

INTRODUCTIONS

TO

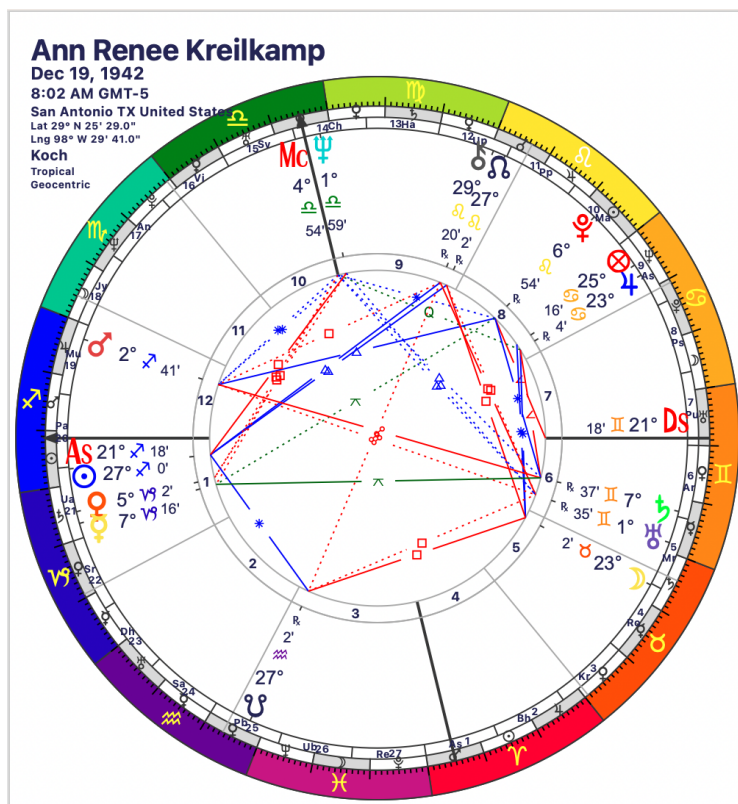
ASTROLOGY

HOW AND WHY

would a Ph.D. Philosopher

choose to learn Astrology?!?

The Answer is Socratic: KNOW THYSELF.



What I did not realize at the time I began this journey: The process of revealing the unique nature of the Self through astrology would blast through my dogmatic, fundamentalist conceptual helmet and open me to oneness, the infinite mystery of love and light. As usual, I offer my own journey as a template, that others may also open.

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Essay

IT STARTED WITH MY TEACHER

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From 1967 to 1972 I was under the influence of my major professor in graduate school.

In his mind, my teacher was a skeptic, and proud of it. Emotionally, however, he was a positivist. And it was this dynamic discord within him which excited me, which vibrated in tune with my own.

A skeptic is a searcher, he would tell me, over and over again, as I blundered into one dogma after another. A skeptic never stops searching, he believes nothing of what he hears or sees, but forever looks between, within, behind, beyond.

So far, so good.

But his emotional positivism had stopped him in his search. Unable to live out his ideals, he had become cynical. He could see/feel into the nature of reality only with his five outer senses. Thus was most of reality closed to him.

As a skeptic, his colleagues considered him radical, irreverent; a gadfly, even a pest.

But his skepticism ran skin-deep. That irreverence was only a token. Emotionally, he was a member of his generation of professional philosophers, each of them divided in two, body and mind.

Descartes said that body and mind are separate and independent entities, meeting only at the pineal gland. This gland is said by mystics to be the physical location of the spiritual “third eye,” that “sixth sense” within the body, not one of the original five.

Professional philosophers today agree with Descartes on the separation of mind and body. Indeed they live that separation in their lives. I think, therefore I am. Therefore only my thinking is me.

Professional philosophers ignore Descartes’ remark about the pineal gland. They see only bodies, they feel only their minds. Their spirits, their hearts, have been cut out from them.

Despite his skepticism, my teacher had final standards, those of his five outer senses. He was doomed to seek the “facts”; doomed, as a skeptic, to sniff around, discovering what was “false.”

I was with him for seven years.

It took me seven years to grow beyond him — something he told me in the beginning I must do.

“Do you want to be like me?” he asked, impish, as I came to him finally, begging for his help.

“Yes!” I cried, eagerly.

“*Wrong!*” he thundered. “You must go beyond me, you must stand on my shoulders.”

And when I did he rejected my philosophy, accusing me hotly: “You are an absolute relativist!”

I thanked him.

For if the spiritual world exists, then both mind and body are bathed in its aura and there need be no separation between them. Once we climb back into our bodies, our minds will assume their rightful place as servants to the spirit, and we will begin to appreciate the mystery, the utter relativity, of the movement of the spirit in the world.

The usual problem with seeing things relatively (and I mean absolutely relatively, i.e., everything is in motion, reality is a process, not three merely dimensional) is that we can't; we can't postulate it and know what we mean. We can only point to it, live it, live in it.

To establish the meaning of anything we must compare it to something else, itself regarded as "fixed" (i.e., not relative). "Absolute relativity" then is, once spoken, only an empty phrase. It refers to nothing, no thing at all. So we settle for a relative relativism.

We measure relative value by assuming a fixed standard against which any other two things (ideas, values, people, nations) are measured as for their relative value via-a-vis that standard. So when we say "everything is relative" we are only meaning, in effect, that there are different standards by which to measure things. Or, things have value relative to standards. *Whatever standard we pick, however, tends to degenerate into dogma.*

So far I have been talking mere philosophy. Its consequences, however, are very real. For what is happening today is that our standards are being pulled out from under us.

This frightens us.

Our world is falling apart.

The sky is falling in.

Why do I say this? Because, it turns out, absolute relativity pulls the rug of civilization out from under us. Here, I offer two examples of how absolute relativity is degrading society as we know it; both of these examples are among the most important human considerations/institutions. These are gold and marriage.

Gold was the universal standard for 2000 years until 1971. In that year the Feds said that the amount of money extant would no longer bear a fixed relationship to gold. That the gold standard was old, outdated, unnecessary.

Economists do not understand the relationship between economics and the human psyche, between economic and emotional security. For once that fixed relationship was broken, the Feds were free to print as much money as they liked. By pulling the rug out from under economics, the stage was set for rampant inflation and devaluation of the dollar.

Interestingly enough (for those who take note of coincidences), something happened to pull the rug out from under the long-standing institution of marriage too — and at about the same time (late '60s). No longer can we say “til death do us part” — and know we mean it. Each time we divorce and marry again, we are de-valuing the traditional standard of marriage.

Many people say we need a revaluation of marriage — but these studies are still, by and large, confined to various descriptions of the changing rights and duties of the individuals within it. Nowhere have I yet seen a revaluation of marriage itself as an institution and its changing relationships to the rest of society. The proof: when we divorce, we still think we have, in some fundamental way, failed. We vow never to marry again. Or we vow that “next time it will be different.”

As with marriage, so with gold. The collapse of both of these as fixed standards is ushering in new kinds of wars, economic and emotional wars, where everyone fights to preserve his or her own security by grabbing money and the “things” it buys — including gold; by grabbing partners, one marriage after another, then another . . .

We still rush for seats on the see-saw, but its pivot is cracking. Soon both ends of the board will come crashing down.

Nobody wins in an economic/emotional war. Everybody loses, once the pivot breaks.

The question is, what is the standard that shall replace the gold standard and its hand-maiden, the “free” market?

The question is, what is the standard that shall replace marriage and its handmaiden, the moral majority?

Either we will create other standards — and treat them too, as gods — or we will once and for all recognize the relativity of all standards, all value-systems, save those of the laws of our own nature and our environment. These laws, however, we cannot “know” in the end — even relatively! For they interpenetrate one another, they swallow one another, there is no single perspective to which all other views are to be reduced.

The laws of nature are natural, and therefore mysterious to the mind. They emerge from the spirit. They cannot be contained.

Absolute relativity in our thinking *could* encourage spiritual compassion, absorbing all in all, a movement of the heart of humankind.

That is why, herr professor, I am an (absolute) relativist. This does not mean I’m amoral, that I have no values. On the contrary. My standards are subject to change, as my perspective enlarges to admit as much of reality as I possibly can at any given moment into consciousness. If everyone did this, the lines of division between us would melt, dissolve, and we would realize: there are no “facts.” There are only miracles. And we are one.

Whatever my current standards, they are ever subject to a law higher and deeper than my conscious knowledge of it. This law I regard as a vanishing point for my constantly growing awareness; for its mystery, its utter relativity, is that against which I measure my life.

Essay

ANNIE IN ASTROLAND

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Imagine yourself in front of a mirror. You are, as usual, trying to see who you really are. But this mirror does the usual: it feeds back what you give it. You smile, it smiles; you frown, it frowns. Whatever you do, it does too, simultaneously. There is no way you can catch yourself unaware, no way you can really learn something new, so complete, so automatic, is this mimic, this mockery.

Suddenly, the mirror dissolves. From being faced with a two-dimensional flat reflecting plane, you are now behind the mirror; you are Alice, you are in another world, a world with more than two dimensions.

You look around. There is nothing there. Oh no . . . there is nothing there! Or is there?

Suddenly, in the corner of your eye, you notice something. Quick! You turn to look. What is it? You don't know. How can you tell? For as you focus on it, it vanishes. (Strange as this experience is, it reminds you of other times — like walking through a forest. Sometimes it seems as if there are little creatures out there — elves? fairies? — they allow you to experience them through your peripheral vision, as shadows in the corners of your eyes; but the moment you turn your head to look, they vanish.)

Something else catches the corner of your eye. Aha, something is there. But it seems far away. Or is it? You move closer, you want a closer look. Oh no! . . . as you put your foot down, the ground crumbles under your feet.

You are falling, falling. You want to grab hold. But to what? There is nothing there! Finally, you land again, in another place now, another space. Again, totally unfamiliar. Again, you try to orient yourself, this time not so sure you'll be able to. Where is the sun, the moon, the sky, where are the houses, the trees, the people? But again, nothing. No thing, only a vast, spacious silence. But wait, there is something, there are many things! What are they? How many are there? Where does one begin and the other leave off? How to separate one from another? What is real, what is not?

You reach for (one?) (two?) of these (things?). You want to feel it, to measure it, to make sense of it, to make sure it exists.

You reach for "it," and it too is gone. Was it too close or too far away? Was it real, or are you dreaming?

You are confused. You are lost. You are abandoned. You are newborn, you must begin from scratch.

Such was my experience of the new world of astrology, a world where the usual coordinates of space and time do not exist. And because they do not exist, learning to find my feet in this new world was difficult. Indeed, it may have been the most difficult experience of my life, requiring me, over a period of years, to discover resources I never knew I had, to penetrate into areas of understanding that I never knew existed. Astrology became my teacher, guiding me to go with a certain inner process, despite wave after wave of pain and confusion that would wash over me, resulting at times, in a skepticism, a despair, a meaninglessness so profound that there were times when I wondered if I would ever be able to return from behind the mirror to my normal self . . .

Whew! Here I am again, back on the right side of the mirror. As before, it operates in the usual way, with instantaneous mimicry, mockery. I am relieved. I am frustrated. Relieved, to be back again, back to normal. Frustrated, because I am no longer there, no longer exploring that new world.

Wanting to make sense of what happened to me, wanting to get assurance that this really did happen to me, I talk to a friend. Or rather, I try to talk to this friend. But what do I say? I have no words to describe my experience. In fact, because I have no words for the experience, I am rapidly losing touch with it, it is fading from my conscious memory. (Rather like a dream does, if I don't remember it in words. And as with dreams, what I remember later is veiled by the words originally used to describe it.)

But I try anyway. I try to find analogies. Like Alice. Like going behind the looking glass. But I am caught in a bind. To the extent these analogies communicate, they falsify what I actually experienced. To the extent they do make sense to my friend, he/she says this makes no sense.

Now I am truly alone.

I find myself behind the mirror again. Again I see something, this time directly, in focus. Not one, but two things, two things that look alike. Aha! Breakthrough! For if I can see two things of the same kind, then I can also, in that same perception, see them as separate from one another. It is my perception of both, my ability to see them as related, which allows me to recognize the identity of one of them, in itself. Seeing two, I begin to measure them in space and time by comparing them to one another, noticing both sameness and differences. In short, I begin to point to them, name them, say this is that, this is not that, this is like that, this is not like that.

As before, when I try to get close to these two "objects," to focus clearly, to see their details — the ground crumbles. But this time I expect it. I expect to not fall forever, but to land. And as before, I land in a different place, a space totally unfamiliar.

Again, something there. Several things. Four of them! Two kinds, two of each kind. Two different kinds. Two names. X and Y. This is X. This is Y. X is related to Y, X is different from Y. And so. On. I am beginning to be able to describe my experience, to speak of it to the folks back home. To let them know I am not crazy, not just dreaming.

Our dreams are individual. Only seldom do we have repeated dreams. (One example here, of a common repetitive dream, is, ironically, that of falling through space — a type of dream some consider nightmarish.) Even more seldom do we have dreams where one dream takes off from another, makes sense in terms of the other.

Every morning I wake up from my dreams. Every morning it is the same. The sun comes up. The sun goes round. The sun goes down. If our dreams were like this, if every dream had the sun, or any other regular patterning as a backdrop, then I could indeed say that I lead two lives, one by day, one by night. For then there would be no such thing as “sleep,” as both my day-world and my night-world would be regularly patterned, would both be “real;” during both of them I would be, in some sense, “awake.”

To make sense of my experiences in the world behind the mirror is to somehow begin to see them as patterns. If I can do this, and give words to the patterns I see, then I can begin to make sense to others. To be able to make sense to others gives me confidence, helps me know I am not crazy, not dreaming, that this world is real, real enough for me to continue exploring, real enough not to be so frightened I stop.

Of course, it helps if other people have also gone behind the looking glass. And it turns out, they have, or anyway, they say they have. There is a whole literature describing this new world. There is, in fact, a whole language, complete with symbols, statements, ways of making sense.

As I explore the literature of astrology, as I begin to learn this language, I find that different people give different meanings to astrological symbols, and patterns of symbols; that they try to make sense of this world in many different ways.

This confuses me. This confuses me almost as much as does the new world they all want to describe.

Nevertheless, I continue to read the literature, and to make exploratory trips behind the glass.

The literature helps me make sense of the world it is attempting to describe. My experience of this world helps me make sense of the literature.

Gradually, I begin to sort out the new world from the literature used to describe it.

Gradually, I begin to see where my eyes play tricks on me behind the glass; I begin to sort out what is real, what is illusory, what is happening in its own terms, what I am projecting upon it from the world outside.

Gradually, I begin to see which parts of the literature are real, which are mere copies: I sense which authors have actually gone behind the mirror, which are standing in front of it — and doing as the mirror does — they mimic, they mock—.

Gradually, I begin to learn what a symbol is in general, as distinguished from the mere name of an object. “Names,” in our world, are assumed to have one or several clearcut meanings, or “definitions.” Different dictionaries have somewhat different definitions, but all of them come close to what we think of as “standard” definitions. (We assume reliance on these standards ensures communication between one person and another. How many times were we told in high school to begin our term papers by “defining our terms”?)

Symbols, on the other hand, have many different meanings, they operate on many levels, within many dimensions. Symbolic meaning is not stable, not fixed. It is indeterminate, ongoing, opening; it radiates out from some central mysterious core. Rather than denoting some “thing,” symbolic meaning connotes — a certain context or atmosphere, a particular space/time. The symbolic meaning of any astrological energy is the space/time which it inhabits, is the amount of time it takes to carve out its own space.

Take the symbol “Jupiter,” for example. Rather than referring to the physical body in the sky of the astronomer, the astrological Jupiter refers to a cycle of 12 years, and the space, or field which that cycle encloses. Any situation on earth that can be described as exhibiting, somehow, a 12-year pattern, or obvious fractions thereof ($\frac{1}{2} = 6$ yrs, $\frac{1}{3} = 4$ yrs, $\frac{1}{4} = 3$ years), can be identified as having “Jupiterian” characteristics. Just how any particular 12-year pattern relates to “Jupiter” depends how the astrologer makes sense

of it. Different astrologers exhibit particular temperaments, training, life experiences, prejudices, values, etc.

And it's not just the astrologer who brings to astrology his/her own point of view. The client, too, is living at a certain level of his/her own development, and it is up to the astrologer to somehow recognize what point on his/her evolutionary spiral that client is on. Just how this is done, again depends on the astrologer. Some are intuitive, some are psychic, some are skilled observers of behavior; some know how to probe for and make sense of the client's history and values.

To take another example, the astrological "Uranus": within the context of the life of a person who is asleep to any energy beyond the orbit of Saturn (30 years), Uranus energy (84 year cycle) may simply manifest as nervousness or irritability, sudden disruptive events, including accidents; to the evolved soul, on the other hand, Uranus energy can signify brilliance, originality, one who welcomes the unexpected.

It stands to reason that no astrologer can interpret a client's chart who is living at a level beyond what that astrologer has experienced.

Though I have digressed somewhat beyond my initial experience of astrology, I hope this side track makes its point: for many and various reasons, what appears on the surface as conflicting meanings of one and the same symbol does not necessarily mean that all but one or several of these meanings are "wrong" or "false." This I had to learn. It was not easy for me.

Each time I would come upon a discrepancy, each time I discovered two or more authors saying seemingly incompatible things about the same astrological situation, I would try to dismiss astrology as inconsistent. But I couldn't. It didn't work. Astrology kept calling me to it, as moth to the flame, and each time I got burned I would lick my wounds and return. There was no stopping it.

It took me two years of concentrated study — and repeated periods of depression, despair — before I began to think and dream in the language of astrology.

It took me another two years before I could say anything.

Meanwhile, I learned both deductively and inductively, devouring books, setting up hundreds of charts, comparing each to my own — not because I am a narcissist, but because my own experience is, after all, what I know, what I can count on; is, ultimately, for each of us, the lever which can move the world.

What I have been attempting to describe here is my initial experience of the world of astrology, and the astrological language. An experience of loss, confusion, abandonment. This experience, common to any journey into any new language, is more intensified the further removed the new language is from the language one ordinarily speaks. This experience of disorientation is not merely linguistic, it is experiential: one of the characteristics of a living language is that it both reflects and is an integral part of a certain way of being-in-the-world. The language one speaks and the culture one inhabits are one and the same.

It is fairly easy for an English-speaking person to learn French, or Spanish, or German. All four of these languages are “Indo-European” — they are built upon the same structural base; they have the same deep structure for their grammars, and their languages reflect it as a set of assumptions about the structure of the world as a whole. We Indo-Europeans cut up the world in the same sorts of ways.

For an English-speaking person to learn Chinese, however, is quite another matter, as both the language and the culture of China are alien to those of European ancestry.

The languages of biology, chemistry and physics are all built upon the same structural base — the scientific model of the world inherited from the 17th century. As do scientists, as a group, tend to have somewhat the same values, attitudes, beliefs, prejudices. It is the rare scientist who is open-minded enough to see some possible value in astrology. Most of them view it as silly, nonsensical, superstitious. This is no surprise. The culture of science is as removed from that of astrology as is English from Chinese.

The culture of science treats “time” as if it were a straight-line series of connected instantaneous moments, forever receding into the past, projecting into the future.

Hence the culture of science cannot make sense of the idea of cyclical time, of time as a turning back on itself, as beginning again forever.

The culture of science treats “space” as if it were always the same, a three-dimensional framework or grid. There are no alternate levels, dimensions or realities within the “space” of the culture of science; science does not speak of different “spaces,” nor, in any real way, can it make sense of the idea of context, except as “larger” and “smaller” contexts with the same three-dimensional boundary system.

So too with the scientific treatment of “objects,” as mapped in language by nouns, names. Science assumes the dictionary definition, the “correct” definition. Science can make no sense of the symbolic nature of the astrological language.

Notice: I am not speaking here about the rare scientists who map out possible scenarios that move beyond Newtonian 3D space and time. Of course these pioneers exist, and they explore myriad possibilities that leave most people, even most other scientists, behind. On the other hand, the standard culture of science, what some might call the common-sense of science, also our ordinary common-sense. Scientists deal with the same reality we do in our ordinary lives, the difference being that they investigate it in more detail. Science cuts up the world the way Indo-Europeans do, the way we do. As a part of the deep structure of our ordinary common sense, it is something we do not question.

To go behind the mirror is to leave both science and common-sense behind. Is to encounter a world of many spaces (many dimensions), many times (many cycles), all of them reflecting, charging, interpenetrating each other. Is to learn to accept uncertainty, and acknowledge that all is relative, all is real, there is no one truth, nor one way of arriving at it. Is to enter a world where each entity born is a promise — of uniqueness, of originality, fulfilling *exactly* its own destiny as a specific and utterly necessary function within a larger whole.

I go behind the mirror. Daily, regularly. Deeper and deeper. And as I do, I change.

Essay

HOPIS, MYSTICS, MADMEN, ASTROLOGERS

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Imagine a world of light and shadow, swirling, flickering. No forms are visible. All is change.

Imagine a world where there are no objects “out-there” in space.

Imagine the world inside your skin!

Imagine our civilization as having its own skin.

Imagine this skin as a sieve, full of holes. Holes to admit light. White holes, white light. Light swirls into color, dynamic, dancing.

Imagine the newborn’s world, much the same.

Or is it?

William James spoke of the “buzzing booming confusion” of a newborn’s world. Yet recent studies show children recognize at least one abstract pattern immediately upon birth: A circle with two short horizontal lines for eyes, one short horizontal line for nose centered below eyes; one short line for mouth centered below nose.

Indeed, researchers found that these same four lines arranged in any other way within a circle do not evoke a response. Newborns, apparently, are triggered to recognize a certain pattern for its survival value. This kind of recognition seems to be natural, transcultural, species-wide, a part of human (and animal?) nature.

We are born natural, responding instinctively, at one with the world. Gradually, over a period of years — the developmental psychologist Jean Piaget claimed 12 years — we are taught to split ourselves off from our original nature. The natural mind recedes deep underground, to remain there until some event, some *miracle*, arouses it to life. Meanwhile, the child learns to adapt to the prevailing human culture, learns to “objectify” nature, and these days, eventually, put a price tag on it.

“What’s this, Mommy, what’s that?” our small children ask. They drive us crazy with their questions, their need to know the names of things.

Naming is the beginning. Soon our children learn verbs and link names together. “Dick threw the ball.” “I want a cookie.”

In only a few short years our children master the hidden rules, the grammar, of the English language. Once they learn to talk, they see the same world we do. From that time on they are enculturated, locked in.

All this is obvious, so obvious we forget we had to learn how to do it. So obvious we seldom realize: there is no such thing as uneducated seeing. What we see is, in part, a function of what we have already learned.

The grammar of the English language mirrors the world-view we call Newtonian: “separate bodies moving through three-dimensional space according to laws of “linear time” — past to present to future. We take this way of viewing and interacting with the world “out there” for granted. We call it “common sense.” We question the sanity of anyone who does not see/feel the same.

According to the anthropologist Edward Sapir, the grammar of the Hopi Indian language mirrors a different world-view. This language contains no names, no nouns, no “objects”; nor does it include either past or future verb tenses. For them, time is always Now, eternally present. We say “Dick threw the ball.” They would say something like “there is a ball throwing.”

We have trouble imagining the world of the Hopi. Even our imaginations are framed by our language — and its world-view.

Each language describes its own world — once learned, it is an integral part of that world. Each language frames things up, uses a special set of glasses. The closer the prescriptions on our linguistic glasses, the easier it is to talk to one another.

We can't talk to newborns and expect them to answer us back.

We can't talk to the Hopi and expect him/her to share our preoccupation with the past and the future.

We can't talk to madmen either. They have retreated into a private world. They speak a private language.

Mystics, east and west, also speak a private language. Their experience, while very real, is not shared with the rest of us.

Mystics, some poets, and many contemporary physicists all point to a world which is not the same as the one we see. This world has no objects in space. No time as we know it.

20th century physics is discovering that the original scientific view of solid bodies moving through empty space ("atoms through the void") according to laws of linear time works only for the middle dimensions, the ones in our daily life. Neither the worlds of the very small or the very large can be described this way. Within the atom and within the galaxy, time and space are not separate. Rather, they co-exist, as "space-time," a four-or-more-dimensional continuum.

We think we know that, because our instruments are precise, and our equations add up.

We have yet to imagine it.

We have yet to invent a language which can talk about and make sense of relativistic physics. Once we do, we will cross an experiential boundary-line. We will no longer see bodies in space, but fields of energy, dynamic, dancing.

Einstein once said to a friend, as they were strolling past an insane asylum, "There are the madmen who are not atomic physicists!" Perhaps he was only joking. (I imagine

his friend took his remark that way.) Or perhaps he was talking about his actual experience, the price he had to pay for inventing the special theory of relativity. Perhaps that invention was a process of discovery, not only of the mind, but personally. Perhaps Einstein was actually reborn, as a different kind of person than his fellows, one whose actual experience of the universe had been transformed

When I first began to study the language of astrology, I was a Newtonian. I lived in clock time, I saw solid bodies moving through the void.

Now my seeing is more akin to that of the newborn, the Hopi, the mystic, the madman, the 20th century physicist.

Imagine the solar system.

Imagine each planetary “body” as a symbol for a certain quality of energy.

Imagine many such energies — all defined relativistically — *according to the times they take to carve out their own spaces, their cycles, or orbits.*

Imagine these energies interacting — as an electromagnetically charged field, dynamic, dancing.

Imagine this world inside your skin. Imagine it everywhere, filling the void.

There is no void. There are, rather, holes, white holes, white light. Filling space/time, lighting the world with meaning.

Astrology studies the structure produced by space/time, studies the forms within circles and cycles. Astrology assumes meaning, and discovers it. Everywhere.

STANDING IN THE CENTER

The world-view generated by my study of astrology

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As a child I was a female Faust. By the time I grew up I was determined to know everything — all the facts. Though I didn't deal my soul to the devil for knowledge, I did read every page of the encyclopedia — up through the letter "C." In one ear and out the other. I had no net to catch my facts, no principle of selection, no framework beyond the alphabet, no real reason to learn anything in particular.

I never told anyone about my determination. There were limits to what people could accept. They would have called me foolish, naïve. There were too many facts even then, thirty odd years ago, for any one person to collect them all.

Though my project was doomed, the way I went about it was quite acceptable. Let me explain.

For the past three hundred years we who live in the western world have been making the assumption that all our knowledge arises originally from impressions made upon the five outer senses, impressions which, once translated into words, we call "facts." This method of learning we call "scientific," and its theoretical formulation we owe to the philosopher John Locke, who said that when we are born our minds are "blank tablets" ready to receive "impressions" from the outside world. All our knowledge, he said, is gained "inductively," from experience through our five outer senses.

Though I didn't know it then, there was a (Lockean) method to my madness. Despite my naivete, my failure to achieve my goal, the path I had chosen was traditional.

Rene Descartes, speaking at the same time as Locke, said the opposite: all our knowledge comes from God. We are born, he said, with “innate ideas,” and these ideas are guaranteed true. Why? Because God is perfect, therefore God wouldn't lie to us.

This method of learning we now call “deductive” (or, sometimes, “intuitive”). In contrast to learning from the bottom up, deductive learning proceeds from the top on down.

Descartes' faith in God's benevolence describes the other half of my child's mind. A good Catholic girl, I trusted dogma — for the same reason Descartes did.

Three centuries ago, Descartes and Locke engaged in a debate as to which method of learning — inductivism or deductivism — was correct. This debate still continues in academic circles, though we call it by different names: “nature versus nurture,” “heredity versus conditioning.”

Though this debate is abstract, its real world consequences reach far and wide. Legal dilemmas reconciling the claims of religion with those of the state, ethical choices as to whether to send someone to jail or try to rehabilitate him, educational choices as to what and how to teach in schools — these choices, among others, reflect how we decide, usually unconsciously, the outcome of this debate.

Those who value deductive over inductive learning tend to be somewhat rigid in their views, and are more likely to favor the status quo. Quite certain that their beliefs are true — after all, God is on their side — they are not only unlikely to appreciate others' points of view, but indeed often feel it their duty to convert others to their own. This attitude — need I say it? — is the fertile breeding ground for war, and indeed we could say that all wars are religious wars, the protagonists fighting over whose God is the real one. (In this context, we might call both Capitalism and Communism religions.)

Those who value inductive over deductive learning tend to be more broadminded, but lack backbone. Believing that anybody can be educated into believing anything, they tend to treat the human mind as if it were a machine, a computer, where all learning is Skinnerian conditioning, brainwashing. This view of the mind is a fertile field for consumer advertising and presidential campaigns. Here, ethical and metaphysical questions do not arise, unless programmed.

