prophecy and foreknowledge as a whole.

To begin his discussion of free will and foreknowledge, Origen reminds us again of *Gen.* 1:14, emphasising the continuity of the present concerns with the scriptural context of the astrological discussion that has preceded. He then begins with foreknowledge, starting with a generalised version of the signs/causes question: does an entity's foreknowing an event necessarily imply that entity causes the event?

Origen invites consideration of the following scenario: an event takes place with a witness. Let us, for the sake of ease, use a specific example (which Origen does not): let us say that Augustine and Jerome have a fist-fight, and present, watching, is Polycarp. Polycarp then writes a letter to Ignatius to explain what happened. In this scenario, neither Polycarp nor his letter can be reasonably held to be responsible for the fight – they simply have disseminated knowledge of the event. Similarly, Ignatius, who wasn't even present, cannot have caused the fight. Apply this principle, Origen says, to the future. Take the same scenario, but in this case, Polycarp writes his letter *before* the fight, saying that it is going to happen. If it does in fact then happen, Ignatius cannot reasonably believe that Polycarp or his letter *caused* the fight – the fight was caused by none other than the participants, Augustine and Jerome. Thus, just because an entity has foreknowledge of an event, the entity does not *necessarily* cause that event, even if the entity puts its foreknowledge down in writing.

So, explains Origen, with Scripture. He cites the specific case of Judas – if somebody were to read a prophecy in Scripture that Judas would betray Christ, it would not be reasonable to say that Scripture itself caused Judas to betray Christ. Thus it would also not be reasonable to say that the author of Scripture caused Judas to betray Christ. Well, says Origen, this same principle applies even when the author is God – there is no *necessary* reason to believe, just because God authored the prophecy through the Spirit, that he *caused* Judas to do anything (other than in the most general sense of being the first cause of all things).

God's foreknowledge, for Origen, is beyond question:

ὁτι μὲν οὖν ἕκαστον τῶν ἐσομένων πρὸ πολλοῦ οἶδεν ὁ θεὸς γενησόμενον, καὶ χωρὶς μὲν γραφῆς αὐτόθεν ἐκ τῆς ἐννοίας τῆς περὶ θεοῦ δῆλον τῷ συνιέντι ἀξίωμα δυνάμεως νοῦ θεοῦ. (*Philocalia* 23.4)

That God knows far in advance each thing about the future, is, besides Scripture, from the very concept of God, clear to the person who understands the power of the divine mind.

Nevertheless, Origen spends sections 4-5 of *Philocalia* 23 on scriptural examples of God's foreknowledge, all of which are largely uncontroversial. It is worth noting at this point that Origen's notion of foreknowledge has

tightened from a vague/hypothetical event scenario to the prophecies of Scripture – that is, he is not talking about foreknowledge in general (as in pagan astrology), but a particular type of foreknowledge which is necessarily true and certain as it is the result of divine inspiration.

Origen now considers the issue of free will. He structures his argument around the following problems (*Philocalia* 23.6):

1. πῶς, προγνώστου ὄντος ἔξ αἰῶνος τοῦ θεοῦ περὶ τῶν ὑφ'ἑχάστου πράττεσθαι νομιζομένων, τὸ ἐφ' ἡμῖν σώζεται

How, given that God foreknows from eternity everything about each person, can we have free will?

2. καὶ τίνα τρόπον οἱ ἀστέρες οὐκ εἰσὶ ποιητικοὶ τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποις, σημαντικοὶ δὲ μόνον;

In what way are the stars not the causes of events among humans, but only signify them?

3. καὶ ὅτι ἄνθρωποι τὴν περὶ τούτων γνῶσιν ἀκριβῶς ἔχειν οὐ δύνανται, ἀλλὰ δυνάμεσιν ἀνθρώπων κρείττοσι τὰ σημεῖα ἔκκειται.

How human beings cannot understand these things accurately, but that the signs lie open to powers greater than us.

4. τίς γὰρ ἡ αἰτία τοῦ τὰ σημεῖα τὸν θεὸν πεποιηκέναι εἰς γνῶσιν τῶν δυνάμενων.

For what reason these signs were made by God for the powers to know.

We may note that Origen's discussion up to this point has carefully separated the issues of foreknowledge and free will. Sections 1-5 of *Philocalia* 23 only mention foreknowledge and causes of events, whereas at this point Origen's focus shifts to the human element: free will.

