

Short Essay
Sophia Lyons
ENG 303
Ranieri

Plato and Generation Z's Rhetoric of Astrology on Social Media

According to Refinery29, if Plato were a 90s snack based on his sign, he would be Bagel Bites. Which totally makes sense because he's a Taurus.

Background

Social media has emerged as the new largest facilitator for fads among its users. The wide demographics and technological capabilities social media platforms house allow for prominent themes and trends to become apparent and gain popularity. One of the most recent of these topics of obsession is astrology. Astrology on social media is different from the traditional sense of the study because it is more accessible, relatable, and interactive. People with a deeper understanding of astrology produce content that individuals who only know their sun sign (the main sign-- like how your sun sign is Pisces, Dr. Ranieri) will be able to appreciate. Across major social media platforms, the youngest age demographic of 18-29 consistently comprises the highest percentage of age groups that use the platform (Greenwood, Perrin, Duggan, 2016). People that are currently 18-23 are technically considered part of Generation Z. It is within this age group, including users younger than 18 and Millennial outliers, that I have noticed the greatest engagement and production of astrological content. It is through social media that this once easily-dismissed concept has become a common topic and online community among Generation Z. As the content spreads across different sects of social media users, it becomes more prevalent in pop culture as opposed to its original online community of specific astrology accounts and people who were well-versed in its

intricacies. To provide a basic framework for this paper, the social media platforms in the considerations are Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram, with a primary focus on Twitter and Tumblr as they are concentrated in blogging and microblogging and have the most prominent astrological content. The astrological content I will be referring to throughout this paper varies from typical horoscopes and focuses more on interpretive, humor-based, and relatable content that takes traditional astrological concepts and applies them to different content. Examples will be provided throughout the text.

As with most social media trends, the beginning of the widespread adoption of astrology can be sourced back to Tumblr. Tumblr qualifies as a blogging platform and allows multimodal posting. Aside from astrology-related art and horoscope dialogue, humorous astrological concepts gained popularity outside of the typical astrology blogs. Adaptations of in-depth astrological concepts for a common individual on Tumblr include:

- Memes with genuine astrological concepts
 - <http://thorn-in-my-spine.tumblr.com/post/180668152209/what-kills-the-signs>
 - <http://thorn-in-my-spine.tumblr.com/post/180601830424/the-signs-and-their-flaws>
- Astrology adopted by different fan groups
 - <https://morninghis-place.tumblr.com/post/180670104497/the-signs-as-reputation-songs>
 - https://www.tumblr.com/dashboard/blog/1dzodiac#=_

- <https://taffetaastrology.tumblr.com/post/180596377426/the-signs-as-meryl-daviss-costumes>
- Random application to any concept for entertainment purposes
 - <http://wonder-turns-to-danger.tumblr.com/post/180371003285>
 - <https://the-greenhedge-witch.tumblr.com/post/180539903631/what-the-signs-feel-like>
 - <https://zodiacrant.tumblr.com/post/180679887059/capricorn-nuclear-war-cruel-ultimate-aquarius>
- Simplified interpretations of astrological facets to be applied and understood individually
 - <https://starryloveangel.tumblr.com/post/180685206057/when-the-sun-rises-a-brief-description-of>

As with most content and popular concepts, Twitter adapted humorous and common astrology after it became popular on Tumblr. The majority of content mirrors that of what is posted on Tumblr, but because of the nature of microblogging and the different sense of interaction on Twitter compared to Tumblr, Twitter's astrological discourse is much more interactive and conversational. Large astrology-specific accounts, such as @PoetAstrologers have a high follower count and reputation for posting poetic astrological concepts and quotes from notorious individuals with their sun signs. People follow and engage with this account to get a new interpretation of their weekly horoscope as it is romanticized, more personalized, and applicable to general concepts. Accounts also reply to the weekly horoscope interpretations with translations of the poetry that people can engage with to seek another opinion. The posting accounts are typically

highly involved in the astrology community, while the followers tend to have less knowledge and use the larger accounts as a source for information.

Because of its visual nature, Instagram implements these concepts in a slightly adjusted way. While accounts do post screenshots of concepts and posts from Tumblr and Twitter, original astrological content on Instagram involves specifying visual concepts for the astrological signs. Memes such as “starter packs”-- collections of stereotypical actions, phrases, and tangible staples of an identity-- are especially common astrological posts on Twitter and applied to each sign. The majority of astrological content on Instagram includes original memes, reposted memes, and interactive Instagram stories that provide generalizations, stereotypes, manifestations, or representative metaphors about each sign that a user can repost and edit to indicate which of the provided concepts are relatable to them.

Facebook’s astrological content is less prevalent and relevant to this essay, but I will mention it because it is involved enough to be defined and contributes to the greater concept. Astrology on Facebook is primarily taken from the aforementioned social media platforms and is engaged with less because of the “outdated” nature and connotation of Facebook that Generation Z perceives.