Debates, in their abstract form, are dueling dualities. Protagonists hold opposite views, each seeking to present the best reasons for holding to his position rather than switching to the other. There is, in principle, no natural stopping point for a debate, as one can always discover another, better reason for holding on than one has come up with so far. Given the inherent structure of the intellectual game of debate, it's no wonder, after three hundred years, we are still trying to choose between Locke and Descartes.

Our debates describe the limits of our thinking. It takes imagination to see beyond them.

Most people, if asked, would attempt to choose one side or the other. In practice, however, these same people act as if both sides are true — in their respective areas. They divide their minds into two parts, each working independently. I think of my own father here :a medical doctor, one side of his brain judges what is real according to scientific standards; a devout Catholic, the other side of his brain *believes*, beyond reason. Credo, ut intelligam.

Think of opposites as two poles, or end-points, of one line. Make this line the diameter of a circle. Viewed in this way, dualities measure the sizes of our circles, and their circumferences describe the limits of our imaginations.

Any particular debate is possible only when we are inside the circle which its dualities define. Once we see a circle as a whole, from the outside, that debate disappears. There is no either/or; there is both/and.

We don't solve our internal divisions. Rather, we transcend them, move beyond them.

Each of us stands inside the circle of his/her own world-view. Our world-views describe for us the ways it is possible for us to think. Once we reach the boundary-system of our particular circle, once we see/feel its outer limits, we can choose: do we move beyond that circle to a larger, more inclusive one, or do we repeat ourselves, going round and round in circles.

The esoteric belief system and its description through the astrological language offers us another, larger world-view than the one we are accustomed to using. Here, there are no debates between dualities; these resolve into larger wholes.

Imagine each planet as an energy. Imagine its orbit as a circle, or cycle, carved into space around the earth as centerpoint, through time.

Each of us is standing in the center of an infinitely expanding world. The more energies we tune into, the greater, the more inclusive our awareness.

Essay

MY JOURNEY INTO ASTROLOGY

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Introduction

“And you?” My teacher looked up, his left eyebrow arched, pencil poised. “I want to do a paper on the concept of ‘time,’” I mumbled, timidly. “Time?” He sniffed. “I wouldn’t touch the subject. Too difficult.”

Shocked by his refusal, and how it made me, for a moment, the center of a scornful audience of his other pet graduate students, my cheeks burned. Shrinking into my seat, I agreed to change my topic to something smaller, more manageable.

That exchange occurred twenty years ago. I find myself remembering it now, as it was an early clue in my thinking process to what would eventually become a passion for astrology. Back then, my teacher wouldn’t have touched the subject of astrology either. Not because it was “too difficult” (actually, sometimes I think it is!), but because, he told me over lunch one day, it was “nonsense.”

In this opinion, my teacher was reflecting what was then — and still is — the dominant cultural view of astrology. This view is especially pronounced in academic circles. “Superstition!” they huff, when asked, and strive to confine their thoughts to reason. Naturally, as a child of my time, I too had absorbed the dominant view of astrology.

I was a doctoral student in philosophy for six long years, years during which I forced my self to think with left brain only. This rigorous training regime only reinforced my acquiescence to the dominant view of astrology. Astrology was nonsense, of course! But I did want to understand time. That there could have been a connection between astrology and the study of time, did not occur to me.

Astrology is the study of the forms of space and time, as revealed by the positions and motions of heavenly bodies. It isolates and investigates abstract maps — of structures and processes, circles and cycles, and their various and complex rhythmic relations. Any particular moment, as experienced from the point of view of a particular place on earth, can be isolated as a certain set of space/time coordinates. These coordinates, in principle, both focus with pinpoint precision on that one space/time point only and yet include the entire solar system as background context.

Specifying the set of coordinates as a cross formed by the intersection of horizontal and vertical lines, the astrological map is designed as a circle with a cross in it. The earth is located in the center of the circle; the planets range around it at various points on the circumference.

We are all familiar with this basic design. The cross inside the circle is easily the fundamental perceptual form. This form has universal significance: the cross of matter is surrounded by the circle of spirit. Each of us is a square peg trying to fit into a round hole. For each of us, the task is to circle the square, square the circle, and learn how to integrate matter and spirit in our lives.

This basic perceptual form is a living mandala, with deep symbolic underpinnings. Called in alchemy the “quadrature circuli,” the cross inside the circle is a symbol that both reaches back to the ancients and is found in many symbol systems today, world-wide. We recognize it in the cross and the halo of the Christ; we see it in the Native American medicine wheel and its four directions; we witness it in the first recognizable drawings made by any child; and we acknowledge it in the deep structure of the language of astrology.

An astrological map can be constructed for anything or anyone said to be born at a certain time and place. The astrological “birthchart” is a mandala figure, symbol of wholeness for the being it represents. It puts that particular being at the exact center of its universe — an expanding universe, where the orbits of planets are conceived as a series of concentric rings ranging outwards from that centerpoint.

If our task, here on earth, is consciousness expansion, then the astrological world-view, with its continuous expansion outward from any given center, is the largest meaningful reference system we could possibly ask for! How to interpret a birthchart is, however, a fiendishly subtle and complex matter, more art than science, and wisely practiced only after years pondering the marvelous intricacies of both astrology and human nature.

After completing my doctoral degree in philosophy, I moved to California to begin my long awaited career as a philosophy teacher in an experimental college. At the end of that school year I was summarily fired — for being “too experimental.” What a shock! Not that I blame them now. I was righteous and dogmatic. And I did not understand time — or “timing,” having no idea of what a particular community could absorb in a certain amount of time.

Time had caught up with me. An astrologer could have predicted it, or something like it. During the entire year I was teaching, the planet Saturn (called “Father Time” by the medieval; back then life expectancy wasn’t much longer than thirty years, the equivalent of one full cycle of Saturn) crossed back and forth over my “Descendant.” The Descendant was the degree of the zodiac setting in the western sky at my birth, and means, roughly, where I emerge from a private into a more public world. Saturn, which can signify separation, certainly did that to me then. In one stroke, I was rudely severed from what I had been judging against.

The collapse of this long planned career structure for my life shattered my long held views on life as well, and left me open, vulnerable. So much so, that when one woman,

noticing my evident confusion, volunteered to construct my “astrological chart,” I succumbed to that nonsense.

She also offered to “read” it for me, but I refused. Didn’t trust her. Didn’t trust anyone after being fired. Instead, I stared at the design she had created, and was instantly — if unwillingly — caught by its strangeness, its oddly haunting power. For three months I stared, mesmerized, and stared into the mirror too, trying, trying, trying to bring my face into focus. Gradually the question dawned: could this design be a mirror — metaphorically? A mirror for my life? Could my astrological birthchart help me understand what had happened to me?

Instinctively, I knew that the quickest, most incisive way to find out was to look at the positions and motions of what are called the “outer planets” in relation to my birthchart — for a certain two year period of my life. The outer planets — Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto — said to signify the “energies” of the “collective unconscious mind,” are related to the evolutionary path upon which our species is embarked. When any of these planets cross points occupied by personal planets in an individual’s birthchart, they set off a series of inner and outer events in the life so mysterious and so strange that they do not fit in with our current cultural perceptions of reality. Indeed, those who have undergone such an experience unanimously speak of it as something they could not have believed or predicted beforehand, and which acted upon or moved within them in a manner beyond their conscious control.

Our scientific culture doesn’t like to think of events being unpredictable and “out of control.” Such a state, when occurring to an individual, is labeled crazy, to be avoided. “Get control of yourself” they would tell me, when, three years previously, in the middle of my graduate school years, I found myself undergoing a massive and prolonged unconscious turbulence politely referred to then as a “nervous breakdown.” (Now we call it “transformation.”)

Even during those dark and fertile and frightening, and yet, mysteriously wondrous two years, I recognized them as a sort of initiation process, the turning point of my life. Prior to that time, as one of my teachers put it, I had been a “good uptight graduate student.” (“So why did you give it up?” He asked, genuinely puzzled.) The “breakdown”

was a “breakthrough” — into another reality altogether. I mutated, I transformed, into a questing flaming revolutionary; first, in thought and word — as a graduate student, then in action — as a college teacher.

Now I had been fired. The ladder I had been climbing all my life had suddenly been yanked out from under me. Still in shock, I sat there staring at my birthchart, such nonsense! — and wondered if it could help me understand what had happened to me. There seemed to be no rational explanation for why I had, so suddenly and irrevocably, “lost my mind.” And yet, even during that period of deep struggle, in which I was isolated from everything and everyone I had ever known — there was an inner voice which reassured me, over and over again, that the experience was necessary, that it was good, and that someday I would help others go through it too.

Now, faced with my own question, and a possible tool for answering it, I was filled with dread. What if astrology worked? What would that mean? What kind of world would I be living in then? Trembling, fully aware of the significance of that moment in my life, I looked up the positions of the outer planets in a 20th century “ephemeris” (a book which gives the astronomical positions for the daily motions of the planets) for the years 1970-71.

Lo and behold, there it was; evidence, proof! (Well, not exactly “proof” — indeed, I had devoted one long footnote in my doctoral dissertation on the pretension of any “proof”; on the ontology of proof, even mathematical proof, as being merely a human construct, a certain sort of “form” — no more and no less “certain” than other forms.)

What I discovered: during those two years all three outer planets were exactly conjuncting several of my “personal” (i.e., short-cycled) planets, a situation that was both extraordinary and unprecedented. Only at unusual junctures in our lives do outer planets all “act” strongly upon us at once — and in some lives, they never do. When they do, however — various sources would term it fortunate or unfortunate — we are faced with a once-in-a-lifetime learning opportunity.

How we respond to this opportunity varies according to how open we are, or conversely: how fully we have managed to insulate ourselves from the possibility of

radical change. Some people are so numbed to what goes on in their inner lives that they don't even notice these opportunities when they knock on the door. Most people, however, do respond, but assume and act like something is happening to them, from the outside, rather than occurring, as a flowering, from within. And some of us — a few of us, more and more all the time — blossom. We begin to expand, outwards and inwards, from our centers. We grow sensitive to both our own utter uniqueness and our communion with every living thing.

Opportunities of this kind are never exactly repeated. In fact, unrepeatability is of the nature of outer planet energies: their cycles are so long that no position they make can ever repeat itself in one lifetime.

What I found when I looked up the positions and motions of the outer planets for those two years was what I had been expecting to find. As in science; once we ask the question, nature answers. Notice: nature doesn't give answers without questions eliciting them. What counts is a specific, riveting focus. What drives us is sometimes a certain, more or less terrible need to know. The psychic energy behind that need skews our attention in the direction our unconscious knows will yield the answer.

Intuitively, I knew that if astrology made sense, then it would have highlighted those years in the manner that it indeed did. Personal planets would have been temporarily "activated" by conjunction to the transits of outer planets.

It was settled. This was how I would help others. I had found my tool. Astrology was to become the lens through which I would look at others' lives, aiming to understand both the nature and the timing of profound transformational change.

From that day on, I became a student of astrology. Isolating myself from others, I spent every moment I could absorbing this new reality. My new passion grew into an obsession, as I devoured every book I could find and learned how to construct charts myself.

Yet, I confess, during those initial few years I still struggled with my reason. That old, well trained, left-brained self did not really want to believe astrology works. Struggling to quell my doubts, I would dive in further. Often I studied so hard and long that the strange symbols preoccupying me would begin to whirl round and round my brain, fusing, confusing, colliding with one another, colluding to rob me of whatever reason I had left. What am I doing? I would ask myself, then. Am I wasting my time? Is astrology nonsense after all?

My suspicions were amplified by much of what I found in the literature. Various authors' seemingly conflicting claims as to what astrological symbols really meant; difficulties I had in either absorbing or taking seriously both the airy, spacy generalities of some authors, and the dry, detailed, statistical approach of others; not to mention how poorly written so many of the books were — all this made a good case for my skepticism.

Yet there was one author whose clear and overarching genius and humanity in conveying the hidden wisdom of astrology balanced all lesser mortals' attempts: Dane Rudhyar. I speak for a whole generation of contemporary astrologers, when I say that this one author's achievement, time after time, gave me the courage and the will to go on.

Each period of doubt was followed by a renewed surge of energy. My confusion, deeper and darker with each turn of the spiral, was rich and fertile; each time I pushed through it into light, and a period of renewed, more inclusive, differentiated clarity.

Begging anyone I knew even slightly for his or her birth data (date, time and place) I would set up a chart for that set of coordinates and place it next to mine. Following Mills Canons of Induction, the "Method of Sameness and Differences," I compared each one with my own chart. Looking at myself and others through this medium, I gradually sorted myself out from others, bringing my life into focus. Using birthcharts as mirrors reflecting off each other, I gradually learned how to translate feelings I had about a person, and about my relationship to that person, into the symbols on the pages.

Thanks to an initial driving need to understand myself, the patterns in my life and character, I miraculously began to open up to others as well. Day after day, each time I constructed a chart I felt a surge of excitement, wonder; who will this be? Each time the symbols in their relations to one another differed from any I had so far seen. My former black and white judgments began to feel like myopic stereotyping, compared to the extraordinary differentiation of which nature is so obviously capable. Each of us was revealed as an utterly unique individual, a species unto the self. How could I possibly ever again judge another according to my own or anyone else's lights?

My conscious intention was to learn the language of astrology so that I could some day help others understand themselves. My unconscious motivation, however, was, first of all, to understand myself. This was the driving force. I was absorbing astrology as a byproduct of a constant, driving need to know myself. Working obsessively, I sat at my desk for as many hours a day as I could force my fiery self to sit still and focus on the tiny figures and numbers.

After one year, I began to be able to see the entire visual space of a birthchart as a picture, in front of my mind's eye. After two years and three hundred birthcharts, I began to climb inside them. What were initially flat surfaces became three-dimensional living realities, which I could plumb, sometimes forever. Now I was thinking in the language, dreaming in it at night. Now, driving along the highway, or washing the breakfast dishes, I would find myself spontaneously meditating on a symbol, its relations with another, with a whole system of symbols, how they meshed, radiating synchronously, as living, pulsing beings, resounding with life, with meaning.

I knew at that point that I had crossed a threshold. I had moved from left to right brain. My increasing capacity to entertain many symbols at once, by thinking spatially, rather than linearly; my growing understanding of the multidimensional space within which symbols operated; and most profoundly, the continuously dawning recognition of the relativity of both time and space, as shown through the differing cycles of the planets and their relations to one another, spiraling outwards and inwards into worlds within worlds, where each point, when looked at up close, widened into a circle, a space, and

each space, when seen from a great distance, reduced a mere point — all this had moved me out of ordinary life and thought into . . . what, but what? Crossing that threshold had, once again, put me out of touch with others.

The first time, during those two years of my initial transformation while a graduate student in philosophy, I fell into and then became lost within right brain function. Now, using the astrological symbol system of astrology as a reference system, I was becoming skilled at entering that dimension at will, and operating within it for as long as I desired. I was also gaining the facility of crossing back and forth, in and out of right to left brain thinking, at will. What I could not yet do, was to integrate them together so that what went on in the right brain found easy access to the world through left brain communication. Simultaneously, therefore, I was becoming both more creative and more isolated.

Thus, while it took two whole years before I began to think in the language of astrology, it took fully two more years before I could say anything that wasn't either trivial or incomprehensible.

Meanwhile, my good father, himself a medical doctor, despairing of the “progress” of his doctor (of philosophy) daughter, asked “why are you wasting your good brain?” In response, I could only shrug — and sigh, and later, when alone, cry. There is nothing so painful as the gap between two people who love each other when one of them changes to the point where there is no way their worlds can be even compared, much less reunited.

He wasn't the only one. People still corner me, at parties, and ask, smiling smugly — or more rarely, with great sincerity and wonder — “why do you believe in astrology?”

“Why,” I always respond — sometimes defensively, sometimes with equal sincerity and wonder — “do you believe in English?”

Astrology is not a belief system. Astrology is a language. Like any language, astrology can be used to make true — or false — statements. Taken as a whole, however,

languages are not “true” or “false.” We use them — or abuse them; we learn them or leave them alone.

To see astrology as a language, rather than as a belief system, is liberating. This way we can entertain it without having to make a decision as to its worth. Just as we do not question the truth value of the English language, so we can use the astrological language in the same way.

And yet what I say here about languages is, I admit, too simple. As Chomsky, and before him, Whorf and Sapir and even Wittgenstein have shown, all languages contain certain, usually unnoticed, metaphysical assumptions hidden within their grammatical structures. For example, those languages classed as “Indo-European,” English among them, have subject-predicate-object (S-O-P) as the basic structure of any meaningful statement. This is that. John threw the ball. God made me.

The structure of the language of the Hopi differs profoundly from ours. Interestingly enough, it has been said that if we could speak Hopi, we wouldn’t have so much trouble understanding Einstein’s relativity theory. Hopi language has no S-O-P distinction. Nor does it have separate tenses for past, present, and future. Rather than saying John threw the ball, they would say something like, “there-is-a-ball-throwing.” Subject and predicate are one, and time is eternally now.

The Hopi see through different eyes, they move through time and space in a profoundly different way than we do. Thus do differing languages sometimes imply profound differences in the kinds of understanding possible for those who speak them.

What interests me, is that in the case of astrology, even those who do seem to speak the same language often have widely divergent attitudes towards it. This may imply that one’s world-view before learning the language of astrology often colors the manner in which it is interpreted.

There seem to be two primary belief-systems associated with the language of astrology. Those who know nothing about astrology — and even some who do — identify astrology with a kind of fatalism, which denies free will.

This is the belief-system wherein responsibility for one's life is placed upon something else besides the self. Thus, some say, the "stars" (the planets) determine both who they are, and what's going to happen to them day by day.

The fatalistic belief system is slowly giving way to another, more ancient way of appreciating the language of astrology. This other belief-system is known by a number of names, such as "occult," "esoteric," or "metaphysical." (The word "occult," by the way, simply means "hidden," that which is not immediately obvious.) Whereas fatalism denies free will, esotericism gives it back to us — totally. Indeed, we are entirely responsible for ourselves — who we were in the past, who we are now, and who we choose to become in the future.

According to the esoteric point of view, each of us is composed of three principles: body, mind, and soul. Body and mind are mortal, they live and die. Soul is immortal, it existed before we were born, it will exist after we die . . . forever.

The esoteric belief-system assumes reincarnation, the idea that the soul lives many lives, each of them a stepping stone, the lessons it contains helping the soul in its evolution towards perfection.

Free will, within the esoteric point of view, is a function of the soul. The soul chooses the life.

The soul chooses both the moment and the place of birth, and therefore the specific physical and social environment into which one is born — including the body and mind, the parents and siblings. The soul chooses the genetic stream, i.e., the flow of qualities of all kinds which are continuous from generation to generation. (This viewpoint dispels the nature vs. nurture argument. Neither one "determines" us. We choose both; i.e., we choose to be shaped by both heredity and environment.) The soul also chooses the tendencies to health and disease, the lessons this particular life has to offer, and the talents which help one learn them.

Fatalism frequently ignores the soul. It tends to see us as puppets in a play, mechanical, with no inward direction of our own, pulled by strings external to our beings for no apparent reason.

Esotericism, on the other hand, assumes that we, as souls, are spiritual beings evolving towards perfection, through the process of first choosing, then learning, from the experiences of many earth lives. Each life is a step on that road. From this point of view, the astrological birthchart is a map of the soul: it contains, in symbolic form, both what the soul has already learned and its choices for this lifetime.

As Yogananda's teacher in *The Autobiography of a Yogi* put it: "The individual is born at that exact moment when the celestial bodies are in exact mathematical harmony with the karma of that soul."

Within fatalism, the causes of human thought, words and deeds are assumed to be external. Within esotericism, those causes are accepted as internal, a part of our own nature. Esotericism assumes that we create our own realities, it focuses on a specific inner potential which pushes for development throughout a given lifetime.

Whether one interprets astrology fatalistically or esoterically, there are three assumptions which anyone who learns the language of astrology makes which others might not commit to. The first is that the world is meaningful, i.e., that there are patterns in nature. Secondly, that these patterns are all related to one another. The first assumption is held by many scientists. The second one, pioneered, among others, by Buckminster Fuller, is being given an increasingly holistic and ecological and "harmonically resonant" coloring by a new generation of scientists.

A third assumption is one which is still difficult for our culture to accept. This is, at first glance, surprising, since it is really only a corollary of the first two: not just earth, but the heavens are a part of nature too.

These three assumptions can be condensed into four little words: "As above, so below" — a saying attributed to the Greek Hermes Trimegistus. Or, as Jung put it in his Introduction to the Wilhelm version of the I Ching: "Whatever is born of a moment has the quality of that moment, no matter where it is." This is known as the principle of synchronicity, and it is to be distinguished from the principle of causality which belongs to Newtonian physics and usually accompanies a fatalistic interpretation of astrology.

Astrology is a language which includes the heavens as a part of its everyday world. Astrology is stellar ecology. By studying the positions and motions of the planets, it considers the one environment we all share, no matter who we are or where we live, the sky above, turning slowly round once per day. We all see the same sky, we all live under the same universal and ever-changing planetary patterns.

Astrology maps what we all have in common. It assumes unity — and the unified force field physicists since Einstein have been seeking.

Planetary patterns look slightly different depending upon the angles from which they are viewed. As each place on earth is unique and has its own particular beauty, so too each planetary pattern is unique, when viewed from a particular point on earth.

Astrology respects diversity. It honors uniqueness — the utter individuality of every being which can be said to have been, at some point, born.

As the ancient Greeks endeavored to see the world in a way that would embrace its paradoxical nature, where everything is both of one substance and yet continuously changing, where we are simultaneously both mystically one and phenomenally unique and diverse, so too does astrology see the world.

Heraclitus, a pre-Socratic philosopher, reminded us: we never step into the same river twice. Yes, time is a river, and the banks of the river are skin to planetary orbits, channels through which time runs, giving it form and definition. Each point in the river, if stopped, and mapped, as a cross section, would give us a certain set of coordinates, the structure of that particular moment, like no other.

The study of astrology turned out to be a natural next step in my philosophical inquiry into the nature of space and time. In these essays, I focus this astrological way of appreciating space and time into worlds both inside and around me. One could call what I do here “applied philosophy” — far removed from the abstract, technical talk I learned in graduate school. Academic philosophy didn’t teach me how to live in the world. A philosopher who speaks the language of astrology, however, almost automatically finds him or herself studying the living space/time context of our lives.

Lecture

A Philosopher's Journey into Astrology

© Ann Kreilkamp, Ph.D.

[Note: This paper was presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Women in Philosophy, Pacific Division, at Southern Oregon State College in Ashland, Oregon on October 3, 1991.]

It feels both strange and wonderful to be with you at this conference for women in philosophy. Strange, because I have not worked as a professional philosopher since 1973, the year I was fired from an experimental college for being, they told me, “too experimental.” That was my first and only year as a college teacher.

My wonder at being here springs from the same source. For many years I have lived in relative isolation. This is the first time I have been invited to dialogue with others who explore the world of philosophy as a fertile field for their questions.

And then, that these philosophers should be women! Back when I was in school, the thought of female philosophers meeting alone together was unheard of! We didn't see our identity as women as having anything to do with our philosophy and indeed, would have repudiated anyone who dared to suggest that. So this meeting feels to me downright radical.

I feel a bond with you, and yet you may not feel the same with me. Since 1976 I have worked as a professional in astrology, a field thought to be far removed from the world of philosophy.

So here I am, sensing our common ground at a very deep level, and yet feeling estranged. Not to mention frustrated! Whenever anyone asks me, “What do you do?” it feels as if in order to mention the word “astrologer” I must first put up a subtle defensive shield. For the person to whom I am speaking may get a knowing look on her face. Inside, she may subtly dismiss me, as all the negative associations to the word “astrologer” snap into place.

This is not surprising. Astrology has been systematically misunderstood by Western scientific culture, and especially, by those who are highly educated within it, for hundreds of years.

This misunderstanding shows in the usual question I am asked, which is whether or not I “believe” in astrology. This question, I hope to show, is meaningless. Astrology is not the kind of thing one “believes” in.

I would like to tell you a story of what happened to me, a philosopher who found herself fascinated by something quite foreign to her academic training. I would like to show you how my journey into astrology made sense, given my philosophical concerns; how indeed, astrology was precisely what I had been looking for, without my knowing it. Finally, I would like to show how even an introductory exposure to the philosophical foundations of astrology might assist you in deepening your own philosophical exploration.

During my graduate school years, I hardened into an arrogant and elitist intellectual, quick to condemn what I did not understand. Astrology, of course, I dismissed as nonsense. Being fired after only one year teaching was my Waterloo. Suddenly I was kicked off the ladder I had been climbing for many years. Suddenly, I found myself sitting on my ass, stunned, in shock. Being fired called my entire life into question. Over time it even engendered a tiny bit of humility. I began to open to a wider world. I began to wonder about astrology, despite my earlier prejudice.

Let’s cut now to a bleak, rainy afternoon in January, 1974. I am sitting at a kitchen table in San Rafael, California, head in hands, staring at a dog-eared piece of paper. My

living quarters are downstairs, in the dark basement, fitting symbol for the depression which has hung over me since being fired.

One of my housemates has been taking an introductory course in astrology. Last week she volunteered to set up my astrological birthchart. "Sure, why not?" I replied, shrugging my shoulders. As if it didn't matter. As if nothing mattered.

So she constructed the chart for me and I have already spent many afternoons sitting here staring at its meaningless jumble of scribbles and colored lines. Precisely the nonsense I always said it was! And yet here I sit, transfixed! Why? Over and over I find myself drawn towards it, magnetized, as if it is a particularly numinous dream. The chart seems to be whispering secrets, just out of hearing. It seems to contain a golden key, to some locked door I didn't know existed, and now stands there, shimmering, just beyond reach.

How ridiculous! I think to myself, as over and over I catch my psyche just in time to prevent it from moving into the chart, blending with it, fusing. Stop that! What's wrong with you!

This particular rainy January afternoon I am feeling unusually exhausted. My conscious defenses are down. Lethargically, for want of anything better to do, I pick up my housemate's astrological ephemeris for the 20th century and start leafing through it. (The ephemeris is a book showing the daily positions and motions of the planets.) I know I shouldn't be doing this. *Know* I am playing with fire. I know, somehow, that the consequences of this simple act will be incalculable, perhaps disastrous to my entire view of the world.

It is as if, in this seemingly random act of picking up a certain book, I have suddenly given up, surrendered to the dynamism of my larger being. At first with pretended indifference, and then with more and more focused intention, I begin to look up the positions for the planets Pluto, Neptune and Uranus during the year 1970.

1970 had been a cataclysmic year. That was the year I had involuntarily undergone a terrifying and exhilarating journey to the center of my soul. The journey had come upon me without warning, and increased in strength and velocity as it went along. It was as if

I had been struck by lightning from within, as if an earthquake had shaken my psyche loose from its moorings, and plunged me into a twisting, turbulent river, its rapids so thunderous they made my solar plexus thud with fear.

At the end of the year I was changed. That journey had ripped off the masks. I had been stripped naked, with none of the old capacity for playing specific roles to fit various social situations. I felt newborn, fresh, utterly sensitive and responsive to the present moment — and unable to separate myself from it. Gone were the divisions between inside and outside; no longer did I sport a “detached observer” who watched what was happening as my body/personality moved through time and space like a robot.

The Cartesian mind/body split within me had collapsed. I was left alone, a stranger in a very strange land. Utterly vulnerable. And crazy, too, supposedly. From others’ point of view. Not from mine. I was alone, and I was alive. Truly alive for the very first time. Back then, the world had a polite name for my journey: “nervous breakdown.” “What happened to you?” asked the chairman of my department, genuinely curious. “You used to be such a good up-tight graduate student!” This professor was honest in his concern. Others, however, were nervous in my presence. I could feel them whispering among themselves. To me, they hinted that my raging philosophical questions might really be psychiatric. “Don’t you understand?” I would cry, desperate for understanding, “the two are connected?”

Twenty-one years later, we refer to this same journey as “transformation” and speak of it almost casually. A growing subculture within our society now values transformation. There is evolving an intricate social infrastructure which supports the collapse of the mind/body split, what I would call this initiation into the miraculous unfolding of our essential natures.

Prior to the massive and irreversible sea-change within me, there had been signs of what was to come. For years I had been fascinated by the whole question of change, by the nature of the specific differences between continuous and discontinuous change. I was drawn to explore the latter type, those changes that defy our ability to describe, predict or understand. Now, two decades later, there is a popular book on this subject, known in mathematics as “chaos theory.”

Back then I also wondered about “time,” wanted to understand time. One day I asked my major professor if I could write a paper on the concept of time. “Time?” he scoffed. “Too difficult. I wouldn’t touch the subject.”