As an answer to the first problem, Origen posits an interesting solution. God, he argues, foresaw at once the entire universe and all things in it, the chains of cause and effect running from the beginning of time to the end of days. Thinking about God's foreknowledge in this way makes it even clearer, says Origen, that things do not happen *because* God foreknows them – he foreknows them *because* they happen. To unpick that statement a little, Origen explains with the case of Judas (*Philocalia* 23.9):

εἰ ἐνδέξεται Ἰούδαν προδότην γενέσθαι, ἐνδέξεται τὸν θεὸν φρονῆσαι περὶ αὐτοῦ ὅτι προδότης ἔσται.

If it is possible for Judas to become a traitor, it is possible for God to comprehend that he will become a traitor.

but also

εἰ ἐνδέξεται Ἰουδαν εἶναι ἀπόστολον ὁμοίως Πέτρῳ, ἐνδέξεται τὸν θεὸν νοῆσαι περὶ τοῦ Ἰούδα ὅτι μενεῖ ἀπόστολος ὁμοίως Πέτρῳ.

If it is possible for Judas to be an apostle like Peter [i.e. *not* to be a traitor] it is possible for God to know that he will be an apostle like Peter.

Therefore, God says to himself something along these lines:

ἐνδέξεται μὲν τόνδε τόδε ποιῆσαι, ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ ἐναντίον; ἐνδεξομένων δὲ ἀμφοτέρων, οἶδα ὅτι τόδε ποιήσει.

It is possible for him to do this [i.e. become a traitor] and also the opposite is possible; with both still being possible, I know that he will do this [i.e. become a traitor].[16]

This is a little clearer in cases where one option is trivially predictable (*Philocalia* 23.9):

οὐκ ἐνδέξεται τόνδε τινὰ τὸν ἀνθρωπον πτῆναι.

It is not possible for this man to fly.

οὐκ ἐνδέξεται τόνδε σωφρονῆσαι.

It is not possible for this man to behave with moderation.

In the first case, God knows that the only possible option is that the man cannot fly; men cannot fly, whoever they are, regardless of free will – it is an absolute sense of ἐνδεξομαι which denotes logical possibility. But in the second case, ἐνδέξεται does refer to something within the sphere of free will – a sort of possibility that does depend on us.[17] God knows that it is possible for the man either to behave with moderation or not to do so; as God foreknows all things, He knows which of the two will be the case *without compromising the man's free will to do either*.[18] This kind of argument from character – that God can perfectly predict a person's choices as he has perfect knowledge of their character – is found elsewhere in Origen's work, such as in *De Principiis* 3.1.[19]

Origen turns then to scriptural examples of prophets urging repentance as evidence against the compromising of free will.[20] Both rhetorically and philosophically, we are still quite clearly in the realm of prophecy and Scripture; astrology

[16] This section usually translates ἐνδεξομένων as a genitive (e.g. George Lewis' translation of 1911) – i.e, 'of the two, I know that he will do this'. I translate it as a present-tense genitive absolute to capture the sense of the continuing possibility of both courses of action despite God's foreknowledge, which, of course, is Origen's whole point.

[17] Origen uses ἐνδέξομαι and ἐφ'ἡμῖν interchangeably throughout this piece, but, as shown by the explicit setting out of this example, he has at least one concept of what 'can' might mean, in line with Stoic tradition. See Susanne Bobzien, 'The Inadvertant Conception and Late Birth of the Free-Will Problem', *Phronesis* 43 (May 1998), 133-75.

[18] This is essentially an argument that God can foreknow the actions of free agents by having perfect models of their characters. Thus, although a foolish man has the capacity to be wise in terms of free will, God knows his character intimately enough that he is able to see without any difficulty that he will not act wisely. In this model of God's foreknowledge, God's prediction of human actions is no different from human character-based predictions: God merely has a lot more information and a much better understanding of how to predict based off that information.

[19] Controversially, Origen uses this argument of the Devil's free will and potential for salvation. See *De Principiis* 3.1 on the Devil. See also Lisa Holliday, 'Will Satan Be Saved? Reconsidering Origen's Theory of Volition in "Peri Archon"', *Vigiliae Christianae* 63 (2009), 1-23.

[20] *Jeremiah* and *Isaiah* are the major examples.

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is still acting as a test case for broader questions around prophecy. Origen then moves back to the stars, in order to specify how the stars actually relate to God's mind, and uses a syllogism to argue against astral determinism. If the stars are, as Origen argues, an outpouring of the mind of God, then they are essentially an externalisation of God's foreknowledge. If God's foreknowledge of events is not the cause of events (as previously established), and if the stars are an externalisation of God's foreknowledge, then the stars are not the cause of events.