The discourse communities comprised of Generation Z online users interacting through astrology have created and shifted traditional nomos on social media by creating overlap among previously separated groups through its multimodality and automatic connections among people with similar or compatible signs and alignments, as well as similar shared experiences based on astrological qualities affecting interactions with others. The larger community of people engaging in astrology on social media can be

even further classified into more specific groups based on sign identity, compatibility, alignments, rising signs, moon signs, etc. These groups have a very developed identity with a strong sense of community because of how personal astrology is.

So why astrology and why now? Generation Z is a generation that has had identities prescribed to them by everyone but themselves. They have a strong sense of autonomy and nonconformity and now is the time for them to decide how they will be defined and interact in society and the larger context of a generation. Not only does astrology provide detailed identifiers and a sense of personality, but it is general enough to be applicable and malleable so that individuality at a singular level is maintained, while still belonging to a larger group. The idea that people are inherently connected and impacted by the stars and universe is an easily-romanticized concept that assumes agency without denying believers free will. Astrology does not prescribe a lifestyle or purpose, but it connects individuals to nature and explains how its elements can impact a person's relationship with the world and others. These qualities have allowed Generation Z to supplement religion with astrology. Previous generations' deep commitment to and conflict resulting from organized religion have resulted in Generation Z searching for an alternative that is less prescriptive and aligns more closely to their lifestyle.

Astrology provides people with a greater purpose and connection to something unending, powerful, enduring, and supporting members of Generation Z's relation to Truth. Astrology provides an explanation for life and its tumultuous experiences through a connection to the natural world. The concept that nature is inherently impacting our relationships, emotions, and reactions connects people to the world they came from and provides solace in existing in the midst of something greater and alleviates existential

responsibility without eliminating it. Generation Z's rhetoric surrounding astrology on social media is parallel to Plato's fundamental rhetorical concepts.

Parallels

In its application on social media, astrology is equivalent to Plato's implementation of a Transcendental Truth that forms nomos and dictates the world that humans live in. The Oxford Dictionary defines astrology as "The study of the movements and relative positions of celestial bodies interpreted as having an influence on human affairs and the natural world" (Oxford, n.d.). The members of Generation Z that engage in astrological rhetoric and put stock in its concepts use it in the same sense that Plato believed in Truth. Astrology is an intangible plane that acts as a course of nature and is a higher existence that shapes and influences human life. Plato's utilization of Universal Truth serves the same purpose that it is a source of higher knowledge- unobtainable by average humans, but still subconsciously influential and an inherent aspect of human existence. Plato's forms are only accessible to the mind and not the senses, so it could be argued that astrology holds these forms because it is rooted in the universe.

According to Plato, the availability to access and understand such knowledge is limited.

His belief is that everyone exists before they are born with knowledge of universal truth. When a person is born and inherits a physical form on Earth, they lose that knowledge because they are brought down to the physical plane, while the knowledge of Truth continues to exist in the spiritual plane. Philosopher Kings that understand rhetoric and philosophy have access to that knowledge as dialectic and can disseminate it to the nine

levels of souls. The people that study, understand, and translate astrological concepts who run accounts on social media serve as Philosopher Kings for this community.

In addition to the more technical parallels between Plato's rhetoric and astrology, astrology serves as a medium for individuals to align themselves in a platonic relationship with rhetoric. Plato's concept of psychagogia is prevalent in astrological discourse on social media because followers are drawn to understand their lives and how their interactions are being impacted in a greater context. This application of these concepts to individuals' lives allow for them to engage in metacognition and be more self-aware of their emotions and aspects of relationships. Such awareness and evaluation fulfills Plato's ideology that an individual cannot live a good life if it is unexamined. Not only does astrology provide greater truth and meaning to life, but those who seek to understand it and use it to engage in civility as best they can are practicing such examination in order to better themselves and their contribution to society as a whole.

The implications of astrology being made into memes, humorous adaptations, discourse, and art forms convey that inherently there is a passion encompassing astrology and its partakers. Plato believed that passion and dialectic are what lead to the understanding and grasping of Truth, which is then disseminated to others as philosophy. Followers of astrology participate in this process (although it may not be at the level Plato prescribed, it can be adjusted to accurately coincide with astrology on social media) and therefore obtain access to the greater truth and insight that astrology provides. Astrology easily elicits passion because it is such a personal concept and people feel such a deep connection and exposure by it. Through this concept of eros, arete can be achieved. When individuals understand their personal and dynamic connection to

Transcendental Truth through passion, they achieve philosophia. The biggest aspect of this is that everything is introspective and through the scope of the individual. Taking the information provided and applying it to an individual's life and how it interacts with their being and outward existence aligns with Plato's strict belief that arete and philosophia cannot be taught or achieved through any means other than personal effort; individuals cannot be simply given an answer and accept it at face value because that is not true wisdom and understanding.

Conclusion

Regardless of whether this phenomenon continues to occur, this notion of the rhetoric surrounding astrology on social media paralleling Plato's rhetorical theories validates astrology and establishes its increasing prevalence as an aspect of Generation Z's cultural beliefs and identity. Scholars have established that Plato's ideologies are timeless and applicable to a variety of situations, but this paper expands on that by introducing the discourse that multimodality provides within a sect of a generation's conventions.

Sources

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