Now I realize my professor was right. “Time” is difficult, especially, if you see and experience time in a way that belies the scientific notion of a straight line time running from the present moment backwards and forwards into infinity. Indeed, if time is linear, then time is impossible, since the present moment, conceived as a mere point on a line, has no dimension, and therefore does not exist!

It is no wonder we have trouble being truly present to our experience in this culture. For if the present moment is merely a point on a line, then we cannot “be here now.” Instead, we are solipsists, locked inside our “own little worlds,” living an imagined life, inside our heads. Constructing a fantasy reality of what we would like the world to be, we spend our lives either terrified of or longing for a future which will either repeat the past or help us forget it.

Our trouble with time is not merely psychological or neurotic; it lies deeper than that. Our trouble is epistemological and metaphysical, a matter of how our culture unconsciously instructs our brains to perceive and operate upon the world.

This artificial simplification of “time” into a straight line projection has been especially difficult for women to appreciate. Indeed, we cannot both appreciate it and remain attuned to our own biological lives. Assuming time is linear then, for women, the mind/body split is guaranteed.

We women know from the periodic rhythm of our own bodies that time is not linear but cyclical. That time describes circles, each of which is experienced as a complete whole. We are also aware of the structure of each of these wholes, as we go through the various phases of our menstrual cycle. The new moon phase at ovulation, its feeling of a new beginning; the full moon phase when our blood flows, the initial bursting fullness, the celebration of release.

Those of us who keep personal journals and pay attention to truly processing our experience further realize that we live on many levels, that therefore, we are

simultaneously and continuously involved in many different cycles, many different dimensions of experience, many different times.

Each of these cycles, when first completed, can be felt as a whole. It is this felt sense of wholeness which gives meaning to the cycle. Once we understand its meaning, we can incorporate that cycle, and transcend it.

Our cycles of experience come in many sizes. They range from the small superficial daily fluctuations of our moods to our menstrual periods, to seasonal and annual returns, to the gradual but inexorable psychic shifts within the unconscious which are both terrifying and exhilarating, and signify yet another evolutionary stage of personal growth.

Through our lived experience we know that cycles differ from one another, not in their form, but in their size. In form, all cycles are the same, they thus present us with a secure sense of continuity and stability in life. In size, they differ utterly, and it is these differences in size which present us with the specific meanings of particular cycles. The meaning of a cycle is equivalent to the amount of time it takes to complete one whole circuit.

We live our lives as pulsating centers of being, mysteriously attuned to the syncopated beats of many different time spans or cycles. Our lives are pieces of polyphonic music, intricate, resonant, and ultimately soul-satisfying in their creation of a singular, multivalent, and most beautiful harmony.

These harmonies are continuously transformational. As we tune into the subtle multidimensionality of our actual experience, we begin to learn how to change keys, break circles, jump levels. We move from continuous to discontinuous change, inviting “chaos,” surrendering to our own unfolding process. We transform what could be endless repetition into actual spiraling evolution.

I speak here of the slow alchemical magic that occurs within the silence of my own personal cave. As I speak, I am informed by the conception of time to which I was introduced in my study of astrology. These two fertilize each other: my experience falls

into the rubric of astrological cycle theory, and this theory provides the framework within which I plumb the deeper dimensions of my experience.

Within the astrological world-view, each person occupies the exact center of a universe which has no circumference, therefore its center is everywhere. For each person born at a particular juncture of space/time, there is an astrological map which depicts the energetic geometrical pattern of the solar system for that particular moment, from that person's point of view on earth in space. Each person, therefore, stands at the exact center of a series of concentric rings which represent the orbits of the planets.

Within the astrological understanding of space/time, consider each "planet" to be an "energy" or "spiritual principle." *Each of these energies gains its specific meaning precisely through the size of its cycle.* The meaning of a planet IS the time/space field that this cycle describes. A portion of space/time, conceived as a circle, as a whole, is identical with a particular dimension of consciousness. Thus, as we move through time, we are moving through overlapping phases of a concentric series of cycles, mapping portions of space/time dimensions.

Whenever we complete a cycle for the first time, we begin to see it whole. We can then attune to the meaning of that cycle and become as one within it. As we do this, we make it our foundation, a stepping stone into the next larger cycle, the one we are yet unfamiliar with, which is ongoing, and unfolding, in its own mysterious manner.

Were we to be truly present to our experience, then each moment in time would open forever into an infinite series of larger and larger dimensions. The "now" as a point would pulsate, and open, into infinitely expanding awareness. In our culture, we fear this opening, as we fear our nightmares when we fall through infinite space. We fear it, and in our fear we contract, close down. The yawning presence of this opening is too much; we screw it shut and are left as before, trying to feel real as we balance tippy-toe on the dimensionless point of a single line going absolutely nowhere, fast.

If, on the other hand, we assume that each person's experience of time is mapped as the ongoing process of a series of concentric circles or cycles leading out from the self as the center, and we assume that each time we complete a cycle for the first time we can

open to a conscious awareness of that entire cycle, then we can begin to understand the seemingly paradoxical notion that the “now” is not a point but an opening, of which its size depends upon the cycle which it defines. We can begin to make real sense of the ideas of “consciousness expansion,” or “levels of consciousness,” of even the “eternal now,” the mystic “One” — identification with all of creation, the compassion of the Buddha, or the Christ.

From the vastness of infinite space let’s now zoom back to the here and now, and focus, once again, on that drippy January day at the kitchen table in San Rafael. Sitting there, lonely and forlorn on that pivotal afternoon, leafing listlessly through the ephemeris for the first time, I begin to feel my heart thud wildly. My listlessness has disappeared. I am plunging headlong into an exploration from which I have never returned — or, some may say, recovered!

For even before locating the planetary positions for that year of my personal transformation, I somehow know what they are going to tell me. I am aware, at some deep intuitive level, that this afternoon will prove to be a decisive turning point in my life.

I locate the page. Yes. There it is. The outer- planet positions for 1970 are precisely where I knew they would be, before seeing them in print, and more significantly, prior to knowing anything about astrology.

That was the day I dedicated myself to learning astrology. Astrology would be my medium, my tool, the language that would help me guide others through their own transformational changes.

For even in 1970, during the profound loneliness of my own inner journey, I knew I would not always be alone — knew that soon there would be others who would suffer the same, as their beings underwent the wrenching shift from mass cultural to truly individual reality.

That realization had come to me one day in the middle of that intensely difficult year, when I had gone into the bathroom, and stood in front of the mirror . . . Every time I went to the bathroom I would pause to stare at the mirror. Not to preen, the way we

women do, but to discover just who would be staring back at me that particular day. I was drawn to the mirror like a moth to the flame, to stare fixedly at the dark empty (?) hole of the pupil of my eye.

On this particular day I was in despair, more than usually terrified of the journey I had inadvertently embarked upon. I feared I would be an outcast forever, that I would never return to ordinary reality, never be able to live in the same world with others again.

Staring into the mirror, I heard an inner voice. This was not the first time the voice had spoken. The first time was at the very beginning of my inward journey, just after I had left my husband. I was at a party, and I was dancing, twirling like a dervish to the music of The Doors. “YOU ARE ALONE,” the voice had broken through, booming out at me from deep inside. “YOU ARE ALONE, AND YOU HAVE NO CENTER.”

Now, six months later, the solitary writing begun on the dance floor had continued on more subtle levels. I had spiraled inward, to the point where I was now so inside my own center that there was nothing left. The world I had known and lived in was gone. Dead. And I was the lone survivor. Looking in the mirror was to affirm that I did exist, despite the lack of outside contact.

And there it was, that voice again. Astonishingly clear and definite. Booming out at me from deep inside: “DON’T WORRY,” it had counseled. “JUST KEEP GOING. DON’T GET STUCK.”

This is what I tell my clients now, when they are afraid. When they fear for their sanity. When they think they can’t go on. “Don’t worry. Just keep going. Don’t get stuck.” At any point in our lives, we have a choice: we can surrender to the river, or we can attempt to control it, dam it up, pretend it isn’t there. Only the first choice works. “Go with the flow.” The second choice creates unnecessary pain, and if followed long enough, will make us literally sick. Rather than changing the course of the river, our resistance merely slows us down.

The language of astrology is the language of continuous change, of never stepping into the same river twice. At any one point in space/time it both describes the qualities of the river and our specific place within it.

As I turned from the mirror that afternoon, the booming voice still echoing within, I knew something else, too. I knew, with a sureness and a calmness I had never felt before, that someday I would help others go through the kind of transformational change which I was involuntarily pioneering now.

Four years later, sitting at the kitchen table, I discovered the medium which I would use to help me assist others. Astrology, the study of the stars. Astrology is a symbolic language which both identifies the timing of transformational change and helps us absorb its meaning, allowing us to creatively utilize the qualities of the specific planetary energies present.

Fourteen years later, I am still using astrology, and exploring it further, and marveling at its dynamism, its aliveness, its continuing capacity to fascinate. I have used it to investigate not only the present but the past. Through its guidance I discover spiritual and psychological patterns in my own and others' lives, and learn how to break them. As we break our patterns, we free ourselves. We surrender to the moment, this moment, this brand new moment, this continuous delightful surprise.

Anything that can be said to be born at a certain moment in space and time can have a birthchart set up for it. Thus astrology can be applied to books, groups, institutions, entire nations. Anything born into matter has a specific signature, as described through the map of the planetary pattern of that moment. That signature is the essence or nature of that entity, which then unfolds through time.

The laws of unfoldment are written in the signature of that moment. These laws flow continuously and inexorably from that moment on. There is no stopping it. All of life is change, as an orderly, multidimensional never-ending process where there is no goal, there is only the closing and fulfilling and opening of cycles, and cycles within cycles within cycles. If the universe has no circumference, then each entity stands in the center of the universe, as the focal point for a series of concentric cycles or circles

radiating out from that center point. Our task in life is to stand in our own center, hold open our own individual space, which then expands as we tune in to larger and larger cycles of space/time.

The larger the cycle, the deeper within ourselves we must reach in order to understand, incorporate and then transcend it. The larger the cycle, the more subtle and sensitive the awareness that we gain. With each new awareness, we sensitize ourselves further to that which lies beyond our own small personal world. We become truly conscious of our connections to others. Each of us standing at the exact center of our own universe links, through awareness, with larger and larger spheres of creation.

This is the cosmology of astrology. It has enormous ethical implications. The deeper we reach into our own unique reality, the more we love ourselves, and the more sensitive we become to others. As each of us follows the laws of change within our own individual natures, so does Nature take care of all of us. The Golden Rule becomes easy to follow, a part of our natural inclination. We treat others as ourselves, because we feel ourselves as One.

The usual question an astrologer hears is whether or not she really “believes” in it. I hope it is obvious by now that this question rests on a sort of category mistake. One does not so much believe in astrology as come to resonate with it, become one with it, and therefore, one with the continuously shifting energy currents and patterns of our lives. Astrology is the study of the largest open system we can imagine, the sky, its living inhabitants and their wondrous dance, what Pythagoras called “the music of the spheres.” In the continuous temporal and spatial restructuring of planetary positions and patterns, we sense the laws of change in both universal and particular application.

We astrologers don’t need to “believe” in astrology. Instead, we work with it, for we know it works.

Einstein said, back in the nightmare of World War II, “Everything is changed, but our way of thinking.” Yes, Immanuel Kant is still, unfortunately, right. Our so-called “scientific” perception of space and time, those most universal categories of our thinking and experiencing, are still culturally intact.

This is why, despite my training in academic philosophy, I became an astrologer. To embrace the relativistic conception of space and time of astrology is to revolutionize consciousness. Astrology resolves the original Greek philosophical dilemma of how to account for both the One and the Many. In so doing, it offers a resolution to the most significant problem of Western culture since the Greeks and beyond: the human feeling of separation which leads to war.

I pray that the astrological vision of harmony, between above and below, between within and without, between the part and the whole, will become a part of universal understanding. I pray that this new — and very ancient — vision will serve as the conceptual foundation upon which humanity may learn to address its ancient and anguished longing for a truly peaceful planet.

Essay

MY SEARCH FOR THE “SOUL” IN ASTROLOGY

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From the beginning of my practice as an astrologer, and for many years thereafter, I was careful to caution clients: “Astrology,” I would tell them, “can be used to identify characteristics of personality. It does not speak of the soul. Your soul itself remains mysterious, entirely private to you.”

I doubt any of my clients cared one way or another about the distinction between personality and soul, and astrology’s relation to them both. Fourteen years ago, “souls” were a bit like ghosts, pale pallid wispy things; they hung around churches and death beds and cemeteries; they were either sainted or damned.

The closest we got to thinking in terms of soul in our daily lives was when we acknowledged someone as “having soul.” These were exceptional beings, either lauded or isolated for being so. An example of the former is the “Mahatma” (meaning “great soul”) Gandhi; and of the latter, the philosopher and “tormented soul,” Ludwig Wittgenstein. And we spoke of certain aesthetic traditions, for example 19th century “romantic” music and poetry, and even much of modern jazz — as “soulful,” by which we meant, passionate, intensely feeling.

Black people, of course, as a race, were known as “soulful” — a quality which we white folks both patronized and secretly longed for. Blacks were soulful because they were more “earthy,” i.e., we assumed, not as intelligent.

So back then, the word “soul” was not included in our usual vocabulary, and my clients were no exception. Their concerns were secular. Would they meet the man of their dreams, and if so, when? Will they be able to sell their house and buy another one?

My disclaimer was helping me, however. It made me feel better about what I was doing. I was not playing God, not pretending to see into the deepest, most sacred reality of a person. Nobody had to worry about my motives. I was not the Devil, snatching souls.

On the other hand, my entire relationship with astrology was founded upon my own search for soul, for the soul within myself, my deeper nature. I was hungry, hungry for the spirit, for that larger realm which lay somehow within or behind or above our more daily concerns, infusing it with meaning.

So, on the one hand, I was telling clients that I couldn’t see the soul in the chart — at which point they would look at me blankly, uncomprehending, as if to ask, why am I saying that? — and on the other hand, had it not been for my own spiritual search, I would never have been so fascinated by astrology, so determined, for some unknown reason, to learn to speak its language.

On a conscious level, I wanted to respect and preserve the essential privacy of each individual who came to me as a client, and yet, in my own life, I was unconsciously and continuously drawn to delve into my own secret depths.

Over time, with more experience as an astrologer, I began to consciously acknowledge that in some ways I *was* accessing, or at least, somehow sensing, the mysterious ways of the soul — in both myself and others. Not with any kind of certainty or proof. Rather, it was as if my eyes were being nudged in certain directions, in their

seeing of that abstract map we call the “birthchart.” As if something were guiding me, something mysterious and uncanny — to emphasize one point over another, to link certain points together . . .

Sometimes my encounter with a chart would take on a dreamlike quality. All of a sudden I would find myself inside it, participating, somehow, in the mystery of its “life,” the dynamic force field that it represents. Then, just as suddenly, I would awaken, snap out of it. Like those times when I awaken at night, startled; the dream which alerted me is gone now, but for its traces. I am left with a longing, for whatever caused that strong feeling, the numinous charge, its radiance bursting forth like a shower of stars.

But what is it? How to reconstruct it? How to climb back to its source? How to give words to something without losing the very essence of that which has caught me so fully, so precipitously, this luminous herald of worlds beyond worlds.

So, over time, though I still warned my clients about the limits of my powers, I was now admitting to myself that the soul did sometimes seem to be speaking from within the birthchart. I would even say this out loud to a few select clients — those whom I intuitively recognized as being concerned with the state of their own souls.

I was beginning to recognize specifics of what was startling me in the dreamstate. The most obvious clues as to the realm of soul seemed to be radiating from the relations between planets and the four “angles” of the chart. To those people who had planets on or near angles I would say that they “certainly seemed to know what they were doing when they came in this time around.”

I would then explain to them how I had arrived at this assessment. Since the angles are derived from the rotation of the earth, the degree on each angle changes approximately once every four minutes. To put a planet on an angle then, requires precision in timing of the moment of birth. Such precision, in turn, requires a deep familiarity with the way space and time work in our world. This familiarity, I assumed,

would be a characteristic of what we call “old souls,” i.e., those who have had a lot of experience with the trauma of being incarnated into a body.

Like many contemporary astrologers, I also operated according to another assumption, one which was born full-blown within me from the moment I began to study the language. This was the idea that the larger the cycle of the planet, the deeper, the more powerful, and, usually, more unconscious would be its effect on our lives. Given the materialistic and secularist bias of contemporary western culture then, the invisible, intangible aspect of self known as “soul” would most likely be located within the realm of the unconscious.

Soul, as that part of us which we don’t usually know about, but which nevertheless guides the direction of our lives, from below.

Soul, as that which shares, somehow, in the tonality of the long-cycled outer planets.

Soul and the outer planets resonating, ever-quickenings with the pulse of new life, to inspire awe, reverence, a willing or unwilling submission to the specific trajectory upon which each of us is hurtling.

Assuming the angles of the chart are those points in the zodiac where qualities of ourselves are likely to surface, then, I assumed, those souls born with any of the longer-cycled planets on angles are more likely also to have chosen, prior to conception, to become consciously aware of soul, and therefore of the idea of destiny, during this one lifetime.

Along with planets, and especially, long-cycled planets on angles, I also began to appreciate more and more the almost mathematical or architectural elegance of certain birth patterns as a whole. I began to see and sense “old souls” operating within patterns, both simple and complex, which were particularly exacting, definitive, and clear.

I sensed such patterns as containing soul lessons and/or talents which are equally clear, and indicate an unusually focused intention on the part of the soul which chooses such a pattern.

The more difficult the pattern, I would tell the client, the more likely it is karmic in nature, i.e., brought over as unfinished business from other lives. Here, I noted especially the following: those patterns located in fixed signs; those patterns including both short and long-cycled planets and/or Saturn, the nodal axis; those patterns located in or reflecting somehow any of the three water houses of the chart. To me, these specific areas of chart analysis offered clues in understanding the lessons of the soul in this particular incarnation.

In all these ways, along with other astrologers, I was growing more and more comfortable with the idea that perhaps in some ways astrology does access soul.

This deepening of awareness was given tremendous impetus by the entrance of Pluto into Scorpio in 1984. At this point the cultural climate as a whole began to shift. The word “soul” moved out of organized religion into the vernacular. We started using it in conversation, without blushing. We even started including the word “soul” in the titles of books.

As we began to speak of soul, so did we begin to understand and communicate one dominant theme of these Scorpionic times: the process of integrating soul with personality, whereby we learn to live as “embodied souls.”

To merge soul with body is to begin to transform the center of gravity within, so that the source of desire, intention, and action changes from the solar plexus to the heart. Our desire, nay our very instincts change: we move from greed to the gift, from taking more and more from both ourselves and others, to freely and spontaneously giving to both self and others from the ever-flowing river within.

Naturally, during these extraordinary Scorpionic years, more and more clients have been coming with whom I can relate easily on a personal level, as they too, are concerned with the state of their souls, and are seeking, however, inchoately, a level of interpretation in astrology that is deeper, more attuned to what is sacred within themselves.

These clients are, from the outset, more interested in understanding the nature of their own destiny than they are in whether or not they will make a lot of money tomorrow. There is now, for example, little resistance to my speaking of the Midheaven of the chart as their “calling” rather than merely as “career.”

I have always taken care to assure my clients, especially those about to undertake or who are smack in the middle of some transformational process, that “astrology describes your unique individual nature — and its timed evolutionary process of unfoldment.” Then, to those who are afraid, I lean close, look directly in their eyes, and say: “If you follow your nature, nature will take care of you.”

Fourteen years ago, that was a strange thing to say. Even now, I can only barely begin to appreciate the uncanny rearrangement of outer reality which instantly begins to reflect our surrender to inner change, the inexpressible mystery of how nature does support us when we do begin to follow our natures.

Yes, in these days of Paul Simon’s “miracles and wonder,” Joseph Campbell’s phrase “follow your bliss” rolls easily off the tongue.

While I am amazed and grateful for this mutation in the world wind, I am also concerned by what I notice as our usual tendency to bring something forth from the realm of mystery and in that process, subtly or not so subtly, co-opt it, make it ordinary.

I appreciate more, now, why some theologians thought the only way we could speak of God was through what God was not, the so-called “via negativa.” To think we can capture soul, locate it, specify it to any particular planet or dimension or technique or

algorithm — whether we attempt to do this (quasi-) scientifically or astrologically — is, I feel, to begin the process of, once again, losing contact with soul altogether.

Our scientific left-brained need to specify that which is essentially mysterious and ineffable is thoroughly ingrained. Indeed, a few years ago, when I began to set up and study heliocentric charts, I found myself doing precisely that.

The helio chart, I wanted to say, is the chart from the point of view of the soul. This is to distinguish it from the regular, or geocentric chart which identifies the personality.

Even as I made this nice, neat, clear distinction, I grew uneasy. How could anything, even a chart so pure and abstract as the helio, be equivalent to the mystery of soul? I soon found myself hedging, trying to find ways of talking about helio which both appreciated its resonance with soul and yet did not pretend to capture it, pin it down like a butterfly.

No matter how deeply I enter into the more rarified realms of astrology, no matter how many clues I now seem to sense as to the mystery of soul and its nature, they are still just that, clues. Hints. Traces. Mere shadows. Whatever is soul, it is larger and more inclusive than any of my attempts to map it.

I cannot swallow the universe. I can only take little sips at a time. As I assimilate each sip I grow, and am able to take in a little bit more the next time — which again, once assimilated, helps me grow. The universe itself, even the universe of soul, is infinite, as are any of my attempts to discover its limits. The further I probe into its inner/outer reaches, the further it recedes into the remote distance.

Now I speak of helio as that abstract energy system which gives us clues as to the soul's ontological condition prior to birth on earth. I assume that both helio and geocentric charts describe, from their own distinct points of view, aspects of the current stage of evolution of awareness of self as a hologram of the whole.

For me, I am most fascinated by the relationship itself between the helio and the geo charts. To view them together is to initiate a dynamic within myself which changes the way I am able to see either one separately. On the other hand, to view either one alone, is to take a lop-sided approach. Let me explain.

Viewed together, the helio perspective offers a larger, more inclusive way of appreciating the geo chart. In my imagination, as I stand upon the sun and look to earth, things, so to speak, fall into place in a different way. From the helio perspective I suddenly feel, with a jolt to the gut, how the house system of the geo chart grounds me into earth time reality. I feel the gravity of the geo chart, its density, its heaviness. How slowly things move. How easy it is to get stuck. How matter is the flesh of desire, its adhesions binding me, blinding me, to the sun above, to the starry night sky.

One would think I would be glad to be detached, if only for this one imaginary moment, from earth life. But I am not. Life in the flesh warms me. I feel safe. Ensconced in the delicious nourishing comfort of earth's enveloping womb, I enjoy the sensuous intimacy of connection — to other beings of flesh and blood, to earth's fire and wind and rock and soul and water . . .

Yet as I stand upon the sun reflecting upon earth life, I see it whole. I experience the decided growth in compassion that accompanies the conscious recognition of the power of attachment in both my own and others' lives.

I live upon earth in reality, and I stand upon sun in my imagination, looking back to earth. On earth, I allow myself to fully feel the haunted yearning of desire, the inevitable pain that accompanies loss. Standing upon the sun, I can begin to forgive myself and others for what we do to one another when we know not what we do.

From the helio perspective alone, the geo chart looks like a certain distortion or even contamination of the helio, its pure energy system torqued, or skewed in a manner to reflect entry into matter.

But when the helio perspective is combined with a full and felt appreciation of geocentric life, then I can appreciate the geo chart as a crucible, the place where we are learning the lesson of compassion.

From the geo perspective alone, helio looks like an abstract energy system with no reference to real life experience — so abstract, indeed, that up until very recently just glancing at a helio chart made me feel dizzy, spacey, disoriented.

Yet having once stood upon the sun, we can live and breathe more easily here. We don't get so wrapped up in our difficulties as before. We have a knowledge now of why it is so difficult to learn, why we keep falling back, and yet how our destiny is always, ultimately, to move forward, to become aware of our unity with all of creation.

I move back and forth, from one perspective to the other. Now I am growing heavy, sinking down into my body, my body into earth. I contract to a dense point, a black hole, full of pain. I allow the pain in, I surrender. The hole begins to open, wide; I begin to stretch and flex, my energy becoming lighter, easier, cells expanding with space: spirit quickens, begins to move within and through them. I radiate this love. I fly out to the sun, and beyond, to the stars, the wheeling galaxies.

Each perspective, when taken alone, feels myopic, prejudicial, split off from that which would balance it, make it whole. As I meditate upon the relations between the two perspectives I feel a new perspective generating which includes and transcends them both. Dare I say it? I begin the process of healing the painful split between body and spirit, between heaven and earth, *in myself*.

As I continue to feel my way into the relations between these two types of charts, I am especially fascinated by the specific differences. As if, somehow, in the pregnant fullness of the mysterious space between them lies the key to the nature of soul. As if the soul, in choosing both a particular abstract energy pattern and its parallel refraction into matter, is trying to tell us its story, the story of its life between and among the worlds.

I think it is no accident that helio charts are now finding their way into some astrologers' files. Given the need of our time for soul embodiment, to include helio charts in our interpretation of people's lives and longing is to further symbolize, through the astrological language, this pressing need of our times.

Essay

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN, DANE RUDHYAR, AND ME

ASTRO-KRING, The Hague, The Netherlands, 1993

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NOTE: First published in Astro-Kring's book, a collection of International Tributes to Dane Rudyhar, edited by Tees Reitsma, I still notice this essay, floating around the internet. It is one of the most remarkable pieces that I ever composed, and written in a white hot heat, as I recall. I love the subtle swing back and forth between the toxic "dizziness" of Wittgenstein and the healthy "dizziness" of Rudyhar . . .

Like many others, I am a convert to astrology, and like many others, I entered this sacred world through the doorway of Dane Rudhyar. Had I only been exposed to sun-sign daily horoscopes in newspapers, had I had access only to astrology cookbooks delineating what this and that planet, sign, house, aspect and their innumerable combinations meant, had I been initially exposed to fate and event-oriented Victorian astrologers or closeted little old ladies who divined from crystal balls, I doubt I would have endured the painful and exhilarating death and resurrection of the psyche required in order to enter astrology's realm fully.

My story, like many such stories, is long and complicated. The death process was slow and painful — even now I die daily to the ever-surprising traces of my psyche which

still cling to the past. And the resurrection! — well, that too is an ongoing process, an endless spiral curving back to the beginning over and over. There are times when the only way I recognize that my internal process is indeed evolutionary — and not just cyclic, a nightmarish eternal return of the same — is that I am able to endure increasing intensity of both pain and pleasure, while experiencing both with increasing detachment.

I discovered Rudhyar — and astrology — in 1973, at the beginning of my second Saturn cycle. During my first 29.5 year Saturn cycle (Saturn in Gemini) I was preoccupied with trying to fit myself into the usual cultural and philosophical molds — and not succeeding. Meanwhile, I was also attempting to see the truth, what was real in life. Not until the end of that cycle did I realize I had been blindfolded all my life — and then I could summon the courage to rip off the blindfold and throw it away. My story illustrates the old saying: “ontology recapitulates phylogeny.” In my own evolutionary process, I recapitulated the history of the western mind since the beginning of the scientific revolution — and then, thanks to Rudhyar, leaped beyond it.

From the very beginning, I was a searcher, hungry for Truth (Sun Ascendant, and Mars in Sagittarius). I was also stubborn, holding on to whatever version of “truth” I had found as long as possible (Moon in Taurus). Not until my early twenties did I finally give up the Roman Catholicism of my childhood — and then needed to replace it, immediately. The only other candidate for Truth in the world of my limited experience was not religious but secular: science. So I turned to science as a substitute for religion. I wanted to find truth in science, The Truth in science. I wanted to see Science as God, Science as Certainty, the only way to anchor my feet to the ground (Mercury and Venus in Capricorn, Saturn and Uranus in Gemini). Since my religion had failed me, I needed science as a new security blanket. I wanted to wrap it around me and keep out the void.

That was my unconscious intention in 1966 when, at the age of 23, I entered a doctoral program in the philosophy of science at Boston University. I wanted to discover Certainty in Knowledge. In this I was unlike my fellow students, most of whom seemed satisfied to argue particulars. I felt very alone there and upset that others did not seem

to be as driven as I. This drove me back on myself and made me wonder what was wrong with me. Why couldn't I take philosophical questions more lightly? Why couldn't I just play with them, have fun with them, impress others with them?

As the years wore on, I became consciously aware of what seemed at that time to be an extraordinary insight, an insight which, I fear, even now few people in the same position notice about themselves: my search for intellectual certainty was a cover for what I really needed: emotional security. This insight was profound. It turned my world inside out. What had been kept safely in the background pushed inexorably to the foreground. The structure of knowledge and how it is anchored, was no longer linear: I was learning to "read between the lines," to sense the spaces between the lines as present, spaces which others either ignored or seemed to assume were there a priori, as anchors. Or did they? What were they doing and did they know they were doing it? How conscious were they of their assumptions?