Origen uses some examples from contemporary astrology to explain this further. For example, in horoscopic astrology it was common practice to provide information not just about the newborn, but about his/her parents, any brothers or sisters, and other members of the family.[21] Even if, says Origen, we grant that the astrologers could have accurate charts of the constellations at the time of birth, they cannot possibly make the claim that the natal stars of the child are the *cause* of the father's status, or the number of brothers and sisters. If they grant that this is true, then they end up having to maintain that some of the natal stars are not causes but simply signifiers (those pertaining to the family and events preceding the child's birth), and some of them are causes (those pertaining to the child's future). This begs the question: which, and how can you tell them apart? And, indeed, what of the combinations of stars?[22]

Origen therefore rejects individual horoscopic astrology for at least two different reasons. However, having set up the notion of the stars as an outpouring of the mind of God and made allusion to higher powers, he must answer the fourth of his questions, and explain to whom the stars are legible and why: in short, he must account for the fact that he is declaring 'astrology' (of a kind) theoretically possible. His primary answer to this question is that the stars are legible for the 'astral powers', as in the Scriptural references to 'powers, dominions' and so on. These powers are interpreted variously by patristic authors; in this text, Origen appears to see them as operating like some kind of celestial civil service, instructed in their managerial affairs by a system of memos written in the stars:

στοχάζομαι [δὲ] ταῖς τὰ ἀνθρώπινα οἰκονομούσαις δυνάμεσιν ἐκκεῖσθαι τὰ σημεῖα, ἵνα τινὰ μὲν γινώσκωσι μόνον, τινὰ δὲ ἐνεργῶσι, καθάπερ ἐν ταῖς παρ'ἡμιν βίβλοις ἅ μὲν γέγραπται ἵνα γινώσκωμεν [...], ἅ δὲ ἵνα γινώσκοντες ποιῶμεν. (*Philocalia* 23.20)

I conjecture that the signs are shown to the powers which manage human affairs, so that they might know some things only, but do others, like how among human beings, in the Bible there are things written which we are to interpret only [...] and those things which we are, having understood them, to do.

[21] For example, see Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis* 2.14.

[22] This argument is actually unique in ancient anti-astrological literature. Although the first section, the objection to accurate star-charts, appears frequently (see n5), the combinatorial argument is not used. However, some of Cicero's (and following him, Augustine's) arguments concerning twins deal with the same problem.

Origen makes it clear that the powers cannot carry out hermeneutics of the heavens without their special link with the divine, their inspiration by the Holy Spirit. Thus, he claims, it was similarly possible for Biblical figures of great antiquity such as the magi at the nativity and Jacob to have been sufficiently divinely inspired to have been able to carry out the same reading of the heavens.

I believe Origen is reading this kind of 'astrology' in parallel with prophecy as a more arcane form of revelation, a revelation by which the prophet is not inspired verbally, but through the medium of the stars. Thus the scriptural references to astrology are rehabilitated, and astrology is theoretically possible, but the practices of contemporary pagan astrologers are wholeheartedly and thoroughly rejected. This refiguring of astrology as prophecy is explicitly stated:

ἀλλὰ παραπλησίως βιβλίῳ περιέχοντι τὰ μέλλοντα προφητικῶς ὁ πᾶς οὐρανὸς δύναται, οἱονεὶ βίβλος ὢν θεοῦ, περιέχειν τὰ μέλλοντα. (*Philocalia* 23.15)

But similar to a prophetic book which contains the future, the whole heavens can, like a book of God, contain the future.

This analogy links back to the step of the foreknowledge argument which focussed on whether Scripture itself could be a cause, or merely a sign. By comparing the stars to Scripture, Origen is implying that they, like Scripture, cannot be held to be the *cause* of events, even when their author is God. I believe that the logic of Origen's argument flows this way:

1. Astral determinism can be rejected on many grounds, therefore;
2. The stars, as a book authored by God, cannot be held to be the cause of events, therefore;
3. Scripture cannot be held to be the cause of events, even when the foreknowledge contained in it is necessarily true, therefore;
4. Just because God's foreknowledge is necessarily true, that does not imply he is the cause of events, therefore;
5. God is not necessarily the cause of events, and human free will is saved

In this article I have made the case that Origen's discussion of astrology is the first distinctively Christian interpretation of the subject: rather than relying on canonical pagan anti-astrological arguments, Origen uses the distinction between signs and causes in order to pursue a complex argument that is fundamentally about the nature of foreknowledge through prophecy, and about human free will. Contrary to previous scholarly opinion that Origen denies the possibility of human beings reading the stars, I have shown that the very reason for his writing on the topic depends on this possibility; astrology, which throws up its own set of exegetical considerations, is a topic that cuts to the heart of several of the most important themes of Origen's work: true and certain foreknowledge, prophecy, divine inspiration, and human free will.

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