Now I felt even more alone. Not only was there no one to talk to, there was no way I could put my questions into words. My questions were pre-linguistic; they existed in that nebulous border zone where thought and language dissolve into the abyss of the unconscious.

I was learning to see the entire edifice of knowledge claims as a linguistic object, which itself was situated within a certain cultural space. I was seeing the structure of that object and how it was suspended, rather than anchored. I was learning that there is no certainty in the sense of anchoring. That whatever we think we know, is but a fleck of dust floating in infinite space.

But I get ahead of myself here. Actually, at this point I was not willing to recognize this way of understanding knowledge. Rather, since I sensed the ground sliding out from under me, I was desperate to avoid the free fall through the void which it entailed — that sense we are all familiar with, what we call "the blow to the solar plexus," that sickening drop in the stomach which doubles us over in emotional pain.

I was beginning to understand philosophical problems from a subjective psychological perspective. What academic philosophers called “the mind/body problem” had become personal; my problem. I knew that this was my problem and I knew the problem was serious: for I knew it, but I couldn’t allow myself to truly feel it.

In the academic philosophy of that time, there was one place in which mind and body supposedly met. In academic jargon, this place is termed: “sensation,” which in turn refers to what were called the “raw data” of bodily experience. I was interested in Truth and in order to approach even the first step to the ladder which led up to the Truth, one was supposed to begin with that pinched source, the so-called “raw data” of sensation. The only other alternative seemed to be that of Descartes, who posited the existence of “innate (inborn) ideas, which then, he said, he knew were True, because “God was perfect and God wouldn’t lie to me”! That reasoning may seem quaint to our ears, but is it really? Astrologers and other “new age” people regularly talk about something similar, (usually Uranian) ideas which fly through the air and strike those who are receptive to them and which they then know, intuitively, to be true.

But Innate Ideas, or Intuition, as the source of truth, scientific Truth? No, never! Even contemplating such a notion was anathema to my professors — especially to my mentor.

My mentor was a die-hard “logical positivist.” Along with a majority of academics of the time (and even now!), he too believed the source of “truth” lay in sensation, or “sense data,” the supposedly identifiable and definable bits and pieces of smell, taste, touch, vision and hearing that supposedly make up the world of human experience. My teacher was unusual, however. He knew that any so-called truth we managed to squeeze from sense data would be trivial, not worth knowing. He was in a bind. What he believed wasn’t worth anything and he knew it. And he had no way out. Using the left brain/right brain distinction we might put it this way now, 25 years later: for him, only the left brain existed. Therefore, for him, life had no meaning. Yet a left brain without a right brain yields only bits of data, factoids with no meaning. Therefore, for him, life had no meaning.

My mentor was a tragic figure, believing in that which was meaningless and knowing it and hating it. He would rather have been searching for Truth, too. But he couldn't. His methodology wouldn't allow it. For me, he represented the walls of the cage I was banging my head against. It was my destiny to meet him: in his cynicism, he exhibited what I could look forward to, should I get stuck where I then was. And it was prophecy which led him to say, soon after, in words which sprang forth from the right brain he refused to acknowledge: "You must go beyond me. You must stand on my shoulders." That was our first direct and confrontational meeting. I was trembling with fear and he was leaning close to me. "Do you want to be like me?" he had asked, puckish and sprightly. "Yes!" I had exclaimed, adoring. "Wrong!" he thundered. "You must go beyond me . . ."

Enter Ludwig Wittgenstein and through Wittgenstein, several years later: Dane Rudhyar; though one might be surprised that I connect the two. For those readers not familiar with Wittgenstein, let me introduce him. Wittgenstein was an Austrian philosopher and a contemporary of Rudhyar, both of them carrying the generational signature of the most recent great conjunction of the two outer — very slow moving — planets, Neptune and Pluto. Wittgenstein was born in 1889, six years earlier than Rudhyar, before the conjunction, in Gemini, was precise. He was a mysterious figure who regularly left academia, feeling more comfortable as a gardener for a monastery than as a Cambridge don. Despite his checkered career, Wittgenstein fascinated. He achieved an almost legendary stature within academic philosophical circles during this lifetime and was credited single-handedly for originating the two most prevalent 20th century philosophical schools of thought — logical positivism and ordinary language analysis — both of which he himself repudiated! Since his death in 1951 his influence, while still esoteric and obscure, has spread far beyond philosophy. His aphoristic remarks are quoted by certain thinkers in many fields, though what exactly he actually meant by them will always be a matter of widely varied interpretation.

My own reading of the man's work, done for my doctoral dissertation, is unusual and no more provable than any of the others. Unbeknownst to me, for I had not yet begun to study astrology, I began to read Wittgenstein at a time in my life when transit

Neptune was conjunct my natal 12th house Sagittarian Mars and opposite natal Uranus in Gemini. I felt very strongly at the time that my psyche had climbed inside him, that he and I were one, and that there was no question but that I understood him — understood not so much his cryptic ideas, as his muffled cries of pain.

Wittgenstein was a bridge between my teacher and Rudhyar. As my teacher had been locked inside his left brain with no way out and knew it (thus his tragic stature), Wittgenstein went one step further: against his will, he had pulsed on through the boundary and was stuck on the outside of the left brain, clawing at it, desperate to find his way back in. Beyond was the infinite void of the right brain, the starry skies within; and he kept his back to it, stiffened, afraid. If my mentor was a tragic figure, Wittgenstein was doubly tragic. I was drawn to tragic figures and determined not to be one myself. After several years of graduate school, I was already fulfilling my teacher's prophecy in moving beyond him. He had told me never to read Wittgenstein. Said he was "confused"; "and besides," he had whispered, "he's a subclinical schizophrenic." Despite his warning, I finally did read Wittgenstein and like many others, became utterly entranced. "This book is true," I said to myself, after reading his *Philosophical Investigations* all the way through in a single afternoon, my eyes glued to the pages, "but I don't know what it means."

What? I said that? Impossible. *I said that*. It was my first intuitive (right brain) remark, the first strike from out of the blue. I wondered how I could say that. For within logical positivism, one has to know what something means before one can determine (ideally through some sort of scientific test or experiment) whether it's true or false. I had been trained under my teacher, a logical positivist; however, this training is not unusual, since logical positivism is a technical delineation of our (scientific) common sense. To say that one can know something is true without knowing what it means is "nonsense," within our scientific framework for making sense. It "makes no sense." Yet it *did* make sense. That's exactly what I had said and I knew it was true. And yet I didn't know what it meant.

I kept reading Wittgenstein. I couldn't stop. It was as if I was possessed. My obsession with Wittgenstein was a projection, a foil, for my own eventual transformation. Through grappling with him I was bringing up for review what had been the underground assumptions that held all my other more conscious beliefs in place. What had been background was now foreground, staring me in the face. The scientific framework of my common sense cracked, collapsed. The boundaries between my self and the world, my own and Wittgenstein's psyche, dissolved. I was discovering another common sense altogether, this one an actual sensing in common.

This kind of common sensing is very different from our scientific "common sense," where we have no senses in common, where instead we are all locked into our own private worlds and receive information individually, through the five external senses. Western cultural angst and alienation is no mystery, when we realize that even the philosophical underpinnings of our daily lives dictate that we remain separate, isolated, and lonely. Wittgenstein was one philosopher who felt this aloneness in an acute fashion. His question: "How can we know another person is in pain?" takes on strange new colorations when seen in this light. Wittgenstein's questions, I feel, are not just mere examples subject to "linguistic analysis"; they can be often taken as disguised and muffled cries for help.

Wittgenstein was not the only one who needed help. My continuous reading of his works was changing me. Soon I was as confused as Wittgenstein had himself admitted to be; as others, his disciples, were determined to deny; as still others, critics, cited and condemned him for. I couldn't stop reading him. My eyes felt like they were glued to the page. His work felt swollen, like an advanced pregnancy, never delivered. Like a volcano, slowly imploding. Feeling his buried passion, my passion was aroused. I told my teacher. "So what if he's confused. I prefer fertile confusion to sterile clarity." That shut him up. He looked at me, cocked an eyebrow, startled.

Something was happening to me. I was becoming strange. The walls of the cage had thinned and dissolved. I was spinning out into the void, with no way out and no way through. Back then others called this experience a "nervous breakdown." But I knew,

even then, that what I was beginning to undergo was holy. That this journey into the beyond was a sacred initiation.

My worst fears had come true. There was no ground to stand on, no certainty, no security. Instead there were waves and lights and shocking insights, shuddering ascents and descents into realms that I knew not with my rational brain and thus could not describe, nor even remember afterwards. I was hungry for more, more. I went sailing through the universe attuning to stellar winds. But I didn't know it. I had no map and no guide.

Enter Rudhyar. Not that I ever wanted to read his books, or become an astrologer, or even think about it. I hated astrology. I was a philosopher, not a quack! All I knew was the popularized version of astrology, the veil with which our scientific culture has shrouded this most ancient and supreme language. Despite the fact that I had torn off the blockers of left brain science, I was still looking at the world through narrowly scientific eyes, still avoiding what I thought of as silly superstition.

Rudhyar entered my life at a point when, despite a lingering prejudice, I was newly opened and thus vulnerable, receptive to the new. I had always been a seeker and now my search was leading me in a direction I had not anticipated. A friend set up my astrological chart and I was astonished to find myself asking: "Is this a map? Is this really a map? Will it help me to see? Will it enable me to go on?" When I asked how to read the chart, she handed me Rudhyar's *Astrology of Personality*.

I date my own resurrection as stemming from the moment I picked up this book. From then on, what had been experienced as terrible, the uncertainty of having no intellectual foundation upon which to rely, became magical, the continuous playfulness of the transformed mind, at one with its own imaginative reach. With this transformation, the problem of certainty in knowledge, rather than being solved, dissolves — within a larger dimension. I had set out to discover certainty and instead, fell into the void. The void where Rudhyar lived. The terrible morphed into the joyful, as I beheld and learned to live within the creative present, this infinitely fertile space that

upholds and nurtures continuous transformations of form. Space as an electric, alive presence, magical medium for emergence.

Rudhyar was a musician, a composer; he had no need for intellectual certainty. In music there is no place to stand, there is only change, the continuous contrapuntal play of moving harmonies. Rudhyar's writings in astrology reflected his musical sensibility; they were not written from within a left-brain framework. Rudhyar was inside what he was talking about, his focus on consciousness journeying through time and space, comfortable among the worlds, landing anywhere and viewing the cosmos from that vantage point, then taking off again. Moving with the music, becoming one with it and describing what he saw along the way. His cosmos was a divine orchestral performance with no beginning and no end. In this orchestra, planets and stars were the instruments, great Celestial Beings, and in the play of their continuous motion they were making love to each other, resonating in a vast and complex concerto expanding forever into larger and larger harmonies.

Rudhyar's was a universe in which every point opens into a space and every space is a mere point in some vaster realm. Where each and every point is central and all of them a continuous flow. Where each circumference traces the trajectory of some vast Being circled by others yet larger than itself. In Rudhyar's universe there was no one point to stand on and no need for one: in a continuously expanding universe every point is central. In Rudhyar's universe there is no fear, contraction, separation; instead one expands to sense one's communion with all that is. In Rudhyar's universe there is no huddling with one's back to the void, but a flying free within it, sailing within and between the points into larger and smaller spaces. The sense of dizziness that people feel when reading Rudhyar stems, I feel, from this multidimensional consciousness which both inhabited him and which, paradoxically, he knew he was but a tiny speck within.

Both Wittgenstein and Rudhyar make me dizzy — but with a vast difference. In Wittgenstein I experience the dizziness of confusion; I sense a stifling, but orderly world in the process of disintegration. And yet, for Wittgenstein, that disintegration was precisely what he longed for; he knew, in some part of himself foreign to his rational

clarifying mind, that in the buzzing booming confusion of his body's stream of life lay his real life, an intimation of aliveness, a vibrancy that the mechanical orientation of scientific mentality had disallowed. In that longing, I feel at one with him and I feel for him.

In Rudhyar I feel dizziness as exhilaration, exaltation, a sense of an opening so wide that it takes my breath away; I have to stretch more and more, to encompass more and more. Wittgenstein's confusion was fertile, yes, a longing for something and yet a fear of it; a longing for love, for opening into a larger sense of things and yet an inability or refusal to do so. Wittgenstein makes me feel entombed, suffocating; I fight to get out. Rudhyar releases me.

Both Wittgenstein and Rudhyar discovered the void and that put them both beyond the pale, alone, each in a universe of one.

For Wittgenstein, aloneness was experienced as alienation; he was both attracted to and repelled by the void which, for him, was senseless, out or beyond all sense. He was outside, out beyond the walls of his cultural and linguistic cage, yet afraid of feeling even more separate and trying to get back in, to identify with what he had left behind by seeing it from up close. The more he tried to go back to normal seeing, the more what used to make normal sense kept sliding into something else. The void was not only out there, it was in here; there was no way to avoid it, this slippage, this lack of ground to truly stand upon, this lack of certainty, of security. And yet, paradoxically, he also knew on some level, that this streaming would be his real home, if he could only learn to swim.

For Rudhyar, aloneness was experienced as unity, the all-one; Rudhyar was one whose consciousness included the vastness of the cosmos, where change and diversity were not only acknowledged and included, but gloried in. His consciousness was unitary and utterly spacious: his void was the space that continuously expands; was a sort of universal fluid, both underneath and within the many.

It's as if Wittgenstein represents both a recognition of and a reaction to the loss of the scientific world of Cartesian certainty and Rudhyar follows on his heels, courageously opening to the eternally expanding Now. It's interesting to note that Wittgenstein as a security-oriented Taurus was followed by Rudhyar's fiery Arian initiative. Both born during the time of the Neptune/Pluto conjunction in Gemini, they represent the old and the new ways of experiencing the total transformation of consciousness symbolized by this conjunction. Philosophers, and others of many disciplines, feel the tragedy of Wittgenstein; many of them too, one senses, fear to move beyond. Rudhyar has not yet found such wide renown, as his kind of courage is still rare.

Yet, despite my immense gratitude to Rudhyar for releasing me from the need for intellectual certainty, for introducing me to absolute relativity, I am still left with the original problem I first contacted in graduate school over twenty-five years ago: the split between my mind and body. Rudhyar lived in a different age. His concerns were celestial. Earth was merely one point in an infinitely expanding universe and the awareness of the astrologer was, potentially, all inclusive. In Rudhyar's universe one's humanity is identical with that awareness.

For Rudhyar, to be a relativist is to be free to see from any point of view, any dimension of reality. This allows one to have a perspective which is continuously enlarging and diversifying. In principle, one can see relativistic thinking as the key to humanity's transcendence of factionalism and prejudice, breeding grounds for cruelty and war. Conversion to relativistic thinking appears to be necessary, if we are to create a transcultural milieu in which truly peaceful practice can be nurtured as the changed basis for human relations.

Unfortunately, relativity can also be and has been used as yet another weapon, to justify actions of any kind. Relativism in ethics can and is often invoked as a cynical excuse for doing whatever you want and getting away with it. I feel that this is why most people have not embraced relativism intellectually. From an ethical point of view, its consequences appear to be disastrous. Intellectual relativism, in the absence of genuine feeling, becomes inhuman, a merely abstract exercise. Our transformed mind must be

linked to a transformed heart for our actions to be performed with real consideration for others — or even consideration for other aspects of our own selves — our emotional needs, our body's needs, our soul's needs.

Which brings me back to what I began with in this paper: 25 years ago I discovered that the search for intellectual certainty is a cover for the need for emotional security. Thanks to Dane Rudhyar, I then discovered that the proper function of the intellect is play, the joyful play of the transformed mind. Emotional security, however, remains an authentic human need. A need which I still feel. And I'm not going to get it through reading Rudhyar, or through anyone's intellectual study of the workings of celestial bodies.

My ultimate goal is to integrate transformation in consciousness with a transformation in the way in which I inhabit my own body. Intuitively, I know that "true security is to be found within" — a saying that many people also subscribe to, but do they really understand it? Do they know what they are saying? I feel that most people think of this remark as "spiritual," i.e., once one has "peace of mind," true security will follow automatically. On the contrary, it is my feeling that true security, as long as we are human beings inhabiting bodies on the planetary body Earth, is to be found precisely in our bodies as sacred temples housing the spirit. I want to tune into my body, to be capable of feeling the aliveness — and the consciousness of aliveness — in each individual cell. Then focusing through my transformed body as medium, I want to learn to tune into Earth, the vibrant aliveness of Her body.

Through the integration of a transformed mind and body, I want to transform my understanding of astrology; to particularize it, by grounding it into the here and now — to this place in this time. Somehow — and this is an inchoate notion, only barely perceived and can only be formulated as a sort of guttural grunt, my finger pointing down, not up; not out there, but down here; not all of that, but only this — somehow, what Rudhyar talked about in the abstract, the need to see each point as a space and each space as a point, needs to be realized, made manifest, here in my daily life, in the ongoing experience of my own body.

I feel there is an understanding that we astrologers need to arrive at and I don't think we are going to reach it through abstract speculation. The direction lies inward, in our hearts. We need to attune to the rhythm of the human heart's universal beat in order to bring our minds and bodies together. We need to understand things by going through the Earth out into the heavens, rather than by lifting off and pretending it's just our own little launching pad, nothing special. For if every point in the universe is the center of things, then so is this one, this point, this place where I live and you.

I don't fully understand what I am saying here; I only know that for me, astrology has become too abstract, too intellectual. We need to learn how to embody astrology. We will do that through our bodies, each as a portion of the larger Earth body. Earth's body is the medium of our communion with the stars.

We need to move beyond Rudhyar, need to stand upon yet another great one's shoulders.

INTRODUCTION TO ASTROLOGY
A Philosophical Primer

© Ann Kreilkamp, Ph.D.
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PREFACE

I wrote this primer to satisfy a perceived lack in the astrological literature. Though many books describe the unique language of astrology — its ancient alphabet, nomenclature and grammar — and many more are devoted to techniques and interpretations, I have yet to discover an introductory volume which presents the “ontology” of astrology — what one might call the interior “space” that astrology, as an “object” — inhabits in our collective mind.

I began to study astrology in 1973, when I was 30 years old, at my first “Saturn Return.” When my father, a physician, heard of my interest he asked me, amazed: “Why are you wasting your good brain?” Like most other scientifically trained people, he assumed astrology was nonsense, a superstitious holdover from the past. This attitude towards astrology, still prevalent today, is no surprise: our materialistic culture would be undermined if it allowed astrology to emerge from its long-standing status as either utterly superficial (cf. newspaper syndicated Sun-sign astrology) or decidedly occult (and therefore strange, weird, scary).

I wrote this primer so that I could hand it to people when they ask the questions I had when I began to study astrology. These questions do not pertain so much to specific technical points but rather explore this subject we call “astrology” as a whole, and why anybody with any brains would want to study it.

INTRODUCTION

Astrology is *not* what it seems

When people hear that I'm an astrologer, they often draw back in alarm. "You believe in astrology?" they spit out, contemptuous. To these I answer with a question, "Do you believe in English?" That stops them. In order to understand my response, their brain must suddenly shift gears.

Astrology is not a belief system; astrology is a language. Like any language, astrology can be used to make true or false statements. Taken as a whole, however, languages are not "true" or "false." We use them — or abuse them; we learn them or leave them alone.

Others have the opposite reaction; they grab me, excited, wonder if I can predict their love life, when they'll get rich. I try to shake them off. What they want are answers. I prefer to deepen our questions.

Both critical and uncritical attitudes toward astrology are typical — and both are inappropriate. Were we to delve into the philosophical underpinnings of astrology, we might acknowledge and honor it as a universal symbolic language. Were we to learn this language, it might help us heal the divisions that threaten our inner lives, our relations with others, our communities, our world.

My dream is to see the astrological "ephemeris" (a book listing the daily positions and motions of the planets) become so familiar that whenever some (inner or outer, private or public) event occurs that mystifies or excites us we automatically "look up the planets" to identify the configuration operating in the heavens for that moment in time and place and compare it to the configuration in the heavens at the moment when we were born. Inevitably, we will discover correlations, synchronicities between the two configurations, some so exacting and uncanny that we can't help but suspect divine choreography at work.

Synchronicities blast open our usual interpretive frameworks; they invite us to explore symbolic ramifications and to link events and their configurations to others in the near and distant past. Ultimately, by investigating the larger, multidimensional context of events through the lens of astrology, we open our capacity to absorb and incorporate them within a much more expanded awareness.

Astrology is a universal language, perhaps even a divine language — the language the gods would speak had they need for words.

Astrology is both mathematical and mystical

As a discipline, astrology is formal, abstract and mathematical, the study of the interplay of Space and Time as viewed from planet Earth. Astrology describes and analyzes structures and processes within and among circles and cycles in this solar system and beyond.

Yet the underlying assumption of astrology is mystical: everything is related; all apparent dualities resolve into unity. *As above, so below*: what is above (in the heavens) mirrors what is below (on Earth). *As within, so without*: the original and changing patterns of our inner lives mirror those in the outer world.

Your astrological “birthchart” is an arrangement of points (planetary positions) around the circumference of a circle that shows the configurations in the heavens for your specific birth time and place. As such, it depicts the essential and unique *structure* of your life. The continuing cycles of the planets as they move in and out of crucial geometrical patterns with each other and your birth planet positions correlate with your life as an unfolding *process*.

The art of astrology consists of correlating your story — the types, timing, and flow of your personal experiences (process) — with the overall purpose and meaning (structure) of your life.

From a cosmic perspective, we are spacious, high-frequency, spiritual beings temporarily squeezed into dense, low-frequency, material bodies held by gravity on planet Earth as it rotates through a solar system embedded in a vast galactic spiral communicating with countless other galaxies in an ever-expanding self-aware universe.

Living on Earth, we humans tend to forget the larger picture.

Ignoring the starry sky above, we get caught below in specific, moment-by-moment sensations, feelings, ideas, and memories — but not entirely. Human nature is paradoxical, simultaneously driven by tumultuous surface passions of desire and by an unswerving, and usually hidden, inner directive for meaning and purpose.

Astrology is stellar ecology

Astro-logy, the study of the stars, asks us to behold the Earth as the center of our solar system — and beyond. Astrology is an ecology of the stars. It considers the one environment we all share, no matter who we are or where we live, the sky above us, turning slowly round once every 24 hours. We all see the same sky, we all live under the same universal and ever-changing planetary patterns.

Con-sider: to move with the stars.

Dis-aster: to turn away from the stars.

Astrology maps what we all have in common; it assumes unity.

Planetary patterns look slightly different depending upon the angles from which they are viewed. As each place on earth is unique and has its own particular beauty, so too each planetary pattern is unique, when viewed from a particular place on Earth.

Astrology respects diversity, it honors uniqueness.

Astrologers have belief systems

So far I have attempted to situate astrology in our collective psyche as a certain kind of ontological “object” by referring to it as a language, rather than as a belief system. However, just as with any focus of human attention, there is no “neutral” or “objective” understanding of astrology. Anyone who uses this language does so within his or her own world-view.

There are two belief-systems usually associated with the language of astrology. The first, and, unfortunately, still the most common, is the “fatalistic” framework. The second, I call “esoteric” or “metaphysical.” This is the framework that informs my understanding of astrology, since it integrates left-brained mathematics with right-brained mysticism.

Fatalism vs. Esotericism

The fatalistic belief system, unfortunately, still prevails, especially among those who have not studied the language. It is this belief system which embeds the view of astrology as either stupid or scary, either superstitious nonsense or “occult.” The esoteric or metaphysical belief system, on the other hand, though more rare, has been growing steadily since the late 1960s.

Fatalism denies free will

Fatalism denies free will. Instead, responsibility for one’s life is placed upon something external to the self. In this view, “the stars” (the planets) determine both who we are and what’s going to happen to us day by day.

I’ve noticed that, almost without exception, anyone who either (critically) “hates” astrology or (uncritically) “loves” astrology does so for the same reason. Associating it with fatalism, those who want to keep their free will hate astrology; those who want to deny their free will love it.

Fatalism is not confined to astrology. Indeed, we blame our genetic inheritance, our parents and early childhood conditioning, our jobs, our governments, the devil himself — so and so, or such and such, we complain, keeps us from developing our full potential.

Though rarely noticed, fatalism is endemic within our society, and astrology is one of the scapegoats for this unconscious belief that our lives are controlled by outside forces.

The association of the language of astrology with the fatalist belief system is the principal obstacle standing in the way of a renewed cultural acceptance of this most ancient and profound language.

Esotericism includes free will

Astrology can also be associated with another belief system, known by a number of different names, such as “esoteric” or “metaphysical.” We could even use the name “occult” here, if we understand that this word does not refer to anything manipulative; “occult” simply means “hidden,” that which is not immediately obvious. Whereas fatalism denies free will, esotericism gives it back to us — totally. Indeed, we are entirely responsible for ourselves — who we were in the past, who we are now, and who we choose to become in the future.

Within this alternative world view, each of us encompasses three principles: body, mind and soul. Body and mind are mortal, they live and die. The soul is immortal, it existed before you were born, and it will exist after you die.

The esoteric belief-system assumes reincarnation, the idea that the soul lives many lives, each of them a stepping stone, the lessons it contains advancing the soul’s evolution.

Free will, within this point of view, is a function of the soul. The soul chooses the life.

Your soul chooses both the moment and the place of birth, and therefore the specific physical and social environment into which you were born — including your body and mind, your parents, your brothers and sisters; your soul chooses the genetic stream, in other words, the flow of qualities of all kinds inherited from generation to generation. The soul also chooses your tendencies to health or disease, the lessons this life has to offer, and the talents to help you learn them.

Fatalism and Esotericism compared

Fatalism ignores the soul. It tends to see us as puppets in a play, mechanical, with no inward direction of our own, pulled by strings external to our beings for no apparent reason.

Esotericism, on the other hand, assumes that you as a soul are a spiritual being evolving towards perfection, through the process of freely choosing, and then learning, from the experiences of your many earth lives.

Within fatalism, the causes of human thoughts, words and deeds are assumed to be external. Within esotericism those causes are accepted as internal, a part of your own nature. Esotericism assumes that we create our own realities; it focuses on a specific inner potential that pushes for development throughout a given lifetime.

The birthchart as a destiny pattern

The astrological birthchart is a map of the planetary pattern in the heavens during one specific moment shown from a particular place on earth. This moment is also the destiny pattern of the person whose birth it is. In other words, the birthchart locates an individual in space and time and indicates the direction his or her life will take.

As above, so below.

“Whatever is born during a certain moment in time has the qualities of that moment, no matter where it is.” — C. G. Jung. This is known as the “law of synchronicity,” to distinguish it from the scientific “law of causality” — whereby one thing is said to cause or influence another. Within the esoteric perspective, astrology does not establish causal relations between heavenly and terrestrial phenomena. Rather, it notices that correlations between them do exist. The question why these correlations exist lies outside the province of astrology.

The universe is always changing, it does not repeat itself. Therefore, each pattern is unique, and each person born under a particular pattern is also unique, unrepeatable! You are the only person on earth to ever have your particular pattern. Each of us enters the earth plane as a seed, a tiny, concentrated unit of potentiality, destined to express itself, to develop itself fully according to its own unique laws, unfolding its own glorious individuality.

We are free — to become precisely ourselves, fulfilling our entire potential.

How successful a soul will be in following through with the birth destiny chosen depends both upon continued use of free will and upon the level of understanding the soul has gained through previous lives. How “old” the soul is, how many times it has already incarnated on Earth and how much it has actually learned from each incarnation, is not something an astrologer can understand by simply looking at the birthchart.

An old soul is capable of expressing his or her birthchart with more awareness than a young soul can. What a young soul might call “fate” — a sense of being tossed about by uncontrollable circumstances — an older soul will recognize as individual destiny. Older souls have experienced and suffered enough to understand that whatever is going on outside mirrors what’s happening inside.

As above, so below. As within, so without.

The “older soul” realizes: whatever are the circumstances we find ourselves in, we have attracted these to us as mirrors. That’s what they are for! To show us what’s going on inside us! Outer happenings symbolize inner events. To change our circumstances is, first, to change our minds. We create our own realities. No one else, and no thing else, not even “the stars,” is responsible for the way we live our lives.

In response to those fatalists who say that the planets “cause” us to behave in certain ways, I would say with Edgar Cayce, it is more likely we humans “cause” the planets to act in certain ways! We are much more powerful than we think. Thoughts act as lazer beams. They cut through space. They cross vast distances. They carve out the courses of the planets. And — what’s even more extraordinary — the courses of our lives. It is we who are responsible . . . responsive! Able, to respond.

Astrology is a symbolic language

It may seem as if what I am saying here is clear-cut and objective. That once one learns the language of astrology well enough, one can describe and predict with precision both who a person is, and how he or she is going to develop.

Nothing could be further from the truth. As a person’s life needs to be treated with reverence, appreciated for its mystery, so too astrology, as a language which attempts to map that life, is more akin to mystery than it is to anything scientific.

Astrology, viewed within the esoteric or metaphysical framework, is a symbolic language, not a literal one. Thus those who assume the clarity and objectivity of the literal language of science as a standard for thinking and speaking find it difficult to appreciate how to approach astrology.

In a literal language one looks up a word in the dictionary to discover what it means. Various definitions, when added together, are assumed to equal the current possible range of meaning for the word being defined.

Astrological “words,” on the other hand, are symbols. Each of them generates an immense, but indefinite, range of meaning. It’s as if the symbol were a sun, and its meanings the rays, radiating out from that central nucleus. This nucleus itself is mysterious. The essence of a symbol cannot be defined. Much like a dream, it remains mysterious.

No matter how definite our attempts to define our dreams, to make them make sense, there is always something left over, an irreducible core which eludes any of our attempts at understanding and which continues to yield a rich harvest of meaning. That which is symbolic in nature is larger, fuller than any of our attempts to limit it to literal definition.

Symbols fascinate us — and frustrate us. We want to understand. Somehow we know that if we did understand, it would change our lives. Yet because of the way we have been

trained in our schools, we tend to be scientific in our approach, thinking that all words should be literally defined. This approach is so fundamental to our western way of thinking that it is difficult for us to even realize we use it, much less to unlearn our need for limiting the meanings of things by defining them, containing them, capturing them.

Symbols are gifts of the spirit. They ask to be appreciated, not boxed in. And to do this, we must switch from left to right brain. We must relax, into our intuitive, receptive, symbolic selves.

Astrology and the philosophical attitude

Since astrology is a symbolic language, it can serve to aid us in exploring attitudes and values that are hard to understand, that lie beneath our conscious awareness, and that have to do with the meaning and direction of our lives. To meditate on the birthchart is to engender a compassion for the entire fabric of earthly existence, and to wonder how we fit into it. This deepens our concerns, makes us aware of our priorities, and helps us to detach from the constant distractions of our daily lives.

Within this context, we may ask, what am I really supposed to accomplish before I die? What is the meaning and purpose of my life? These questions then become a dynamically pulsating center around which all lesser concerns revolve as constellations. A meditation upon the birthchart orients us towards a continuous and ever-deepening resonance with our life purpose, and encourages us to live fully, to live impeccably, to live our lives as if they mattered.

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF ASTROLOGY

Part I: STRUCTURE

Astrology compared to other symbolic languages

In my own attempts to make sense of an unusually hectic and peripatetic life, I have studied a number of psychological and esoteric languages, including Freudian, Jungian, Tarot, and numerology. I have sought to name, describe, and analyze the complexities of my inner world so that I might understand and amplify my own evolutionary thrust. While I value each of these languages, I now view them as a more or less enriching adjuncts to the ancient mother lode of astrology.

Astrology may be the most differentiated symbolic language ever invented to elucidate the complexity of human character and experience within a whole-systems orientation to the larger universe.

Compare the language of astrology with Freud's world-view, for example. Freud invented three terms to describe the human psyche: "id," "ego," and "superego." By contrast, the basic vocabulary of astrology includes ten "planets," twelve "signs," twelve "houses," and all their combinations — that's 10 x 12 x 12! — plus geometrical "aspects," aspect patterns, asteroids, new planets, comets, fixed stars and constellations, and so on. There are even astrological analyses of all 360 degrees in a circle.

In what follows I will attempt to present the basics of astrology in a way that demonstrates how I came to grips with it. By the way, though I discuss "signs" and "houses" in general, I leave it to the reader to consult cookbooks on astrology for specific delineations of the twelve signs and twelve houses.

Symbols and their context

In what follows, I will introduce certain astrological concepts as if they can be understood in isolation. Keep in mind, however, that like all of life, every symbol in the birthchart is colored by all its relationships! For example, if you are a Sagittarian, then your Sagittarian Sun sign is affected by the house in which it is located, the sign and house position of the Moon and the other planets, the Ascendant, aspects among all of these, current transits and progressions, and more. Each birthchart is unique, and so complex that it contains literally millions of points of possible reference. What an astrologer looks for depends not only on experience, tradition and training, but on his or her personal expectations, attitudes, and level of evolutionary development. Please be aware: an astrologer cannot "read" the chart of someone more psychologically or spiritually "advanced."

In other words, there is no such thing as a final, definitive interpretation of your birth chart. While the astrological birthchart is objective (any astrologer would set it up in

approximately the same way), the interpretation of the birthchart is not. The meaning found there is in part a function of who is looking at it.

Role of intuition in interpretation

There is much focus today on the role of intuition in learning. And yet there is a subtle difference between an idea that flashes through as intuition and one that floats up as fantasy. Only long experience and a sensitive attunement to one's inner life can yield the ability to distinguish between them.

Despite this caveat however, please be aware that the birthchart yields its meaning more easily and fully to intuition than to any system of technical analysis. (This is why computer programs "interpreting" birthcharts don't satisfy. They spew lists of ingredients but cannot intuit how those ingredients are likely to mix.) The intuition must be trained. As Einstein once said, "Luck comes to the prepared mind." Just as a concert pianist appears to play the most technical and complex pieces effortlessly, so too, the student of astrology must train for years to be able to focus the intuition precisely and then recognize the manner in which a birth pattern is being enacted.

The birthchart as a mandala symbol

The birthchart is both a detached, objective "map" of the heavens for a certain point in time and place and a sacred, circular "mandala" symbolizing wholeness. The birthchart is your blueprint for life, a mysterious set of instructions for the journey you must take to integrate the various parts of yourself.

Planets. The symbols inside the birthchart represent planetary energies. The birthchart has been compared to an electromagnetic force field, with each point (each planet) in the system in resonance with the whole.

Better yet, see the birthchart as a stage play, with the planets as actors, and the geometrical patterns that connect them your lifetime themes. As both author and director of this play, you must at some point allow the actors to all appear together on the stage.

Finally, one might compare the birthchart to a symphony orchestra; the planets are its instruments, and you are both composer and conductor. Each instrument must be practiced until it vibrates with its full and pure tone; they are then combined in duets, triplets, quartets, quintets, and so on. Hopefully, at some point in your journey, the voices of all your instruments will fuse into one glorious song, a hymn of praise to the marvelous and intricate complexity of your singular nature as a tiny speck of magnificence within an infinitely vast, radiant universe.

The structure of the birthchart mandala

Cross and square. The internal structure of the birthchart mandala is that of the cross or square within the circle. Each of us, in effect, at birth, is hung on a cross, and must learn how to square the circle, to fit the square peg of our personality into the round hole of our immortal spirit. This cross is represented by the coordinate axes of the chart, horizontal and vertical.

The horizontal line or axis on the chart represents the actual horizon at the moment of birth. When you were born, any planets above that line were above the earth and planets below that line were below. “Above,” symbolizes day, light, publicity, objectivity — you in relation to the outer world. “Below” represents night, darkness, privacy, subjectivity — you in relation to your interior world.

The vertical line or axis is known as the “meridian.” Planets located left of this line represent energies through which you work out your destiny independently of others. In this half of the chart you create your own circumstances. Planets located to the right of the meridian represent energies through which you work out your destiny in concert with others. In this half of the chart you respond to circumstances already created.

Remember, the birthchart is a symbolic picture of who you are. And the energies of the universe flow through you. The circumference of the chart represents the boundary system of the self, which holds the ten planetary energies. These energies interact with the world outside you through their relation to the two “outlets” of the birthchart. These outlets are called the “Ascendant” and the “Midheaven.”

Ascendant. The Ascendant outlet, located at the left end of the horizontal line is “personal.”

Midheaven. The Midheaven outlet, located at the top end of the vertical line, is “impersonal.”

Think of these two outlets as nozzles on a garden hose, used to spray water in different ways. The settings of these “nozzles” are determined by the specific astrological “signs” they are in.

The horizontal axis: Ascendant/Descendant

The Ascendant, or “rising sign,” represents the point of the eastern sky that was “rising” at the moment of birth and symbolizes both your personality and how you personally interact with your environment. Your personality is the part of yourself you show to the world — your persona, coming from the Greek word meaning “mask”; it also represents your face, your body, and the way you express your inner life through it. The Ascendant is not your real self, but your self-image, what you show to others. The “environment,” also represented by the Ascendant, includes all those circumstances and situations in which you find yourself day by day.

Descendant. At the other end of the horizontal line is the “Descendant.” Whereas at the Ascendant you dynamically project your personality into the world, at the Descendant the world is magnetically attracted to you. The Descendant signifies partnership. Planets found there often seem to describe qualities of your partners, whether personal or professional. It may also signify your opponents — partners of another kind.

The horizontal line is the symbol for the theme of the self in relation to the other in our lives. As we project ourselves into the world, so do we attract others who reflect our projections.

The vertical axis: Midheaven/Immun Coeli

At right angles to the horizontal line is the vertical line, the two ends of which are called the Midheaven (at the top) and the Immun Coeli (at the bottom).

Midheaven. The Midheaven, or Zenith, at the topmost point of the chart, is the impersonal outlet through which your inner energies interact with the outside world. Whereas the Ascendant describes your personality’s interchange with the immediate environment, the Midheaven outlet indicates what you are here for, the purpose, or intent of the incarnation. It is the most public position in the chart, and signifies your eventual achievement or lack of it, noting recognition and notoriety, honor and dishonor.

The Midheaven usually signifies your career, the role you play in society. For one who has begun to “individuate” however, the Midheaven describes the calling, that which you must do to fully become what you are meant to be, what the universe needs of this particular entity.

Immun Coeli. Directly opposite the Midheaven is the Immun Coeli (or Nadir), the bottom most point of the chart. As the Midheaven represents what you are reaching for, so the Immun Coeli represents the foundation upon which you stand. Your home and family. These are the very roots of your self.

This is where you put your feet on the ground. The Immun Coeli symbolizes the most private part of your self, that which constitutes the ground of your being.

The vertical line then, stands for the private in relation to the public theme in our lives. As we plant our feet on the ground, so can we reach for the stars.

Planets, signs, houses

Three main categories of astrological symbols are shown in the birthchart: planets, signs and houses.

Planets. The astrological symbols for the “planets” stand for specific spiritual energies or principles. Astrology identifies ten different planetary energies operating within you, the eight known planets — Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto — plus the Sun and Moon.

Signs. The same planet operates differently depending on the “sign” of the zodiac it occupies. Think of the planet as a “verb” and the sign it is in as an “adverb,” modifying it, so that it functions in a certain manner. (For example, the verb for Mars might be expressed as “to act.” If Mars is placed in the sign of Cancer, it would indicate action expressed “emotionally.”)

Zodiac. The “zodiac” traces the invisible circular band in the heavens around the Earth through which the Sun, Moon and planets move. The 360° zodiac is segmented into twelve 30° signs — Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces. The zodiac encompasses the totality of human experience, and can be viewed as a developmental process, from the seed (Aries), its soil (Taurus), the first stirrings of life above ground (Gemini), water and other nutrients (Cancer), individual plant identity (Leo) . . . all the way through to compost (Pisces) where individuals dissolve back into unity. Likewise, there is within each individual sign its own developmental process, tending towards increasing awareness and refinement. For example, the raw impulsive rashness of Aries evolves through experience into courageous, pioneering leadership.

Houses. “Houses” are the wedge-shaped spaces inside the circle, numbered one to twelve counterclockwise starting with the Ascendant as cusp of the first house. In general, the sequence of the signs resonates with the meanings in the sequence of the houses, so that the natural sign to govern a house reflects its place in the sequence. Aries, for example, is the natural governor of the first house and Leo of the fifth house. Houses are areas of experience within which the planets operate, and are established through the daily revolution of the Earth. Houses torque the pure energies of the planets into the messy, confusing, nitty-gritty business of life on Earth and govern daily affairs, circumstances and situations. The more planets in any one house, the more the affairs of that house are emphasized.

Remember, planets are symbols inside the circle. Signs are symbols outside the circle. Houses are the wedged-shaped spaces.

Elements and qualities (modes)

Each astrological sign belongs to one of four “elements” and one of three “qualities” (or “nodes”). The four elements are fire, earth, air, and water. The three qualities are cardinal, fixed, and mutable.

Think of the natural meanings of the four elements and you will understand their astrological meanings. “Fire” is fiery, forceful, exuberant, inspirational; “earth” is down-

to-earth, practical, grounded; “air” circulates, communicates, is mental, detached, and often long-winded; and “water” is emotional, resonant, sensitive, full of feeling.

Of the qualities, “cardinal” is active, enterprising, and initiating; “fixed” is stable, resistant to change, and stubborn; and “mutable” is changeable, adaptable, and mercurial.

Planetary rulers

Each sign is said to “rule” at least one planet. A planet in its “ruler” is thought to be particularly powerful because the meaning of the planet is highly compatible with the meaning of the sign; thus the planet can act naturally, with no interference. The “ruler” of the sign on the Ascendant is often deemed to rule the whole chart.

Planetary aspects

I began my study of astrology in 1973. Working alone, I devoured the literature, pouring over what seemed to be an endless stream of unrelated details. Then one day, feeling thoroughly confused and overwhelmed, I walked into a book store in San Francisco and saw, tacked to the wall, a birthchart with what are called the astrological “aspects” drawn in as colored lines, linking planets to one another. I stopped, and stood staring at this picture, transfixed.

I wish I could share with you what that few minutes meant to me. It was a real revelation. Aspects, I realized intuitively, were the keys to a deeper, more wholistic understanding of astrology. They show how a person’s energies operate as an integrated system.

To understand the system, first, be aware that the center of the chart represents Earth — with you on it. From the point of view of this center, taken as a third point from which any two planets are viewed, aspects depict the geometrical relations of those planets.

Planets relate either harmoniously or inharmoniously, depending on three things: first, the natures of the planets involved (Mars and Saturn usually don’t like each other, whereas Venus and the Moon usually do); secondly, on the type of aspect involved (that is, each aspect, depending on the degree of its angle, has its own symbolic interpretation); and third, on one’s level of awareness. The more we recognize the nature of an energy within ourselves, the more we can work with it to evolve the way it expresses, both by itself and in relation to other energies.

Each aspect has an “orb allowance,” that is, a range of variation from exactness, of up to ten degrees, again depending on the type of aspect and the planets involved. The more exact the aspect, the more compelling its influence.

Stressful aspects

Certain aspects are especially significant, because stressful, thus dynamic. These are the “conjunction” (0°), the “square” (90°) and the “opposition” (180°).

Conjunction. The “conjunction,” 0°, is the most powerful aspect and the only one easily visible in the night sky: two planets joined together by an aspect of more or less zero degrees. Conjunctions link energies so closely that they tend towards fusion; this makes it difficult to experience them separately. In addition, energies in conjunction tend to magnify one another, as if in an echo chamber. This aspect provides focus, concentration and intensity in a particular area. The conjunction can also be too intense, in which case it becomes overwhelming, frustrating or confusing, again depending upon the energies involved. Four or more energies conjunct constitute a “stellium,” in which case the sign and house involved receive extreme emphasis in the life.

Opposition. The “opposition” is the second most powerful aspect. Two or more planets oppose one another when they are more or less 180° apart. Oppositions link energies through polarity and indicate apparently contradictory urges that tend to work in various unconscious ways. We can express first one, then the other, like a see-saw. Or, we can use each of these energies to cancel the other, leading to repression of both. Or, we can identify with one of the energies at the expense of the other, which gets repressed.

Always, what is repressed eventually surfaces, usually first appearing as if it belongs to some person or situation in the outer world. We then experience this energy as some person or situation coming at us that we are strongly drawn to or just as strongly repelled. Eventually, we learn to recognize such “projection” as a mirror we have attracted to show us a part of our inner life that has been rejected or neglected. Oppositions resolve as we acknowledge, recognize, and then learn how to simultaneously express two apparently contradictory sides of our own nature. Ultimately, oppositions stretch us, expand our horizons, enlarge perspective; we begin to realize that every coin has two sides and that any single truth is only one point — of view.

Square. The “square,” also a very powerful aspect, relates two planets that are more or less 90° apart. Planets square one another act at cross-purposes. They generate friction by rubbing each other the wrong way. Squares are enormously productive. However, again, our original tendency is to either see-saw between them or to accept one end of the square and repress, and then, eventually, project the other end outside ourselves. Squares present challenges so strong that they force change. Something inside has to move, to adjust, to temper, or refine its action.

The opposition and the square are both known as “difficult” aspects. Likewise the conjunction, when it links two or more planets with incompatible natures. Most people blame others when something difficult in themselves gets activated. Others who aim to understand the workings of their inner life welcome difficult aspects as opportunities to practice self-awareness.

Difficult aspects promote consciousness expansion. They demand that we become acutely aware of how we use them. Until we learn to use them constructively, we tend to run up against the same types of difficulties over and over again. These aspects provide tension in our lives, inner turmoil, anxiety, frustration, conflict. They force us to change, to develop ourselves, to evolve to our full potential. The more tension, the more potential. The more difficult the chart, the greater its developmental, evolutionary capacity.

The difficult aspects which are exact or closest to exactness are keys to the major life lessons of the individual, the “engine,” if you will, that powers the dynamic of the chart.

Harmonious aspects

Trines and sextiles. “Trines,” 120°, and “sextiles,” 60°, indicate ease and synthesis, two or more energies that naturally harmonize and integrate. Trines and sextiles display our talents, what we discover we know how to do with almost no effort. They support us during times of crisis provided by difficult aspects, and indeed, are often discovered only in crisis, otherwise lying latent and unused.

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF ASTROLOGY

Part 2: PROCESS

The nature of astrological prediction

It is important to remember that astrology cannot be used to predict particular events with certainty. Exactly what is going to take place at any particular time depends upon circumstances you have attracted into your life from past thoughts and actions, upon current use of your free will as determined by your current level of awareness — and, of course, upon the creative energy of the universe as it spews endless new variations on any theme we can identify.

In my own case, I make a game of listing all the ways in which I *think* a coming aspect might manifest based on memory of how the same or similar aspect manifested before. Then I laugh and throw the list away, telling myself, “Well, now I know what *won’t* happen!” — and wait to witness yet another startling new expressive variation of this energy emerge from the Void.

Karma

Karma is the ethical law of cause and effect. Karma manifests as a residue of congealed energy from the past — either past lives, or past times in this life — which seeks discharge. Until there is conscious awareness of this energy, we tend to exhibit it symptomatically — attracting, and then reacting to, the same or similar types of situations and circumstances over and over again.

Karmic repetition can occur at any level, from small daily self-destructive habits such as cigarette smoking, to large negative lifetime patterns. Think of the woman who marries — and divorces — three alcoholics in a row; or of the man who continually sabotages his own career by not believing in his own worth. Repetitions are like logjams in a river, damming it up, inhibiting flow.

As we become aware of our patterns, we begin to attract new circumstances. Changed circumstances renew our spirits, prompting us to choose to break the habits of the past and go on to develop our full potential. As Nietzsche put it, “to learn is to change.” From pacing round and round in a small, closed space, we break out of each circle to soar into a spiral, dynamically expanding our perspective through ever new experiences, activating our evolutionary thrust.

Dharma

If karma is the residue left over, the path of least resistance, leading us to think and feel and do the same things over and over again, then dharma is the future calling us, the

uncarved path we are meant to pursue, were we to allow ourselves to fully express our inherent nature. Karma is present circumstances reflecting past action; dharma is future circumstances reflecting present action. Sometimes this action is purely mental and spiritual, a new attitude or resolve, a mental image of what we are to become.

Whereas astrology cannot predict particular events with certainty, what it can do is help us understand the nature and timing of the activated energies, plus elucidate various ways these energies typically express — again, depending on the interaction of karma, free will, and playful new curve balls from the universe!

Progressions and transits

Planets in the birthchart exist as “tendencies,” time-release capsules, their energies released by the triggering effects of “progressions” and “transits.”

Secondary Progressions. Secondary progressions are based on the idea that each day of life symbolically equals one year. The first day after birth equals the first year, the second day the second year, and so on. The positions of the planets on the 30th day of life then, say something about what the 30th year of life will be like, and indicate long term trends.

Transits. Transits track the actual movements of the planets in relation to both each other and the original positions of the planets at birth. The most important transits are the longer-cycled ones (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto). These move so slowly that they stay long enough in one place to make a significant impact.

The most important transits made by either progressions or natal planets are the ones that create difficult aspects, 0°, 90° and 180°. Sometimes these aspects coincide with the awakening of long repressed energies rising to the surface. In this case we are forced to confront a previously unacknowledged part of ourselves. Other times, these aspects coincide with times when a more or less long standing situation in either the inner or outer world becomes so acutely uncomfortable that something, finally, must be done to change it.

Transits of Saturn last up to one year. Those of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto remain several years or more. Usually the most difficult period is when the aspect begins. This is when we are most likely to experience its “negative” effects. The key to this period of time is acceptance. A recognition that whatever is happening is necessary and meaningful.

Difficult times in our lives spur development. Without them we wouldn’t stop and look at what we are doing, wouldn’t recognize the need for change. That one of these transits can last for several years symbolizes the depth and difficulty of the lesson involved. By the time the aspect finally moves off exactness we have grown used to it, and have expanded our awareness and altered our lives accordingly.

Difficult progressions and transits indicate times of crisis. The word “crisis,” in Chinese, enjoys two meanings: one, “to decide,” and the other, “dangerous opportunity.”

A difficult progression or transit signifies a dangerous opportunity to decide to increase our understanding of ourselves. Such a decision sets in motion a search to discover the inner cause of an outer event. Difficult progressions and transits provide timing for the gradual revelation of our inner natures.

So far I’ve focused on some of the basic components of the astrological language, both its structure (planetary symbols, relations, and patterns) and process (how patterns unfold through time). Now I would like to step more deeply into this notion of “process,” and to do so I will first consider two different perspectives on the nature of Time.

Perspectives on the nature of Time

Our lives are governed by two kinds of time, linear and cyclical. Linear time is a cultural overlay that tends to ignore or obliterate cyclical time.

What we call “time’s arrow” of linear time heads in a straight line forwards, from the past into the future. This kind of uni-directional time is an illusion, a human invention, the product of civilization.

“Cyclical” time, on the other hand, is the time nature uses, as reflected in the precession of the equinoxes, the cycles of the seasons, the alteration of day and night, the female monthly menstrual flow, the nine-month cycle of human pregnancy, and so on.

Each of our lives is its own cycle, from birth to death, from dust to dust.

Linear time is conceived as absolute. There is only one time, and we all set our clocks to that same standard “correct” time. Cyclical time, on the other hand, is manifold. As there are many cycles, so too there are many times, each of them with a beginning, a middle, and an end which, in turn, becomes a new beginning. In cyclical time things return to their origins, over and over again. “To every thing there is a season. And a time to every purpose under the heavens.”

Time Cycles: an esoteric, evolutionary perspective

Each time we experience the fullness of a particular cycle for the very first time a door appears. The door is unlocked, but it is up to us to open it.

Each time we find ourselves within the seemingly miraculous fullness of a cycle’s first closure and dare to open the door, lo and behold! — like the Fool in the Tarot we step blindly into a new dimension: the space of a cycle larger than the one we have just completed. And each time we do this, we are presented with the opportunity to shift our

perspective and transform. We “break the circle” of the old, repeating cycle and activate our latent capacity to eventually encompass a more expanded world.

Think of yourself as the center of the universe. If the universe is expanding in all directions, then every point in it is central, and you *do* stand in the center of the universe. Living on Earth, you are surrounded by the planets moving in invisible concentric rings, smaller rings nesting inside the larger, out from the center of yourself.

The meaning of a planet is its cycle.

Each planetary orbit defines the boundary system of a specific dimension or sphere of awareness.

Your task, while on earth, is to expand your consciousness, by gradually encompassing larger and larger “frames of reference,” greater and greater dimensions of awareness. You do this by living, through time.

It is precisely your experience of the interpenetrating, concentric cycles of planetary time that introduces you to the multidimensional universe.

Planetary Returns as Life Markers

Each planet takes a certain amount of time to return to the original position it held at your birth. The first return of any planet to the original birth position is a significant event. It marks the time when that energy has fulfilled its basic orbit and sphere of influence. As the planet continues in its circular path, that energy then becomes a “constant,” an established part of your inner life. Your consciousness and experience then move beyond that planet and begin to attune to the next planet out that has not yet completed its first cycle.

Before a planet returns, it absorbs our attention. There seems to be no end to its influence and it goes on forever. After it returns, we have already absorbed the basic lesson it has to offer. (Venus, for example, teaches the lesson of relating; Mercury, of thinking and speaking and gesturing; Mars, of independence and spontaneity.) After the first return, further cycles of any planet are used to continue the new habit it has taught us and to refine that habit in various ways. (Just as a child only has to learn to walk once; from then on, that child learns to run, and may go on to dance, ice skate or do gymnastics. All of these skills are refinements of the child’s basic ability to walk.)

Life as a Developmental Process

After we have completed the first cycle of any planetary energy, we no longer need to focus on it in quite the same way. Our attention is drawn elsewhere; we begin to be fascinated by something larger, more complex, something that will take even more time to master

Our unfolding experience of the cycles of the “inner” (from the Moon to Mars) and the “social” planets — from (Jupiter to Saturn) — is a developmental process, from birth to approximately 30 years of age.

The Moon has approximately a 30-day cycle. Saturn has approximately a 30-year cycle. In between these two extremes lie the cycles of Mercury (116 days), Venus (224 days), the Sun (365 days), Mars (18 months to 2 years), and Jupiter (12 years). Unless we die at a young age, we experience the full cycles of all seven of these energies at least once. This means that each of their influences can be known to us as a whole; we can incorporate each of them fully into our lives.

Personal Planets: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars

The ***Moon*** has a 30-day cycle. Before you were a month old, your cries and movements seemed somewhat random, very difficult for your mother to understand. After one month your feelings and your behavior were more connected and predictable; you started to learn how to manipulate your environment in different ways in order to meet your various needs and desires.

The Moon symbolizes our instinctive needs, our emotions, and the subconscious conditioning stemming from infancy and early childhood. Your “feeling nature” is represented by the Moon.

The first return of each planetary energy can be understood in the same way as that of the Moon. Once again, the first time that energy returns, the meaning of that energy as a whole is incorporated into the life.

Mercury and ***Venus*** both make their first cycles inside the first year of life, encompassed by the ***Sun***’s cycle of one year. Within that first year, the infant becomes familiar with and begins to deliberately sound language and gesture (Mercury), develops taste and preferences (Venus), and begins to exhibit his or her own inherent nature (Sun). At the end of that first year, the unfocused newborn has evolved into a toddler with a decided character.

It takes not quite two years for ***Mars*** to complete its full circle. Mars symbolizes vitality, our temper, willfulness and urge for independence all of which characterize the so-called “terrible twos,” that period in your life when your most common words were “me,” “mine,” and “NO!”

Thus, fully five different energies complete their first cycles during the first two years of life: Moon, Venus, Mercury, Sun, and Mars. This coincides with our common sense idea that people change most during those first two years.

Between two years and twelve years, all these cycles make many more returns, as we deepen our capacities to function in all the ways that they symbolize. Then, when we are twelve years old, something new happens . . .

Social Planets: Jupiter and Saturn

At twelve, another frame of reference clicks in for the first time, when the 12-year cycle of *Jupiter* closes. Jupiter symbolizes the values and attitudes you adopt as a member of a community larger than your immediate family. Twelve years is the period of time right before puberty sets in, when you switched allegiance from family values to peer values.

Puberty and its rebellion against authority is symbolized by Saturn's half-cycle, when it opposes, or moves 180° across from, its birth position, somewhere between 14 and 15 years.

The final planetary cycle we can experience as a whole within one lifetime is that of *Saturn* somewhere between 28 and 30 years.

The “Saturn Return”

The first Saturn Return is potentially the most important turning point in a person's life. Before the first Saturn cycle completes itself, our lives seem to offer unlimited options. They look as if they will go on forever. We tend to feel immortal.

During the year or two before Saturn completes its first cycle we sense something changing. What was formerly endless now begins to look decidedly finite. Whereas before we were trying to look and act older, to be “taken seriously,” now we *are* older, we can see it in our faces, feel it in our bones. And our life, we now realize, is serious, serious business. We realize our time is limited (one of the meanings of Saturn is “limitation”), and that we had better decide exactly what we want to accomplish in the time we have left. (Some other meanings for Saturn are “seriousness,” “plans,” “discipline,” “form,” “goals,” and “time.”)

The completion of the first Saturn Return marks the first time when we sense a pressing inner directive to take stock of our lives. For the first time we can actually look back to see where we began and loop forward to now. We assess what we have and have not accomplished — and whether or not it has been worth the effort! We scrutinize the authorities and the rules by which we have been living — and decide which of them, if any, we will continue to follow. Tentatively, we move towards full autonomy, towards taking real responsibility for ourselves. We begin to make the first of those decisions that will determine the course of our lives for the next 30 years.

During the first cycle of Saturn we evaluate ourselves by comparing ourselves to others. During the second cycle we measure ourselves against our own “inner potential.” As the

first Saturn cycle was the cycle of adjustment to — or rebellion from — social “reality,” so the second cycle, when consciously enacted, becomes the cycle of individual identity and productivity.

The third cycle of Saturn begins somewhere between the ages of 56 and 60 and was, in ages past, recognized as the cycle of wisdom. This makes sense, because, obviously, once a person has lived through two of these long cycles he or she has experienced much of what life has to offer and gained hard-won acceptance of the way things are. This ancient understanding of the third cycle of Saturn has been gradually re-emerging into contemporary culture since the 1990s through the reintroduction of concepts such as “elder” and “crone.” (Cf: www.cronemagazine.com, www.cronescounsel.org).

Saturn and the process of “Individuation”

Before the first Saturn Return we operate in time, linear time, endlessly reaching into the future, straight ahead. After the first Saturn Return our experience of “time” subtly changes. We have now lived through a large chunk of life and felt how, in a very real sense, time circled back on itself. We “started over” at 30, we began again, this time consciously, knowing that each thought, each word, each deed had its consequences, that it shaped our course irrevocably. Our formative years are over now, it is time to build the “forms” that reflect “who we think we really are.”

Having completed yet another cycle for the first time, we have been “launched” again. We are now unconsciously attuning to the next larger sphere of planetary influence. But this time there is little possibility of completion. The next cycle is Uranus, 84 years long. We catch a glimpse of eternity as we are propelled into our thirties, we tap into a dimension of timelessness — the “eternal Now,” that which exists beyond linear time, beyond the world of form.

Depending on our level of awareness, from now on we have the possibility of living in the world in a different manner. No longer identifying with the forms of that world, or even, with our own form nature, we may now be “in the world, but not of it.” We may stop time, at any moment, and hear the universe sing. Observe the cosmic drama. Take part in the dance of life.

From an esoteric point of view, the first Saturn Return is a sacred rite of initiation.

Before its first return this Saturn energy operates like a wall, or force field, keeping us from venturing out beyond what society teaches us is real. By limiting our horizons, it also assures that we will build a social identity, an individual ego. Through the time-span of one Saturn cycle, we learn to function as a separate and recognizable entity in the social world.

After Saturn's first return, this same Saturn energy can now function as a gateway, or channel, allowing energies from beyond that force field to enter the life in a way that does not destroy the ego.

Jung called this the "process of individuation." In developmental astrology this process refers to the individual's growing awareness of the Self as Soul.

Those individuals who consciously choose to start over at the first Saturn Return are making a decision to transcend their social conditioning, the limitations of their personal egos. This decision frees them to encounter a universe much larger than the one society presently accepts.

Most people do not take this step.

For most people, Saturn serves as a wall their entire lives, separating the inside from the outside. Clinging to their individual "identities" as well as the cycle they have just completed, they try to turn back the clock, remain forever young, and shield themselves from any experience which might threaten who they are desperate to think they are. This can make for a very lonely life.

Some who shied away from launching themselves into a larger universe after the first Saturn return feel almost forced to do so after Saturn returns the second time — as the creative alternative to despair and isolation. This is not surprising, given that in our society, especially women are considered to "lose value" over time, to the point where, after sixty, they recede into invisibility. Indeed, prime time for women, still mostly valued in terms of youthful beauty, peaks prior to Saturn's first return at thirty!

At whatever age they make the leap, individuals who do pass through the "ring-pass-not" of Saturn find themselves in another world. A world that is governed by different laws. A world wherein the individual soul is recognized as both the center of the universe and at the same time one small speck in an immense and glorious creation. A world of paradox, where nothing is as it seems, and everything is more, much more, than could ever be imagined.

This world is symbolized by the cycles of what are called the three "outer planets:" Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto, with cycles of 84, 165, and 248 years respectively.

Outer Planets: Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto

With the possible exception of Uranus, the cycles of the outer planets are longer than our lifetimes. We cannot complete their full cycles; therefore, we cannot fully understand them, control them, predict them, repeat them, or incorporate them into our lives. These energies remain forever mysterious; they speak of nature and her laws, deeper and vaster than our scientific culture has mastered.

Since these energies take so long to complete their cycles, they stay in one place a long time. Both their positions and the patterns they make with one another serve as generational signatures. These outer planets represent the energies of the evolving collective unconscious mind and signify, usually, mass conditions and events.

Usually, but not always.

We all know the saying, “there is a fine line between genius and insanity.” This saying is true, and both these states of consciousness are correlated with the functions of the outer planets. Those individuals whom we call “geniuses” interact with these energies creatively, consciously. The others, unfortunately, are lost souls; they have been overwhelmed by these same energies, their egos shattering under the impact of forces beyond their control.

Who knows why some people give up and “go crazy,” while others are able to rise to the occasion. Who knows why some are curious enough and courageous enough to use these challenging times to encounter and begin to express previously unknown qualities of their own character? These qualities are so astounding and so powerful, that we would never believe it, were we not to surrender to the experience of discovering our own genius! And what, then, is genius, but the experience of opening more fully to the endlessly creative energies of the universe?

My First Saturn Return

My decision to seriously study this language came at my first Saturn Return, when I discovered that the transits of the outer planets had coincided with the timing of a powerful transformational time within my own life — so powerful that for awhile I was terrified that I truly had “gone crazy.” Had I, during that intensely difficult, disturbing, and exhilarating time in my mid-to late-twenties, consulted with an esoterically-oriented astrologer, I would have been presented with a larger — outer planet — context for understanding. This would have gifted me with an opportunity to see and feel the meaning and purpose within my strange experiences; it would have helped me to release fear and embrace the unprecedented growth potential of that time even more fully than I did.

Throughout these decades as a consulting astrologer, over and over and over again I have seen stunned shock and relief wash over troubled faces when I note that our appointment coincides with difficult and therefore challenging outer planet action in their lives. What made no sense begins to make sense. The light dawns. Not only are their feelings about what is happening to them acknowledged, but these feelings are put into a new framework of meaning so awesome that it takes the breath away

These individuals, on a soul level, have decided that it is now time to move beyond time, beyond the ring-pass-not of Saturn’s boundary system. By opening their Saturn channel to outer planet energies, they are learning to trust the universe — and their own

unconscious minds. They expand beyond beyond left-brain logic and reason — to right-brain mystery, magic, miracle; to the human capacity for continuous transformation.

In order to interact with outer planet energies creatively, we must release our identification with the ego, and allow the soul to take over. Within this new focus, the ego becomes transparent, something to be seen through.

Rather than being that with which we identify, by which we recognize ourselves, the ego then functions as an instrument, or ally, a tool to help the soul achieve its ends while on earth. Serving as a channel, a discipline, “Saturn” then helps us ground our native capacity to both surrender to and transmit higher forces.

As the untamed ego’s need is service to self, so the soul’s need is service to others. Individuals who have expanded their awareness beyond the limitations of Saturn realize they are meant to devote their genius to the service of humanity and the planet in this most difficult and magnificent passage into the new age, beyond ego, beyond war, beyond separation.

Astrology and Peace

When understood and practiced from within the esoteric world-view, astrology has the capacity to serve as a universal language, bonding us to one another. This ecology of the stars can both help us to appreciate the wealth of untapped potential lying inside each of us, and to accept and encourage the richness of our diversity.

Used as a predictive art, astrology teaches us to tune in to our own natures, to become one with what is and what is unfolding. By pointing out times when energies wax and wane, astrology helps us to describe the possibilities within any given moment. It encourages achievement during times of high promise and it teaches patience when energies lie fallow.

Here we sense intimations of the eternal message: peace on earth, good will to all. If each of us were to express our original natures fully and naturally, then the life force within us would flow freely and there would be harmony within. Were we all at peace with ourselves, we would find it easy and natural to harmonize with others, to demonstrate good will. The famous Pythagorean “harmony of the spheres” would be echoed, here on Earth. And what a joy that would be!

APPENDIX

A (VERY) SHORT HISTORY OF ASTROLOGY

The precise origins of the language of astrology are unknown. Astrology goes back at least to the Chaldeans of Mesopotamia, and from there recedes into the mists of prerecorded time. The first specific astrological records are dated 7th century B.C. Egyptian star charts exist from around 4200 B.C.

Languages vary according to the needs of the people who use them. Just as Eskimos have hundreds of words for different qualities of snow and ice, so did ancient peoples look to the heavens to help them understand and plan for living on Earth. The Great Pyramid, Stonehenge, the Serpent Mound in Ohio, and other ancient monuments were originally used for astronomical purposes, to plot the timing of solstices and equinoxes.

We separate astronomy from astrology, and consider the former “scientific,” the latter “superstitious.” Such a distinction would have puzzled the ancients; for them, understanding the heavens helped insure survival. Knowing the date of the vernal equinox (the first day of spring), for example, was of obvious benefit for spring planting.

For the ancients, astronomy and astrology were one, and both conceived within a larger sacred dimension. Solstice and equinox events structured the calendar year, and these portentous cardinal moments called for religious ceremonies celebrating the union of the various members of the entire natural kingdom, including the skies above. All of life was sacred, and the entire universe alive.

Today, the few remaining indigenous, land-based peoples — Eskimos, Hopis, Australian Aborigines, the native peoples of the Americas — still assume an all-pervasive spiritual dimension to the natural world that sustained their ancestors for millennia.

Even as late as the 17th century, Copernicus, Kepler and Newton were astronomers who also studied astrology and other occult matters. Yet the separation of astronomy from astrology dates from this time. To understand how that happened we must look beneath the specific discoveries of these early scientists to the world-view of Newtonian science that emerged during the 17th century.

The new “scientific method” decreed that only those “facts” which were “empirically verifiable” by our five outer senses could be called knowledge. The “facts” (of astronomy) were obvious — the positions and motions of the planets in the heavens. The (astrological) meaning of those “facts,” their relevance to earthly and human affairs, was symbolic, “unverifiable” and therefore “meaningless” — according to the new scientific doctrine. Thus did astronomy divorce itself from astrology, which then gradually fell into

disfavor, going underground for three hundred years, only to begin to re-emerge in the last half of the 20th century.

Unfortunately, although Newtonian physics has been replaced by Einsteinian relativity, the underlying world-view of Newtonian science and its methodology is still so sacrosanct that even some contemporary astrologers do not question it. Instead, they attempt, through inductive research and statistics, to “make astrology scientific.” The work of Gauquelin, for example, is cited for its “statistically significant” results in showing the emphasis of certain planets near the horizon and midheaven of the charts for famous people of certain professions (e.g. Mars for athletes, Saturn for scientists). While this kind of study may provide astrological data as another grist for the scientific mill, it ignores and even, at times, subtly repudiates the essentially symbolic, mysterious core of astrology which makes it so profound and so elusive to those who would try to pin it down.

Contemporary Astrology

During the 19th century, Newton’s theory reigned supreme, and so did the world-view within which it was embedded. Scientific knowledge was sure, certain; and life was viewed dogmatically, moralistically. Whatever happened, there was a definite way to look at it, good or bad, black or white. Not surprisingly, those who studied astrology lent it a decidedly Victorian cast, and the literature from that time reflects it.

The 20th century witnessed the Einsteinian revolution in science and its aftermath, the slow, gradual crumbling of the Newtonian world-view. As the new millennium opens, we continue to incorporate the pioneering work of Freud and Jung in depth psychology, Piaget in developmental psychology, Kohler in perception theory, Polanyi and Kuhn in the philosophy of science, the drug-induced discoveries of ‘60s “consciousness-expansion,” the parallels between the new quantum physics and mysticism, and the spiritual meeting of East and West. All these influences and many more have built a foundation for the many new voices now outlining what is emerging as a revolution in consciousness, a brand new — and much more relativistic (and thus Einsteinian) — world-view.

The Newtonian view of the world focused on conscious, “clear and distinct” knowledge. Now we are becoming more realistic; we recognize that our conscious beliefs lie embedded within a confused, unsystematic matrix of unconscious attitudes, hunches, prejudices, complexes, genetic programs, conditioned responses — far cry from the clarity and order of the Newtonian ideal. The Socratic maxim, “Know Thyself,” is once again becoming the standard of excellence — and a certain humility in the face of our inner complexity is replacing the naïve Newtonian goal of certainty in knowledge.

Within the past 35 years, perhaps the most crucial development in our cultural understanding has been the continuing rise in the status of women, and the valuing of “the feminine,” i.e., right-brained, intuitive, non-rational, synthesizing modes of thinking. Despite the last reactionary gasp of one-sided dogmatic patriarchal domination in politics

and religion — and perhaps because of it — humanity is having to learn how to place logical, rational, analytic, left-brained science within this larger, more spacious context.

We are gradually moving towards a recognition of the “scientific method” as one among many ways of exploring reality. Furthermore, we now acknowledge that science is not as “objective” as it claims to be; that science, like all other human endeavors, is subject to both personal and cultural prejudice as well as outright fraud. Moreover, more and more of us are now lamenting the fact that science, far from improving our lives, has often placed its handmaiden, technology, between us and our lives. Science, which began as the unfettered study of the laws of nature, has created a non-material, virtual world.

Parallel to, and resonating with, this re-valuation of both science and the feminine has been a growing appreciation of the richness and complexity of nature — both the nature of our own physical bodies, and of the natural world around us. Both environmental studies in ecology and the many new healing modes are oriented towards understanding the laws which govern whole and open systems.

Astrology, as practiced going forward into the 21st century, incorporates and reflects all these new and more varied and subtle approaches to human character and destiny. More than perhaps any other discipline, the language of astrology has the capacity to study aspects of character as viewed from within the integrity of the whole.

Despite three centuries of official banishment, astrology is alive and well and always has been, at least in the serious study and practice of those whose minds and hearts are open to values which lie beyond the limitations of the crumbling, but still official Newtonian world-view. An unusually spacious language, astrology is capable of continually incorporating ever-shifting cultural points of view. This vigorous and resilient ability to adapt itself to changing cultural currents may be one cue to why it has survived for so many thousands of years.

Essay

CELESTIAL NAVIGATIONS

A Philosophical Introduction to Esoteric Astrology As a Path of Self-Mastery

© Ann Kreilkamp 1985 (amended 2020)

What is Astrology?

From a permacultural perspective, astrology is stellar ecology — an ecology of the stars. It considers the one environment we all share, no matter who we are or where we live, the sky above us, turning slowly round once per day. We all live under the same ever-changing planetary patterns.

Astrology maps what we all have in common, it assumes unity.

Planetary patterns look slightly different depending upon the angles from which they are viewed. As each place on Earth is unique and has its own particular beauty, so too each planetary pattern is unique, when viewed from a particular place on earth.

Astrology respects diversity, it honors uniqueness.

To study the stars is both to behold Earth as the center of the perceived universe and to recognize Earth as one member of one tiny solar system in the Milky Way galaxy — and beyond. Astrology, the study of the stars, is a universal language, perhaps even a divine language — the language the gods would use had they need for words.

Astrology Is a Language

Whenever I go to a party, someone asks me, “Why do you believe in astrology?” I answer them with another question, “Why do you believe in English?”

Astrology is not a belief system; it’s a language. Like any language, astrology can be used to make true — or false — statements. Taken as a whole, however, languages are not “true” or “false.” We use them — or abuse them; we learn them or leave them alone.

Astrology and Belief Systems

Even though astrology is not a belief system, those who speak this language do have belief systems. There is no “neutral” or “objective” understanding of astrology. Anyone who uses this language does so within his or her own particular perspective, or world-view.

There are two main belief-systems associated with the language of astrology, one which denies free will and the other which assumes it.

Most people identify astrology with “fatalism,” which denies free will. This is the belief system wherein responsibility for one’s life is placed upon something else besides the self. Thus, some say, “the stars” (the planets) determine both who they are, and what’s going to happen to them day by day.

Astrology can also be associated with another belief system, known by a number of different names, such as “esoteric,” “occult,” or “metaphysical.” (By the way, the word “occult” here, does not refer to anything deep, dark, or mysterious. It simply means “hidden,” or that which is not immediately obvious.) Whereas fatalism denies free will, esotericism gives it back to us — totally. Indeed, you are entirely responsible for yourself — who you were in the past, who you are now, and who you choose to become in the future.

Within the esoteric point of view, you are composed of three principles: body, mind, and soul. Body and mind are mortal, they live and die. The soul is immortal, it existed before you were born, and it will exist after you die . . . forever.

The esoteric belief-system assumes reincarnation, the idea that your soul lives many lives, each of them a stepping stone, the lessons it contains helping your soul in its evolution towards perfection.

Free will, within the esoteric point of view, is a function of your soul. The soul chooses the life.

Your soul chooses both the moment and the place of birth, and therefore the specific physical and social environment into which you were born — including your body and mind, your parents, your brothers and sisters; the soul chooses your genetic stream, in other words, the flow of qualities of all kinds inherited from generation to generation. The soul also chooses your tendencies to health or disease, the lessons this particular life has to offer, and the talents which help you learn them.

Fatalism frequently ignores the soul. It tends to see us as puppets in a play, mechanical, with no inward direction of our own, pulled by strings external to our beings for no apparent reason.

Esotericism, on the other hand, assumes that you as a soul are a spiritual being evolving towards perfection, through the process of freely choosing, and then learning, from the experiences of your many Earth lives.

Within fatalism, the causes of human thoughts, words and deeds are assumed to be external. Within esotericism those causes are recognized as internal, a part of your own nature. Esotericism assumes that we create our own realities; it focuses on a specific inner potential which pushes for development throughout a given lifetime.

The Birthchart Is a Destiny Pattern

The astrological birthchart maps the planetary pattern in the heavens during one particular moment shown from one particular place on earth. This moment is also the

destiny pattern of the person born then and there. In other words, your birthchart locates you as an individual in time and space and indicates the direction your life will take.

As above, so below. As within, so without.

The universe is always changing, it does not repeat itself. Therefore, each pattern is unique, and each person born under a particular pattern is also unique, unrepeatable. You are the only person on earth to ever have your specific pattern. (Even identical twins are born in different bodies, and at slightly different times.) There is nobody in the world like you. Therefore, there are no models, no one to tell you how to think, what to do, who to become. Each of us entering the Earth plane does so as a seed, a tiny concentrated unit of potentiality destined to express itself, to develop itself fully, according to its own unique laws, unfolding its own glorious individuality.

We are free — to become precisely ourselves, fulfilling our entire potential.

“Old” Souls and “Young” Souls

How successful a soul will be in following through with the birth destiny chosen depends upon both the continued use of free will and upon the level of understanding the soul has gained through previous lives. How “old” the soul is, how many times it has already incarnated, is not something an astrologer can understand by simply looking at a birthchart. (However, to a seasoned astrologer, the pattern in the birthchart does offer clues.)

An old soul is capable of expressing his/her birthchart with more “awareness” than a young soul can. What a young soul might call “fate” — a sense of being tossed about by uncontrollable circumstances — an older soul will recognize as individual destiny. Older souls have experienced and “suffered” enough to understand that whatever is going on outside mirrors what’s happening inside. As above, so below. As within, so without.

The older soul realizes: whatever are the circumstances we find ourselves in, we have attracted these to us as mirrors. That’s what they are for! To show us what’s going on inside us! Outer happenings symbolize inner events. To change our circumstances is,

first, to change our minds. We create our own realities. No one else, and no thing else, not even “the stars,” is responsible for the way we live our lives.

In response to fatalists who claim that the planets “cause” us to behave in certain ways, I would say with Edgar Cayce, it is more likely we humans “cause” the planets to act in certain ways! We are much more powerful than we think. Thoughts act as laser beams. They cut through space. They cross vast distances. They carve out the courses of the planets. And — what’s even more extraordinary — the courses of our lives. It is we who are responsible. Able, to respond!

Astrology Is A Symbolic Language

Astrological “words” are “symbols.” Each of them generates an immense range of meaning. It’s as if the symbol were a sun, and its meanings are the rays, radiating out from that central symbolic nucleus. This nucleus itself is mysterious. The essence of a symbol cannot be defined. It remains mysterious, much like a dream is mysterious.

No matter how definite our attempts to rationally understand our dreams, to make them make sense, there is always something left over, an irreducible core that eludes any of our attempts at understanding and continues to yield a rich harvest of meaning. That which is symbolic in nature is larger, fuller than any of our attempts to limit it to literal definition.

Symbols are gifts of the spirit. They ask to be appreciated, not boxed in. And to do this, we must switch from left to right brain. We must relax, into our intuitive, dreaming, receptive, symbolic selves.

Within this context, we may ask, what am I really supposed to accomplish before I die? What is the meaning and purpose of my life? These questions then become the dynamically pulsating center around which all lesser concerns revolve as constellations. A meditation upon the birthchart orients us towards a continuous and ever-deepening resonance with our life purpose, and encourages us to live fully, to live impeccably, to live our lives as if they mattered.

Introduction to Interpretation

In order to follow this path of self-mastery via the language of astrology, one must learn certain technical rules for interpreting the birthchart.

While learning the technical rules however, please keep in mind that the birthchart yields its meaning more fully to intuition than to any system of technical analysis. Indeed, it is the intuition itself which must be trained. As Einstein once said, “luck’ comes to the prepared mind.” As a concert pianist appears to play the most technical and complex pieces effortlessly, so too, the student of astrology must train for years to be able to focus the intuition precisely and then recognize the manner in which a birth pattern is being enacted.

Astrology is the study of space and time and their relations to one another, considering circles and cycles, structures and processes. As a discipline it is formal, abstract, and mathematical. From this point of view the birthchart is merely an arrangement of points upon the plane of a circle.

The birthchart maps the blueprint, or essential structure, of one’s life. The continuing cycles of the planets as they act upon birth planet positions over time correlate with one’s life as a process.

The art of astrology consists in relating the abstract discipline to the concrete lived experiences of human beings.

We humans are complex and mysterious creatures. It is appropriate then, that astrology is perhaps the most complex and mysterious language ever invented to describe human character and experience.

In what follows, I will introduce certain astrological concepts as if they were separable from their original context. Keep in mind however, that ultimately, everything in the birthchart must be understood in relation to everything else! For example, if one has a Sagittarian Sun, this must be understood in relation to the placement of the Moon and the other planets, the Ascendant, the signs and houses planets occupy, geometrical aspects among all the planets, as well as the geometrical pattern of the birthchart as a

whole. The birthchart is so complex that it contains unlimited points of possible reference. What to look for depends both on tradition and training as well as on personal expectations.

Horizontal and Vertical: Ascendant and Midheaven

The birthchart as a whole is both a “map” of the heavens, and a circular “mandala,” a graphic representation of wholeness. The symbols inside the circle of the birthchart represent planetary energies. The birth moment and place are represented by the two central coordinates of the chart, the horizontal and vertical axes. These two crossed lines and other spokes in the wheel frame the “houses,” numbered counterclockwise from 1 to 12, starting with the Ascendant, as particular areas of life experience where planetary energies are located.

The horizontal line on the chart represents the actual horizon at the moment of birth. When you were born, all the planets above that line were above the visible horizon of the earth and all the planets below that line were below the horizon. “Above,” symbolically, represents day, light, publicity, objectivity, detachment — you in relation to the world. “Below” represents night, darkness, privacy, subjectivity, attachment — you in relation to yourself.

The vertical line is known as the “meridian.” Planets located left of this line represent those energies through which you work out your destiny independently of others. In this half of the chart you create your own circumstances. Planets located to the right of the meridian represent those energies through which you work out your destiny in concert with others. In this half of the chart you respond to circumstances already created.

Remember, the birthchart is a representation of who you are. And the energies of the universe flow through you. The circumference of the chart represents the boundary system of the self, which “contains” the ten planetary energies. These energies interact with the world outside you through their relation to the two “outlets” of the birthchart. These outlets are called the “Ascendant” and the “Midheaven.”

The Ascendant is the “personal” outlet, located at the left end of the horizontal line. The Midheaven is the “impersonal” outlet, located at the top end of the vertical line. (Think of these “outlets” as nozzles on a garden hose, used to spray water in different ways. The settings of these “nozzles” are determined by the particular astrological signs they occupy.)

The Ascendant, or rising sign, represents that point of the eastern horizon “rising” at the moment of your birth. The Ascendant represents both your personality and the environment. Your personality is that part of your self which you show to the world — your persona, coming from the Greek word meaning “mask”; it also represents your face, your body, and the way you express yourself through it. The Ascendant is not your real self, but your self-image, as well as the image you show to others. The “environment,” also represented by the Ascendant, includes the circumstances and situations in which you find yourself moment by moment.

At the other end of the horizontal line is the Descendant. As at the Ascendant you dynamically project your personality into the world, so at the Descendant the world is magnetically attracted to you. The Descendant signifies partnership. Planets found here often seem to describe qualities of your partner, whether personal or professional. It may also signify your opponents, who are partners of another kind.

The horizontal line is the symbol for the theme of the self in relation to the other in our daily lives. As we project ourselves into the world, so do we attract others who reflect our own projections.

At right angles to the horizontal line is the vertical line, the two ends of which are called the Midheaven (at the top) and the Immum Coeli (at the bottom).

The Midheaven, the topmost point of the chart, is the other outlet which allows your inner energies to interact with the world. Whereas the Ascendant is a personal outlet, describing your personality’s interchange with the immediate environment, the Midheaven outlet is impersonal, showing what you are here for, the purpose, or conscious intent of incarnation. It is the most public position in the chart, and signifies

your eventual achievement or lack of it, noting recognition and notoriety, honor and dishonor.

The Midheaven usually signifies your career, the role you play in society. Once you have begun to “individuate” however, the Midheaven then describes your calling, what you must do to fulfill your calling, what the universe needs of this particular entity.

Directly opposite the Midheaven is the Immum Coeli, at the very bottom of the chart. As the Midheaven represents what you are reaching for, so the Immum Coeli represents the foundation upon which you stand. Home and family, the very roots of the self. This is where you put your feet on the ground. The Immum Coeli symbolizes the most private part of your self, and constitutes the ground of your being.

The vertical line then, stands for the private in relation to the public theme in our lives. As we plant our feet firmly on the ground, so can we reach for the stars.

Planets, Signs, and Houses

There are three different types of astrological symbols shown on the birthchart: planets, signs, and houses.

The astrological symbols for the “planets” stand for specific spiritual energies or principles. Astrology identifies ten different planetary energies operating within you, the eight known planets plus Sun and Moon.

The same planet operates differently depending on which “sign” it occupies. Think of the planet as a “verb” and the sign it is in as an “adverb,” modifying it, making it behave in a certain manner. (For example, the verb for Mars might be expressed as “to act.” If, in a chart, Mars is placed in the sign of Cancer, it would indicate action expressed “emotionally.”)

Each sign represents one phase of the astrological journey encompassing the totality of human experience. There are twelve signs, or phases, of that journey. Each sign occupies a thirty degree segment of the circular zodiac, 360 degrees. (The “zodiac,” by

the way, is the pathway of the Sun, Moon, and planets, and lies like an invisible belt around the earth.)

As there are twelve signs, so there are twelve houses. Each house is a wedge-shaped space running counterclockwise from the Ascendant (first house). Houses are areas of experience within which the planets operate. Established through the daily rotation of the earth, houses indicate earthly affairs, circumstances and situations.

If you map the signs onto the houses, starting with Aries and the first house going counterclockwise, each sign and house carries something of the same meaning. Thus, Aries naturally rules the first house, Taurus the second, and so on.

The more planets in any one house, the more the affairs of that house are emphasized.

In sum, planets are the symbols inside the circle. Signs are the symbols outside the circle. Houses are the wedge-shaped spaces starting from the Ascendant and running counterclockwise.

Elements and Qualities (Modes)

Each astrological sign belongs to one of four “elements” and one of three “qualities” (sometimes called “modes”). The four elements are fire, earth, air and water. The three qualities are cardinal, fixed, and mutable.

Think of the natural meanings of the four elements and you will understand them astrologically. “Fire” is fiery, forceful, exuberant, inspirational; “Earth” is down-to-earth, practical, grounded, territorial; “Air” circulates, communicates, is mental, detached, and can be long-winded; and “Water” is emotional, resonant, sensitive, full of feeling.

Of the qualities (modes), “Cardinal” is active, enterprising, initiating; “Fixed” is stable, resistant to change, stubborn; and “Mutable” is changeable, adaptable, mercurial.

Planetary Rulers

Each sign is “ruled” by at least one planet; and some planets rule two signs. A planet in its “ruler” is thought to be particularly powerful because the meaning of the planet is similar to the meaning of the sign; thus the planet can act naturally, with no interference or resistance. The ruler of the sign on the Ascendant is often said to rule the whole chart.

Planetary Aspects

I began my study of astrology in 1974. Working alone, I devoured the literature, pouring over what seemed to be an endless stream of unrelated details. Then one day, feeling thoroughly confused, I walked into a book store in California, and saw, tacked to the wall, a birthchart with what are called the astrological “aspects” drawn in as colored lines, linking the planets to one another. I stopped walking, and stood staring at this picture, transfixed.

I wish I could share with you what those few minutes meant to me. It was a real revelation. Aspects, I realized intuitively, were the key to a deeper, more wholistic understanding of the birthchart. They show how a person’s energies can operate as an integrated system.

To understand the system, first, be aware that the center of the chart represents Earth — with you on it. From the point of view of this center, taken as the third point from which any two planets are viewed, the astrological aspects indicate the geometrical relations of those planets.

Planets relate either harmoniously or inharmoniously, depending on two things: first, the natures of the planets involved (for example, Mars and Saturn relate to each other differently than Venus and the Moon do); secondly, on the type of aspect involved (that is, each aspect, depending on the degree of its angle, has its own symbolic interpretation.) Each aspect has an “orb allowance,” that is, a range of variation from exactness, of up to ten degrees, again depending on the particular aspect and planets involved. The closer an aspect is to exactness, the more compelling its influence in the life.

There are five major aspects: 0° (conjunction), 60° (sextile), 90° (square), 120° (trine), and 180° (opposition).

The “conjunction” is the most powerful aspect, and the only one easily seen in the nighttime sky: two planets conjunct are joined together by an aspect of zero degrees. Conjunctions link two or more energies together so closely that they intensify one another, as a mutual echo chamber. This aspect provides focus, concentration and intensity in a particular area. The conjunction can also be too intense, however, in which case it becomes frustrating or confusing, again, depending upon the energies involved. Four or more energies conjunct are called a “stellium,” in which case the sign and house involved are extremely emphasized in the life.

Another important aspect is the “opposition.” Oppositions connect two planets 180 degrees apart. Two or more energies are linked through polarity, providing seemingly contradictory urges. The tendency for many of us is to identify with one of the energies at the expense of the other. When we do this, the unacknowledged energy is repressed. What is repressed eventually surfaces, usually first appearing by projection, as if belonging to some person or situation in the outer world. We then tend to experience that energy as something coming at us (and usually, as something or someone we don’t like), rather than recognizing it as a mirror we have attracted to show us a part of our inner life that has been rejected. Oppositions are resolved as we acknowledge and recognize two apparently contradictory sides of our own nature. Ultimately, oppositions stretch us, they expand our horizons, give us perspective; we come to understand that every coin has two sides. Truth is a point — of view.

The “square” is an aspect of 90 degrees. Squares link two or more energies acting at cross-purposes. They generate friction by rubbing each other the wrong way. Squares are enormously productive. Unlike oppositions, energies “squared off” to one another are felt simultaneously. Squares present challenges. The mutual discomfort of the energies involved requires change. At least one of them has to move, to adjust, to temper, or refine its action.

The opposition and the square are both known as “difficult” aspects. In esoteric astrology difficult aspects are welcomed as opportunities.

Difficult aspects promote consciousness. They demand that we become acutely aware of how we use them. Until we learn to use them constructively, we tend to run up against similar difficulties over and over again. These aspects provoke tension, inner uncertainty, anxiety, frustration, conflict, suffering. They force us to change, to develop ourselves, to evolve to our full potential. The more tension, the more potential. The more difficult the chart, the greater its developmental, evolutionary capacity.

“Trines,” 120°, and “sextiles,” 60°, are aspects of ease and synthesis, harmonizing and integrating the energies involved. Trines and sextiles show our talents, what we discover we know how to do with almost no effort. They support us during times of crisis provided by difficult aspects, and are often discovered only in crisis, otherwise lying latent and unused.

The Art of Forecasting

Traditionally, the art of astrology has been thought of as a means of forecasting the future. However, whereas future planetary positions can be known and interpreted, it is important to remember that astrology cannot predict particular events with certainty. Exactly what is going to happen to us at any one time depends both upon circumstances we have attracted into our lives from past thoughts and action, and upon continued use of free will in the current situation.

What astrology can do is to help us understand the nature of the energies currently activated, typical ways these energies tend to work out in life, and the specific timing involved.

Progressions and Transits

Planets in the birthchart exist as “tendencies,” they work like “time-release capsules,” their energies activating via the triggering effect of what are called “progressions” and “transits.”

Progressions (called “secondary progressions”) are based on the idea that each day of life symbolically equals one year. The first day equals the first year, the second day the second year, and so on. The positions of the planets on the thirtieth day of life then, say

something about what the thirtieth year of life will be like, and indicate long term trends.

Transits signify the actual movements of the planets in geometrical relation to the stationary positions of planetary locations at birth. The most important transits are those with longer cycles — Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. These planets move so slowly, they stay long enough in one place, that they have a significant effect on the life.

The most important aspects made by either progressions or transits are the difficult ones, 0° , 90° and 180° . Sometimes these aspects coincide with the awakening of latent or long repressed energies which then rise to the surface. In this case we are forced for the first time to confront a previously unacknowledged part of ourselves. Other times, these aspects coincide with times when a more or less long-standing situation in either the inner or outer world becomes so acutely uncomfortable that something, finally, must be done to change it.

Transits of Saturn over a certain degree area last up to a year. Those of Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto can last three years or more. Usually, the most difficult period is when the transit begins. This is when we are most likely to experience its “negative” effects. The key is acceptance, a recognition that whatever is happening is both necessary and meaningful. Difficult times in our lives spur us on. Without them, we wouldn’t stop and look at what we are doing, wouldn’t experience the need for change. That these transits last for several years correlates with the difficulty of the change involved, indicating how long it actually takes to learn a particular lesson. Then, usually, by the time the transit completes itself we are quite used to it, and have expanded our awareness and adjusted our lives accordingly.

Difficult progressions and transits are times of crisis. The word “crisis,” in Chinese, has two meanings: one, “to decide,” and the other, “dangerous opportunity.”

A difficult progression or transit is a dangerous opportunity to decide to increase understanding of ourselves. Such a decision sets in motion the inner cause of an outer event. Difficult progressions and transits provide us with timing for the gradual revelation of our inner natures throughout our lifetimes.

Two Kinds of “Time”

So far we’ve discussed some of the basic components of the astrological language. Now we’re going to talk about one major way in which this language can be used. But first, an introduction to two kinds of “time,” linear and cyclical.

Linear time is conceived as a straight line, going in one direction, forwards, from the past into the future. This kind of time is an illusion, artificial, a human invention, the product of civilization and measured by clocks.

Cyclical time, on the other hand, is the time nature uses, as reflected in the cycles of the seasons, the alteration of day and night, the female monthly menstrual flow, the nine-month cycle of human pregnancy, and so on. Each of our own lives is its own cycle, from birth to death, from dust to dust.

Linear time is conceived as absolute. There is only one time, and we all set our clocks to that same standard “correct” time. Cyclical time, on the other hand, is manifold. As there are many cycles, so too there are many times, each of them with a beginning, a middle, and an end, which in turn, becomes a new beginning. In cyclical time things return to their origins, over and over again. “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heavens.”

Each time we experience the fullness of one entire cycle for the first time, we are launched into a new dimension — the space of a cycle larger than the one we have just completed. And each time we do this, we shift our perspective, and transform, completely, in order to be able to encompass this new world. A good example here is the changeover from childhood to puberty. Before puberty, there is no way we can understand the new world we will someday enter. After puberty begins, there is no way we can explain to our younger friends what is going on inside us. This same kind of transformation occurs at various times in our lives.

Think of yourself as the exact center of the universe. Standing on earth, you are surrounded by the orbits of the planets, moving in invisible concentric rings, the smaller

ones nesting inside the larger, out from that center. Each planetary orbit defines the boundary system of a particular dimension or sphere of experience.

Your task, while on earth, is to expand your consciousness, to gradually encompass these larger and larger “frames of reference,” these greater and greater dimensions of awareness. You do this, by living, through time. It is precisely your experience of time which allows you to enter, and master, these many worlds.

Each planet takes a certain amount of time to return to the original position it held at your birth. The first return of any planet to its original birth position is a significant event. It marks the time when that energy has now fully encompassed its basic orbit and sphere of influence. As it continues its circular path, that energy then becomes a “constant,” an established part of your inner life. Your consciousness and experience then move beyond that planet and begin to attune to the next planet out, which has not yet completed its first cycle.

Before a planet returns, it absorbs our attention. There seems to be no end to its influence, it goes on forever. After it returns, we have already learned the basic lesson it has to offer. (Venus, for example, teaches the lesson of relating, Mercury of thinking and talking, Mars of independence.) After the first return, further cycles of any planet are used to continue the new habit, and to refine that habit in various ways. (Just as a child only has to learn to walk once; from then on, walking is part of daily life. With a few months, that child learns to run, and may go on to dance, ice skate, or do gymnastics. All of these skills are refinements of the child’s basic ability to walk.)

After we have completed the first cycle of any planetary energy, we no longer need to focus on it in quite the same way. Our attention is drawn elsewhere; we begin to be fascinated by something larger, more complex, something that will take even more time to master.

Our experience of the cycles of what are called the “inner planets” — from the Moon to Saturn — is a developmental process, from birth to approximately thirty years of age.

Life as a Developmental Process

The Moon has approximately a 30-day cycle. Saturn has approximately a 30-year cycle. In between these two extremes lie the cycles of Venus, Mercury, Sun, Mars, and Jupiter. We can experience the full cycles of all six of these energies at least once during an average lifetime. Therefore each of their influences can be known to us, as a whole; we can incorporate each of them fully, into our lives.

The Moon has a 30-day cycle. Before you were a month old, your cries and movements were somewhat random, very difficult for your mother to understand. After you completed one Moon cycle — when you were one month old — your behavior began to become more predictable — you were beginning to cry in different ways now, to show different needs. What was really happening was you were beginning to get control of your feelings, so that you could manipulate your environment in different ways according to your different needs and desires.

The Moon is the symbol for our instinctive needs, our emotions, and the subconscious conditioning stemming from infancy and early childhood. Your feeling nature, your needy self, and the way you were nurtured when young are all represented by the Moon.

The first return of each planetary energy can be understood in the same way as that of the Moon. Once again, the first time that energy returns, the meaning of that energy as a whole can be incorporated into the life.

Venus and Mercury both have cycles shorter than one year. Mercury's cycle is 88 days; the Venus cycle is 225 days. Mercury represents your ability to communicate, through language and gesture. Venus represents your preferences, what you like and dislike. Both these functions established themselves within you before you were one year old.

The cycle of the Sun is one year. By the time of the first birthday, the child has left infancy for toddlerhood, and has developed the ability to communicate and indicate

what he or she likes or dislikes. His or her basic nature is now established and can be recognized.

Mars is a two-year cycle; it takes approximately two years for Mars to complete one full cycle. Mars symbolizes our vital energy, our courage and independence, all of which are characteristic of the so-called “terrible twos,” that period in your life when your most common words were “me,” “mine,” and “NO!”

In sum, between birth and two years, five different energies complete their first cycles: Moon, Venus, Mercury, Sun, and Mars. This coincides with our common sense idea that people change most during the first two years of life.

Not until you were twelve years old did the next cycle click in, and that was the energy of Jupiter, symbolizing the values and attitudes you adopted as a member of a community larger than your immediate family. Twelve years is the period of time right before puberty sets in, when you switched allegiance from family values to peer values.

The final cycle we can experience as a whole within one typical lifetime is that of Saturn, somewhere between 28 and 30 years. (By the way, puberty, and its rebellion against authority, is symbolized by Saturn’s half-cycle, somewhere between 14 and 15 years.)

The “Saturn Return”

The first Saturn Return is potentially the most important turning point in a person’s entire life. Before the first Saturn cycle completes itself, our lives seem to offer unlimited options. They seem as if they will go on forever. We tend to feel immortal. — Remember when you used to feel like that, remember when you had all the time in the world? — During the year or two before Saturn completes its first cycle a shift begins. What was formerly endless now begins to look decidedly finite. Whereas before we were trying to look and act older, to be taken “seriously,” now we *are* older; we can see it in our faces, feel it in our bones. And our life, we now realize, is serious, serious business. We discover our time is limited (one of the meanings of Saturn is “limitation”), and that we

had better decide exactly what we want to accomplish in the time we have left. (Some other meanings for Saturn are “seriousness,” “plans,” goals,” and “time.”)

The completion of the first Saturn cycle represents that period when we are primed to take stock in our lives for the first time. We look at our lives as a whole. We assess what we have and have not accomplished — and whether or not what we have accomplished has been worth the effort! We scrutinize the authorities and the rules by which we have been living — and decide which of them, if any, we will continue to obey. Tentatively, we move towards full autonomy, towards taking real responsibility for ourselves. We begin to make the first of those decisions which will determine the course of our lives for the next thirty years.

During the first cycle of Saturn we evaluate ourselves by comparing ourselves to others. During the second cycle we measure ourselves against our own “inner potential.” As the first Saturn cycle was the cycle of adjustment to social “reality,” so the second cycle, when consciously enacted, becomes the cycle of productivity, during which we establish an individual identity, and, for those who seek to evolve further, when we undergo the (Jungian) process of “individuation.”

The third cycle of Saturn begins somewhere between the ages of 56 and 60, and was, in ages past, recognized as the cycle of wisdom. This makes sense because, obviously, once a person has lived through two long Saturn cycles he or she has experienced much of what life has to offer and gained hard-won acceptance of the way things are.

During the first Saturn cycle, we operate in time, linear time, endless, our future wide open. After the first Saturn Return our experience of “time” subtly changes. We have now lived through a large part of our life and felt how, in a very real sense, it circled back on itself. We “started over” at 30; we began again, this time consciously, knowing that each thought, each word, each deed has consequences, and shapes our course irrevocably. Our formative years are over now; it is time to build the “forms” that reflect “who we think we are.”

Having completed this long cycle for the first time, we have been “launched” again, and besides igniting the cycle that will result in our own personal, self-created

“identity,” the persona we present to the world, we can now also begin to attune to the next larger sphere of planetary influence. But this time there is little possibility of completion. The next cycle out is Uranus, 84 years long. We can catch a glimpse of eternity as we are propelled into our thirties, and tap into a dimension of timelessness: the “eternal now,” that which exists beyond linear time, beyond the world of form. From now on we can live in the world in a different manner. No longer identifying with the forms of that world, or even, with our own form nature, we can now be “in the world, but not of it.” We may stop time, at any moment, and hear the universe sing. Observe the cosmic drama. Take part in the dance of life.

From an esoteric point of view, the first Saturn return is a sacred rite of initiation.

Before its first return, the Saturn energy operates like a wall, a kind of force field, keeping us from venturing out beyond what society teaches us is real. By limiting our horizons, it also assures that we will build a social construct, an individual ego. Through the time-span of one Saturn cycle, we learn to function as a separate and recognizable entity in the social world.

After Saturn’s first return, this same Saturn energy can now function as a gateway, or channel, allowing energies from beyond that force field to now enter the life in a way that does not “destroy” the ego.

Jung called this the “process of individuation” In esoteric astrology this process refers to the individual’s growing awareness of the Self as Soul.

Those individuals who consciously choose to start over at the first Saturn return are making a decision to transcend their social conditioning, the limitations of their personal egos. This decision frees them to encounter a universe much larger than the one society presently accepts.

Most people do not take this step.

For most people, Saturn serves as a wall their entire lives, separating the inside from the outside. Clinging to their individual “identities,” they shield themselves from any

experience that might threaten who they think they are. This can make for a very lonely life.

One meaning of Saturn is acceptance of necessity, including the fact that not everyone grows at the same rate of speed. As an old Hindu saying goes, “You can’t rip the skin off the snake. The snake sheds its skin when it’s ready to.” To everything there is a season.

Those few who do step beyond the “ring-pass-not” of Saturn find themselves in another world. A world never before seen. A world governed by different laws. A world wherein the individual soul is recognized as both the very center of the universe and at the same time one infinitesimal speck in an immense and glorious creation. A world of paradox, where nothing is as it seems, and everything is more, much more than can be imagined.

This world is symbolized by the cycles of what are called the three “outer” planets, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, with cycles of 84, 165 and 248 years respectively.

The Outer Planets: Uranus, Neptune, Pluto

With the possible exception of Uranus, the cycles of the outer planets are longer than our lifetimes. We cannot complete full cycles of them; therefore, we cannot fully understand them, control them, predict them, repeat them, or incorporate them into our lives. These energies remain forever mysterious to us; they speak of nature and her laws, deeper and vaster than our scientific culture has mastered.

Since these energies take so long to complete their cycles, they remain in one place for a long time. Both their positions and the patterns they make with one another serve as astrological “signatures” for specific generations, and their sign changes and aspects to one another signify shifts in the zeitgeist. In other words, the outer planets represent the energies of the evolving, collective unconscious mind, and signify, usually, mass conditions and events.

But not always.

Those rare individuals who have the courage to move beyond time, beyond the Saturn boundary system, become increasingly aware of the energies of the outer planets. They are learning to trust the universe — and their own unconscious minds. They move beyond reason — to mystery, to magic, to miracle . . . to continuous transformation.

In order to interact with these energies creatively we must release our identification with the ego, and allow the soul to take over. Within this new focus, the ego becomes transparent, something to be seen through.

Rather than being something we identify with, that by which we recognize ourselves, our “self-image,” the ego then functions as an instrument, or servant, helping the soul achieve its ends while on earth. Serving as a channel, a discipline, Saturn connects heaven to earth, and helps us in our new-found capacity to both surrender to and transmit higher forces.

As the ego’s need is service to self, so the soul’s need is service to others. Individuals who have expanded their awareness beyond the limitations of Saturn realize that they are meant to serve the rest of humanity and the planet itself in this most difficult and magnificent passage into the new age, beyond ego, beyond war, beyond separation.

Summary

When understood and practiced from within the esoteric world-view, astrology has the capacity to serve as a universal language, bonding us to one another. This ecology of the stars can both help us to appreciate the wealth of untapped potential lying inside each of us, and to accept and encourage the richness of our diversity.

Used as a predictive art, astrology teaches us to tune in to our own natures, to become one with what is and what is unfolding. By pointing out times when energies wax and wane, astrology helps us to describe the possibilities of any particular moment. It encourages achievement during times of high potential and teaches patience when energies lie fallow.

Here we sense intimations of the eternal message: peace on Earth, good will to all. As each of us learns to express our original natures fully, naturally, then the life force

within us will flow freely and there will be harmony within. Coming to peace within ourselves, we will find it easy and natural to harmonize with others, to demonstrate good will.

Astrology is stellar ecology. Astrology is a language, a universal, divine language. Pray we reconsider her, and her extraordinary offering to the human spirit, so that the famous Pythagorean “harmony of the spheres” can be echoed, here on Earth.

And what a joy that will be!

Essay

ASTROLOGY I: TRANSFORMING ASSUMPTIONS

Chapter 8, Part 1

MY SECRET LIFE: Ten Tools for Transformation

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From Science to Astrology: My Prejudice — and Ours

One of the assumptions I had received from the culture was the opinion that “astrology is nonsense,” “sheer (or mere) superstition.” Like most academics, I viewed astrology with contempt and disgust. Even though I had deliberately and systematically undermined my own rationality by continuously questioning my assumptions, *this* assumption, that astrology was utterly ridiculous, “a realm of soothsayers and quacks,” was so powerful, so deeply embedded, that it remained immune to my investigation.

I have now been a student and practitioner of astrology for 21 years. For 18 of those years, I worked as a consultant in the field, analyzing and “reading” thousands of “charts” for others. I still lecture and teach astrological seminars on occasion, and write articles for astrological magazines. I keep one “ephemeris” (a book showing the daily positions of the planets through time) on my office desk, another next to my bed.

Astrology has become my principal tool for transformation. This complex and intricate symbolic language gifts me with an expanded world-view that is both

abstract and concrete, both mystical and precise. Astrology allows me to place any particular experience within the larger structure of my life as a whole, rendering it meaningful. Astrology replaced the scientific world-view I was deconstructing within myself.

Aha! I must ask myself here, does this mean that I replaced one dogma with another? Did I repudiate one form of fundamentalism only to embrace another? If so, then whatever happened to the epistemological relativism I supposedly learned from LSD?

Like many others who encounter this field of inquiry, there is only one appropriate word to label what happened to me, and that is “conversion,” a word usually only reserved for religion. The comparison is apt. Like religion, astrology is a way of exploring and attending to the world-as-a-whole; moreover, I will attempt to show that, in common with the claims of religious traditions, astrology is a language which renders that whole meaningful. So yes, I did “convert” to astrology — and though the process took years, in the end it was as if I had left this planet and flown to another, where gravity and air and water and food — all were changed. In order to live there, I had to change, too.

I puzzle over this now, and want to be honest with myself. Okay, in truth, by converting from science to astrology did I simply exchange one form of fundamentalism for another?

I don't think so, and here's why.

One of the most fascinating characteristics of astrology, as opposed to any kind of fundamentalism that I am aware of, is that its practitioners do not assume there is one and only one correct interpretation to any astrological statement. Nor then, is there any “search for the correct interpretation,” or even assumption that one interpretation is better than another. Astrology is a symbolic language, similar to the language of dreams. Rather than being dogmatic, astrological statements are suggestive and evocative; they help us expand the way we see both inner and outer worlds.

Ever since leaving the Roman Catholic religion, I have been repelled by any system of ideas that I sense to be dogmatic or fundamentalist. Such systems seem closed, rather than open; they have a certain feel or tone to them — that of rigidity and strictness. Even when my mind might be attracted to particular ideas within such a system, my body instinctively recoils from the restrictive, oppressive feeling of that system as a whole.

So I ask myself here, “Is there anything about the language of astrology that makes me feel constricted or oppressed?” And the answer is a resounding “NO!” The language of astrology is extraordinarily spacious; its insights and metaphors tend to be complex and multidimensional. Every “answer” that astrology gives spawns a hundred new questions. No matter how far I penetrate its mysteries, the horizon recedes even further. I never tire of exploring the world through the prism of astrology, for it sheds continuous new light on any subject imaginable.

On the other hand, some of the uses to which astrology is put do upset me. Three examples come to mind. First, those stereotyping sun-sign columns in newspapers — which, to my mind, keep those who read them stuck in a superficial, indeed superstitious view of astrology. Second, in line with our cultural tendency to not take responsibility for our lives, blaming someone or something else for who we are and what we do, there are those who use astrology in this way (as in, “I can’t help it. I’m a Cancer” — or Leo or Virgo, etc.), thus ignoring their own freedom to choose. And last, but not least, I must admit that I and other astrologers do tend to resort to a kind of shorthand in talking with one another, which my husband says does at least sound like reductionism, or fundamentalism.

Yet stereotypes are not the exclusive province of astrology. And there are plenty of ways, besides astrology, in which people deny responsibility for their lives. Nor does astrology differ from other specialized languages in being compacted into short-hand conversation by specialists. Moreover, as with other specialized languages, there are plenty of charlatans who hoodwink themselves and others into thinking they are astrologers.

Even those, like myself, who do speak the language, acknowledge that our understanding of astrology now is a mere remnant of what must have been a rich and complex heritage reaching back to remotest antiquity.

And here we come across another assumption built into the dominant scientific and technological world-view, that of “progress.” Though this notion has been thoroughly debunked in recent years, both by scholars with a longer view of history and by those who decry its obvious and subtle damaging effects on our human and earthly environment — the myth of progress still persists in the collective imagination. Its corollary, the idea that people who lived long ago must inevitably have been “primitive,” is another one of our rock-bottom cultural assumptions. Given this cultural climate, the fact that astrology reaches into prehistory is used to condemn it.

Epistemological Relativism

What first motivated me to pry my mind loose from the dominant paradigm was the vague but strong sense that something was radically wrong, off, damaged — both within my own self, and in our society. Assuming that whatever was going on within me was also going on within others, I decided to use myself as subject, and embarked upon the project of consciously investigating my assumptions. I assumed that whatever discoveries I made in myself would also apply to the culture that produced me.

Viewing my own psyche as an archeologist would a dig, I sifted through the layers, searching for bedrock — or for what I had thought would be bedrock, and turned out not to be. For whatever assumption I was able to identify and understand, dissolved. The project was endless! There was no basis for thinking, no Archimedian fulcrum, no fundamental bottom-line beyond which I could not go. Unlike Descartes, who, when he embarked upon a similar project, ended up with “God” as the foundation, for me, there was no God, there was only what philosophers fear above all, the “infinite regress” — that feeling, that nightmare, of *falling through space*.

Unlike most philosophers, I was not afraid of this feeling; indeed, I welcomed it. As a child, I had spent many afternoons lying on the grass of our back yard, peering into the immensity of sky. At night, snuggled in my sleeping bag, drinking in the Milky Way, my spirit would shudder free of body and shoot to the stars. In my 20s, during that first LSD trip (see chapter —), unlike my philosopher boyfriend, who had had to lie on his stomach or become overwhelmed with dizziness and nausea, I had lain on my back in exaltation, surrendering once again to that shocking, breathless, whooshing expansion of childhood.

I imagine the reason why philosophers are afraid of the feeling of “falling through space” is because they fear feeling of any kind, being so unaccustomed to it. Philosophers and other intellectuals tend to ignore their bodies and stay in their minds, because they don’t realize there is another dimension — or if they do realize it, they only experience it as a “fall,” a descent into darkness, an unforgivable loss of control.

So when I discovered that there is no real foundation for any idea, I welcomed it, and began to call myself a “relativist.” By this I meant that all ideas, though they may make sense within their context (of other ideas) are ultimately baseless; that all ideas are, ultimately, created from nothing. Whether my mind created the idea or someone else’s mind did, whether it was created in the moment of my thinking it or a long time ago by someone else, that thought, any thought, can always be questioned. There is no absolute bedrock “Truth” — and therefore, no such thing as justification or proof.

That was and is my philosophical “position” — that there is no way to guarantee that any idea is “true,” i.e., in agreement with a reality which is “out-there,” beyond the mind. Who knows what is out there? There may be no out-there, or certainly no way to prove it. (Indeed, what we call “mind” may encompass “reality.”) All thoughts are “posited,” i.e., *actively thrust*, by the mind that creates them, into what is ultimately a void.

Once we imagine ideas as loosened from their moorings, as having no justification or proof, then our questions about them become more interesting.

Rather than trying to prove anything to either ourselves or anyone else, we jump right into the creativity of the idea. Rather than asking “Is it True?” we can ask, “What good will it do? What are its implications?” “What problem(s) does it solve?”

This philosophical position is not original to me. It has been called “skepticism” — a word which I don’t like to use since it is so often confused with “cynicism.” (Cynicism, in the dictionary, means “doglike,” whereas a skeptic is a “searcher.”) Skepticism was popularized by the British philosopher David Hume, in the 18th century, when he argued that even if the sun has risen a million times, there is no guarantee that it will rise tomorrow morning. Hume’s skepticism was reissued by another British philosopher, Sir Karl Popper, in his book *Conjectures and Refutations* (1962), where he argued that scientific theories cannot ever be proven true, though, he said, they can be proved false — through a single refutation. I would agree with his first statement, but not his second, since “proving” something “false” assumes a context of ideas which itself, cannot be proved.

As a philosopher, I would rather call myself an “epistemological relativist” as distinguished from “fundamentalist,” and as distinguished from ethical relativists (for whom any action can be “justified,” in its own context). As an epistemological relativist, my “position” is that no idea can be ultimately justified as “true” — and that includes ethical ideas. Given this position (which “position” I freely admit is taken as a stab in the dark, a thrust into the void), *I must find another basis besides the intellect to discover how to act in the world.*

This to me, is the real point of skepticism. Unlike Hume, I do not think of myself as a skeptic (or epistemological relativist) only to thumb my nose at those who seek proof. I am no longer looking for proof. I no longer need proof. “How could this be?” you might argue. And I can just see my teachers, furious with me, stating vehemently, stamping their feet, “Everyone needs proof! The mind craves certainty as the stomach craves food!” This is precisely where I would disagree. I feel that the certainty which we think our minds crave is actually a poor substitute

for something else altogether, which we *do* crave. That this craving is not intellectual, but emotional — the instinctive need for security, a feeling of being safe in the world. And I sense that the emotional loss of this feeling of safety or security (as individuals, as a community) is at the heart of our cultural insistence on intellectual proof, as well as of our assumption that science (or any type of intellectual activity) can generate proof.

I was an epistemological relativist, and yet I wanted to arrive at a foundation for ethics, for living with others in the world. I could not do this through the intellect, since there was no such thing as proof. What was I to do? Little did I realize it at the time, but the solution to my problem lay close at hand; it lay in the process of paying close attention to my own responses to different experiences in daily life, and to allowing those responses to change me. This was no easy task. I was so used to *thinking* about my experiences that I had desensitized myself to anything my body was feeling. Once I did learn to stop, and listen to what my body was telling me, I had to acknowledge something which I had heretofore thought “logically impossible,” namely, that what my body was feeling often contradicted what my mind was thinking.

At this point, my logical mind, of course, wanted to deny the feeling, in order to stay with what it was thinking. But a deeper part of me refused to do so, instead deliberately committing to simultaneously holding in consciousness both the thought and the feeling. In order to do this, in order to accept and honor such contradictions within myself, I had to expand my capacity, and this meant I had to learn how to include and transcend the either/or dilemmas of logic.

Somehow, the business of learning to accept the reality of contradiction, or paradox, into my life — which usually translated experientially into learning how to surrender to the pain of *not getting my own way* — was the key to learning how to create an ethical foundation for my life. One emotional crisis after another bruised, battered, and finally broke my heart wide open. The small egocentric “I” surrendered. I began to think with my heart. Now my thoughts are “true,” not

because they can be justified intellectually, but because they come from the heart. “The heart has its reasons that the mind will never know.”

Thus, the most important experiences in my life, those which have given me an ethical foundation by teaching me how to get along with others, have been those times when I have not gotten my own way. Such experiences of “failure” have tempered me, softened me, opened me to my own feeling life. These experiences made me turn inward, which in turn — another paradox — was the key to experiencing not only my own inner life but that of others. As I suffer, so do we all suffer. Though our ideas may differ, and though it may be very difficult for us to understand one another, our feelings are like a great ocean in which we are all immersed. By opening my own heart, I learned to give personal, existential meaning to the old ethical maxim, “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.”

I don’t always think with my heart, of course. But I want to, I long to. The struggle for inner peace is endless. I seek to think with my heart; and to counter my seemingly hardwired territorial need to be “right,” righteous, rigidly dogmatic, I remind myself that I am an epistemological relativist.

Imagine what would happen if we all transformed into epistemological relativists! Imagine what would happen if, in thinking about the world and how to act in it, we moved from our minds down into our hearts! For at the bottom of all our arguments and fights and murders and wars are disputes over ideas of some kind. Ideas which lead back to other ideas which we hope or are convinced of or at least assume to be Absolutely True. Only by staying within the fortress of the mind, do we remain impervious to our steadily beating hearts, drumming as one, feeling as one.

The Assumptions of Astrology

I have not attempted to investigate the root assumptions of astrology. What are they? I have no idea. I doubt anyone now living does. The origins of astrology lie too far back for us to comprehend. And if my history is any indication, if I could

know and understand the assumptions of astrology, then astrology itself (for me) would dissolve.

Perhaps this is a clue as to why astrology has been around for so many thousands of years. Why the human psyche is still so attracted, despite our relatively recent strictures against it. The bedrock of astrology is profoundly unknown. Even those who do speak the language don't usually ask — or even wonder. It's too difficult; it takes us back so far into prehistory that we get lost in the mist. We "fall through space" back into the stars. Astrology feels mysterious, even religious. As we do not demand that our religious mysteries be fully explained, so I do not demand this of astrology.

But what happened? Why astrology? Why not something else? Why did I choose, as my medical doctor father asked, genuinely puzzled, to "waste my good brain?"

Despite the systematic attempt to open my right brain and integrate it with my left brain, to dissolve my "rationality" into a larger "presence" by questioning my assumptions, I was still an ignorant intellectual. I had been a doctoral student in philosophy for six years. This kind of intellectual training — not to mention the milieu in which it takes place — does not easily let go. What opened me to the possibility of astrology as a living language of the psyche was what, by now, you might expect, a sudden horrific life crisis.

Death and Rebirth

In 1972 I was hired over more than 500 candidates as a full-time teacher at New College of California, an experimental school which was, at that time, only one year old. Fresh with a newly-minted PhD, I entered the school as a heroine, my application telling the students I wanted to "help undo in them what had been done to me." My philosophy was Socratic: real knowledge is found within; the word "educare" means "to pull out," rather than to put in; real learning requires that we remove the veils created by our schooling and social conditioning which prevent us from accessing this original knowledge. I still subscribe to this

philosophy of education, though I rarely talk about it. Back then, I was young, and foolish, and arrogant, and trumpeted my beliefs endlessly.

Needless, to say, this attitude was extremely polarizing, and another, equally arrogant teacher, whose background was The Great Books program at the University of Chicago, became my worthy opponent. “Real learning,” for him, of course, was filling students’ minds with ideas from (Great) books. In endless debates, attended by the entire school (of about 100), we thrust verbal daggers back and forth, both of us striving to prove the absolute truth of our opposing points of view. (I had already forgotten the epistemological relativism taught me by LSD . . .)

Little did I know it then, but the school had been founded during the time of year when the Sun was in Scorpio, its president was Scorpio, five out of the seven full time teachers had their Suns in Scorpio, and during that period of my life Pluto (ruler of Scorpio, symbolizing, power, death and rebirth) was crossing the Midheaven (symbolizing the public life path) of my birthchart.

After one year came the crisis: I was summarily fired. The president, in a letter to me three days before school was to begin again in September, said that I was “too experimental” for that experimental college. The real charge, however, should have been arrogance, “power over.”

Back then, my reaction to being fired was first shock, then denial of my own part in what had happened plus fury at others, and ultimately, depression, as I unconsciously turned my anger inward. Pluto’s death and rebirth process plunged me into Hades: I had been fired, which killed my academic career, and left me for dead. I moved into a room in the basement of a house with four other people upstairs, lived on unemployment checks, and took long slow walks through the grey rain and fog of the Marin County winter.

I tell this story to give you a sense of the context of my life at that time. Being fired from the job I had been working towards for 30 years cracked my foundation, leaving me to some extent broken and humbled. In this atmosphere, one of my

housemates, who was learning how to set up astrological charts, asked me — somewhat hesitantly, she could sense my inner fury, and knew that I might bark at her — if I wanted her to set up my chart.

“Sure,” I responded. “What the hell? Why not?” As if it didn’t matter. As if nothing mattered.

The Opening

So there I was, one soggy afternoon in January 1974, sitting at the kitchen table poring over my birthchart . . .

I had already spent other afternoons sitting there staring at its meaningless jumble of scribbled symbols. Precisely the nonsense I always said it was! But something had happened the day before which made me see this jumble differently . . .

I had been in a book store, where I had noticed an astrological chart, tacked onto a wall. This chart was drawn with colored lines connecting the planets to one another. What had struck me, struck me so forcefully that I call it my first astrological epiphany, was that these lines created a pattern. Aha! I thought to myself, staring, so maybe astrology deals with patterns?

Years before I had been fascinated with Immanuel Kant’s Critique of Pure Reason, in which he says that the mind itself is structured to see the world in only certain sorts of ways; then I had come across Arnold Kohler’s gestalt theory of pattern recognition in psychology, which in turn had led me to Jean Piaget, his theory of developmental structures in psychology. So I was attuned to the idea of patterns or structures as important, somehow, epistemologically — in terms of understanding how we perceive, how we learn, and what ultimately, creates a meaningful whole.

In the bookstore, I asked the clerk if he knew what the colored lines on that chart on the wall meant. He told me that they symbolized different types of “aspects,” which he said, were certain geometrical angles of relationship between

planets. I was fascinated. For if astrology was meaningful, I sensed that its meaning was going to have something to do with the geometrical patterns formed by aspects.

So there I sat, one day later, looking at this chart again, transfixed! Even more so now! “What’s the pattern of *my* chart?” I asked myself. (“Who cares? It wouldn’t mean anything anyway!” whispered the skeptical — no, I mean *cynical*— little devil on my left shoulder.)

The situation at that moment reminds me of the beginning of my fascination with Wittgenstein, my remark: “This book is true, but I don’t know what it means.” Something in me was saying, “This chart is true, but I don’t know what it means.” I wondered: “Could it be that astrology is, somehow, in some way, ‘true’? Could it be that this chart really *is* a map, that it can help me understand who I am, what has happened to me?”

Over and over I found myself drawn towards it, magnetized, as if the chart was a symbol in a particularly numinous dream. It seemed to be whispering secrets, just out of hearing. It seemed to contain a golden key, to some locked door I didn’t know existed, and now stood there, shimmering, just beyond reach. “How ridiculous!” I thought to myself, as over and over I caught my psyche just in time to prevent it from moving into the chart, blending with it, fusing. “Stop that!”

This particular rainy January afternoon I was feeling even more exhausted than usual. My defenses were down. Lethargically, for want of anything better to do, I picked up my housemate’s astrological ephemeris for the 20th century and started leafing through it. I knew I shouldn’t be doing this. Knew I was playing with fire. I knew, somehow, that the consequences of this simple act were to be incalculable, perhaps disastrous to my entire view of the world.

It is as if, in this seemingly random act of picking up a certain book, I suddenly gave up, surrendered to the dynamism of my larger being. At first with pretended indifference, and then with more and more focused intention, I began to look up the positions for the planets Pluto, Neptune, and Uranus during 1970.

A few moments later I had my second epiphany in two days. In only a few moments, that year in my past which had been so mysterious and so profound all of a sudden began to make sense . . .

1970 had been the year when my mind turned, focused inward. The year I discovered Wittgenstein, and he became the foil for my own process. Deciding to systematically investigate my intellectual assumptions had had the effect of plunging me into the abyss of my own unconscious. And while my intention was to do exactly that, I had no idea what that would entail, nor did I realize that once started on such a journey, there would be no stopping it. That it would accelerate. That as I let go of the rules of logic, the stereotyped, socially conditioned roles of society would also fall away. That an inner earthquake would shake my psyche loose from its moorings, plunge me into a twisting, turbulent river, where I would shoot through rapids so thunderous they made my solar plexus thud with fear.

At the end of one full year I finally washed up on the shore, changed. I felt newborn, fresh, utterly sensitive and responsive to the present moment — and unable to separate myself from it. Gone were the divisions between inside and outside; no longer did I sport a “detached observer” who watched what was happening as my body/personality moved through time and space like a robot. The Cartesian mind/body split within me had collapsed, leaving me alone, a stranger in a very strange land. Utterly vulnerable. And crazy, too, supposedly. From others’ point of view. Not from mine. I had survived, and I was alive. Truly alive for the very first time.

Surrender

So, that’s how my surrender to astrology began, at the kitchen table, poring over my birthchart, in January, 1974. I looked up the positions of Pluto, Neptune and Uranus during 1970, the year when I plunged into the collective unconscious. I looked up these particular planets because I intuitively knew that because they were the *outer* planets, with cycles longer than one lifetime, they symbolized the unconscious mind. I knew that if these slow-moving planets, during that strange

and wondrous year, crossed over points in the zodiac that were occupied by faster-moving planets on the day of my birth, that these crossings would correlate to the extraordinary journey of that year. And that, if this were indeed the case, I would have to devote my life to the study of astrology.

Back in 1970, there had been moments when I was truly terrified of the journey I was on. I worried that I would not come back to ordinary life. That I would be unable to survive, complete my dissertation, get a teaching job, take care of my children. Every day I would go to the mirror, look into my eyes, and wonder, who am I now, who am I becoming? One day in front of the mirror I heard a voice, low and booming, from deep inside. *DON'T WORRY*, it said. *JUST KEEP GOING. DON'T GET STUCK*. Later that day the voice announced that some day I would help others to go through the same process.

Sitting at the kitchen table in 1974, I remembered that booming voice in 1970, and I realized that astrology, because its outer planet symbols are correlated with the emergence and timing of transformational processes, would be the language I would learn in order to help others go through their own evolutionary shifts.

At that time, of course, people didn't use the word "transformation." The world had a polite name for my journey — "nervous breakdown" — and certainly, others had been nervous in my presence! I would feel them whispering among themselves. When my professors and fellow graduate students hinted that my raging philosophical questions were actually psychiatric, I would cry, desperate, "Don't you understand? The two are connected? Don't you sense how the philosophical "mind/body split" is *in me*?"

What they had called a nervous breakdown, I intuitively knew, even then, was a *breakthrough*. That though I was alone, my experience was prophetic; that it would herald similar breakthroughs in others. Now, in 1997, 27 years later, we refer to transformation almost casually. A growing subculture within our society values this extraordinary personal journey. There is evolving an intricate social infrastructure that supports the collapse of the mind/body split, the subsequent

integration of mind/body/spirit, this initiation into the miraculous unfolding of our essential natures.

Prior to that massive and irreversible shift within myself, there had been signs of what was to come. For years I had been fascinated by the whole question of change, by the specific differences between continuous and discontinuous change. I had been drawn to explore the latter, change which defies our ability to describe, predict or understand. Now, three decades later, “chaos theory” in mathematics is hip, bandied about at cocktail parties.

What Is Time?

As a graduate student I had also wondered about Time. One day I had asked Agassi if I could write a paper on the concept of Time. “Time?” he had scoffed. “I wouldn’t touch the subject. Too difficult.”

Now I realize he was right. Understanding “Time” is difficult, especially when the concept is imagined as a straight line running from the present moment backwards and forwards into infinity. Indeed, if time is linear, then how can we possibly understand it, since this kind of time is impossible! The present moment, conceived as a mere point on a line, has no dimension, and therefore does not exist!

It is no wonder we have trouble being truly present to our experience. For if the present moment is merely a point on a line then we cannot follow Ram Dass’s admonition to Be Here Now. Instead, we are solipsists, locked inside our “own little worlds,” living imagined lives, inside our heads!

Constructing a fantasy reality of what we would like the world to be, we spend our lives either terrified of, or longing for, a future that will either repeat the past or help us forget it.

Our trouble with Time is not merely psychological or neurotic; it lies deeper than that. Our trouble is epistemological and metaphysical, a matter of how our

culture unconsciously instructs our brains to perceive and operate within the world.

Time is one of those subjects that we do not talk about. We talk within our socially-constructed view of Time, but we do not notice the way Time itself is constructed. Like the air we breathe, or the water we drink, we take Time for granted — until something goes wrong. As indeed, it has. Like pure water and air, Time has become precious, scarce. We “don’t have time” — for who we really are, for how to live our lives.

Time Cycles

Imagine a world-view wherein time is not linear but cyclical. Where there is not just one time, but many. Imagine a world where there are as many times as there are cycles, each one repeating itself over and over again, moving from beginning to end, and then beginning again. In this world-view death is viewed as a part of life, one node within a continuum. Every birth is followed by death, and each death makes way for new birth. Such is the world-view of astrology; it is also the world-view of the Bible, where “everything has its season,” and of farmers, peasants and other “primitive” peoples who live close to nature, follow her ways. Within this spacious and more ancient astrological view of time, the Plutonian death experience which I had undergone in being fired from New College was timed, and transformed, into the Plutonian rebirth experience my soul had ordained all along.

Though my teachers and my father and just about everybody else could not understand why I was “wasting my good brain,” I discovered that astrology, as the study of the structures and processes of Time and Space, was utterly continuous with my philosophical quest. Within astrology, I found my intellectual and spiritual home.

Many of the foremost astrologers of today discovered astrology when I did, in the early ‘70s. It’s as if we were members of some old temple school, and reincarnated together again, to help reseed the ancient understanding of cyclical

time into this industrialized culture where most people no longer live in conscious attunement to changing daily, monthly, seasonal, and ever-larger rhythms.

The discovery of the goddess as focus of female spirituality also emerged during the early '70s, and it too, recognizes the primacy of cyclical time.

Mainstream culture's artificial simplification of "time" into a single straight line projection has been, of course, for centuries now, especially difficult for women to appreciate. Indeed, women cannot both act as if linear time is real and remain attuned to our own biological lives.

Women *know*, from the periodic lunar rhythms of our own bodies, that time is not linear but cyclical. That time describes circles, each of which is experienced as a complete whole. We are also aware of the structure of each of these wholes, as we undergo the various phases of our menstrual cycle. The new moon phase at ovulation signals our new beginning; the full moon phase when our blood flows — the initial bursting fullness, the celebration of fulfillment, release.

Those of us who keep personal journals and pay attention to truly processing experience further realize that we live on many levels, and that therefore, we are simultaneously and continuously involved in many different cycles, many different dimensions of experience, many different kinds of time.

Cycles as Wholes

Each of these cycles, when first completed, can be felt as a whole. *It is the felt sense of wholeness which gives meaning to any cycle.* Once we apprehend its meaning, we can incorporate that cycle, and transcend it.

Cycles of experience come in many sizes. They range from the daily fluctuations of our moods to our monthly menstrual periods, to seasonal and annual returns, to the gradual but inexorable psychic shifts within the unconscious which are both terrifying and exhilarating, and signify yet another stage of personal growth. These latter cycles are the ones signified by the outer planets: Pluto, Neptune, and Uranus. When a person undergoes the shifts these energies

require, they are liable to think they “have gone mad.” This is where a consultation with an astrologer is so valuable. When we know that this incomprehensible process was preordained, that our soul chose a particular time to be born *so that we might undergo this kind of shift at this point in our lives*, we begin to pay attention. We realize that the shift is natural. Rather than resist, we surrender. To change. To transformation. To allowing the individual dance of our own unique evolutionary process.

Though cycles differ in size, all cycles are identical in structure. As we consciously undergo any cycle of any size, we experience a secure sense of continuity and stability, knowing that every beginning is followed by waxing, midpoint, waning, and completion; that what goes around comes around; that everything has its season. No longer do we need to fear the future or freeze the past. Life and death become processes understood as continuous transformations within a larger order.

While identical in structure, the specific meaning of any cycle is derived from its size, from the amount of time required to complete one whole circuit. Yet some cycles seem to be more interesting, or obvious, or transformational, than others. In astrology, these cycles are known as “planets.” **The meaning of a planet is the amount of time it takes to complete one full circuit. The meaning of a planet is its cycle.**

Essay

ASTROLOGY II: HOW I LEARNED ASTROLOGY

Chapter 8, Part 2

MY SECRET LIFE: TEN TOOLS FOR TRANSFORMATION

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Learning Astrology

The meaning of a planet is its cycle. I didn't understand the profound significance of this deceptively simple statement until I had been studying astrology for several years. And because I hadn't grokked this central idea, my learning was piecemeal and confused; I couldn't sense astrology's overall design, nor how that design correlated with my life.

I will return to this central idea, and to the larger astrological world-view this idea generated within me. But first, I want to sketch out how I actually went about learning astrology, as I think it holds clues to how we learn anything that resonates strongly within our essential selves.

When something really matters to us, we are guided from within as to how to learn it. At first the experience is of a vague twinge of dissatisfaction, an emptiness, or hunger, something the usual food does not satisfy. We may try many ways to assuage the hunger, and none of them work. It remains, and it grows, becoming more and more demanding. Our attention begins to subtly point itself in a certain direction. If we are consciously noticing the hunger, and acknowledge it, then we follow the direction to

which our attention points — no matter how foreign it may be to our usual concerns. It's as if the soul whispers in our inner ear, *Pay Attention!* — and then it drops clues! When we stop to think about it, these clues are actually miracles, sudden shocking intrusions of a higher dimension into this third-dimensional world. We are in a bookstore, and a book jumps out from the shelf. A seemingly chance remark repeats what was said in a dream the night before. One thing leads to another. We become a student, and exactly the right teacher appears . . .

I had been following the trail of synchronicity since I was 26 years old, picking up on clue after clue. Even so, it took me three whole years of study to finally penetrate to the core of astrology. This is no surprise. Even the remnant of ancient astrology with which we are familiar today is astonishingly complex, requiring unusual dedication on the part of the student. Compounding the difficulty is the flack we take from others when we begin to study it!

There is what I call an “unconscious conspiracy” in this culture against astrology. Mention the word “astrology” and we sense the inevitable knee-jerk reaction. The alarms go off in the listener's head! “Whoops, she's gone off the deep end!” Now we're talking “quackery (nonsense)” or “voodoo (forbidden magical power)” — or both. Usually both! How could it be both? How could astrology be both nothing and way too much?

Newspaper and magazine columns on sun-sign astrology are the chief weapons in this ongoing conspiracy; they trivialize astrology, treat it as a harmless superstition, a silly but humorous way of pretending to know ahead of time what is around the corner. And yet, how many millions of people open the newspaper first to their “daily horoscope”? And although they may laugh, and treat it lightly, we humans are fascinated by the idea of linking our own small lives on Earth up to a larger order.

For those, like me, who want to deepen their understanding of astrology, we face not only the culture's dismissal, but our own conditioning as to how learning takes place. To learn something, we assume, is to read books on the subject, or take classes. In 1974,

most books on astrology were what we now call “recipe books,” dealing with possible meanings of planets when placed in various signs. E.g. Mars in Pisces means X whereas Mars in Sagittarius means Y (and at times different authors come up with Xs and Ys that contradict each other). The one real exception to this static view of planets was the work of Dane Rudyhar. For him, the idea that the meaning of a planet is its cycle was a basic assumption implied in everything he ever wrote. I don’t recall him ever stating this assumption outright, but it was there, underneath everything he ever said. The result was his unusual orientation to the *process* of how planets work in astrology.

I devoured Dane Rudyhar; I read some of the recipe books too, and, most important, despite my early learned fear of mathematics, I managed to learn how to set up charts. The process of figuring out each chart turned into a contemplative ritual. One by one, I would work through the formulas for finding the exact positions for each planet at a certain time in the sky for a certain place on earth. As I placed each planet in its proper degree of the circle, the unique and mysterious geometrical pattern that lay at the heart of each person’s life would emerge, bit by bit.

This process of manually setting up charts slowed me down, made me work for every little piece of information; the result was a continuous sense of anticipation, which brought me into my feelings, so that my larger being could gradually incorporate what my mind was perceiving.

How different was this way of learning astrology from today, when computer programs spit out instant charts! As a result, there are a lot of instant astrologers, who are going to have to find new rituals for slowing themselves down enough to pay full attention to one symbol at a time. We do not thoroughly incorporate anything of value by instantly accessing millions of bits of data.

Over that first two-year period I set up birth charts for around 300 people (begging them for their birth data, which they would humor me by giving). Placing their charts next to my own, I would focus on the similarities and differences between the two maps, correlating those findings with the similarities and differences I noticed between us as

persons. I was learning astrology partly through this analytic method of compare and contrast (in philosophy, we called this “Mills’ Canons of Induction”).

And I was learning astrology by paying attention to the ephemeris, watching the planets daily motions through the heavens, noting when transits crossed over the positions of planets in my birthchart, and correlating these crossings with events in my life.

Underneath, what was driving me all along was the need to know: Who am I? What is my path? How could I have been fired from the job for which I had been preparing all my life? What did it mean? What now? What next? Could astrology help me to find out?

Like any scientist, I was, in the beginning, using left-brained tools to translate my own psychological understanding of people into the foreign language of astrology. As time went on, my right brain began to take over. At night, I would find myself dreaming about a particular astrological symbol. During the day, washing dishes or standing in line to buy groceries, I would suddenly wake up, realize that I had been elsewhere, meditating on a symbol.

Astrology was subtly seeping into me, despite my periodic resistance, and despite the ridicule I received from the culture for studying it. (By this time I had moved back to my Idaho hometown to marry Dick, my high school boyfriend and second husband). Though my indoctrinated, elitist, academic self kept scoffing, I could not stop. I had become obsessed.

Learning and Obsession

It is this element of obsession which, to my mind, separates those who are “dabbling in astrology” from serious students. Like any potentially life-transforming subject, astrology requires at least a modicum of obsession from those who seek its wisdom. It reminds me of what is called “transference” in therapy, whereby the person seeking help “falls in love” with the therapist. To learn is to love. There is no way around it. We fall

into whatever we seek to absorb. Longing for union, we offer ourselves up to that which fascinates.

No matter how many bits and pieces I picked up analytically (Taurus people are X, Scorpio people are Y, etc.) I had to completely surrender to astrology, to become one with the planets, their cycles, and their interactions through time. Once again, I had to descend into the collective unconscious. Whereas the first descent had come about as the result of deconstructing my scientific world view, during the second descent I discovered astrology, its mysterious, millennial hold on the human psyche.

I remember the day when it dawned on me that I was actually meditating on the symbol of the planetary energy (and cycle) known as “Jupiter.” Automatically, without conscious intent, and as a result of thinking about Jupiter in my own chart, how that compared with the way Jupiter seemed to work in charts of my friends and with the transits of Jupiter as shown through the ephemeris, I noticed that I was actually beginning to resonate with an “energy,” the energy of Jupiter! I was beginning to entrain to a certain frequency, to inhabit a certain space, or sphere, the dimension of awareness known as “Jupiter.” I was beginning to know Jupiter the way I had known Wittgenstein.

To Learn Is To Change

I was learning astrology, not through “being filled up with ideas,” but truly learning, by surrendering to the unknown. Once again, as with Wittgenstein, I was beginning to embody Nietzsche’s aphoristic dictum: “To learn is to change.” I had fallen in love with astrology, surrendered to it, and it was transforming the way my mind worked. My training had been academic, filling up with others’ ideas, thinking analytically with left brain only. When I met Wittgenstein something happened to me. I could not keep up the pretense of detachment. In sensing the feeling behind his words I had slipped, sometimes, into a mysterious, dreamy, or mystical right-brained space. Now, in order to learn astrology, I was gradually and unconsciously learning to use that space as a container for everything else I was learning. In fact, I found myself internally stretching to see/feel the space/time whole of each planet as an immense invisible sphere. I did

this experientially, by sensing how the space of that sphere was being carved out through time in my real life. Each of these spheres lived in myself, I was realizing, as a certain dimension of awareness.

The Third Epiphany

It was not until 1978, four years after the first and second epiphanies, that I was blown wide open by the third one. In the first, I had been struck by the pattern created by the colored lines in a chart on a bookstore wall, and discovered that it represented angular geometric relationships among the planets.

In the second epiphany I had been sitting at the kitchen table, “idly” leafing through the ephemeris, when I “happened” to look up the planets for 1970 and found myself both shocked and relieved to discover the correlation between that year when I investigated my assumptions and the transits of the outer planets over the original positions of personal planets in my birth chart.

The setting for the third epiphany was my red velvet rocker in Idaho. By this time I was divorced from my second husband, living alone, and sitting there, staring at the fire in the fireplace, when the gestalt I had been unconsciously reaching for finally clicked into place. It was this: *The closing of a circle or cycle is the emotional and mental foundation for a sense of completion or wholeness. Furthermore: This physical and emotional sense of completion or wholeness is what generates the mental and spiritual experience of something as truly purposeful or meaningful.* By connecting these insights to planetary cycles, and through paying attention to both the felt sense of satisfaction within my own body as well as the eureka thrill within my mind and spirit, I had discovered for myself one way to link life on earth with heaven above. The “as above,” to the “so below.” The “as within” to the “so without.” This was the mystic dictum said to be originally ascribed to the ancient Egyptian Hermes Trismegistus; I had rediscovered it by paying attention to my own experience as it unfolded through time.

Let me articulate this epiphany in another way — as it is so simple, too simple, really, for some; they might think it simple-minded until they truly grok that this simple idea might be what lies at the bottom of the sense of meaning in our lives; that, at least for me, without it life actually loses meaning . . .

Once again: only as we complete a cycle, do we begin to see it as a whole. At the close of a cycle, we can gather perspective on the entire time/space of that particular cycle. This indeed, is the process (long or short) that makes possible the “Aha!” experience — that moment when something which has been eluding us clicks into place: finally, we can see it whole, as it really is. Each cycle, once completed, can be fully seen and felt and leaves, as a residue, that felt sense of fullness or satisfaction which comprehending its meaning generates.

What I am saying is this: *the peculiar malaise of our age, the loss of meaning in our lives, on deep sociological, psychological and epistemological levels, may be equivalent to our loss of a conscious appreciation of the cyclical nature of time.*

When the Student Is Ready

Within a few weeks of this third epiphany, an older woman with whom I was slightly acquainted phoned to offer me a scholarship to a weekend workshop with Joseph Campbell. Picture how unlikely this scenario: in a small town in the middle of the vast desert of south central Idaho, a workshop for ten people with the renowned mythologist, Joseph Campbell! Out of the blue, I am invited, by a woman I barely know, to participate at no cost.

This student was ready, and her teacher appeared. I just had to ride my bike a few miles out to the farmhouse where the workshop was to be held.

During that marvelous two-day period, I was able to speak with Campbell alone for a few minutes, hoping that he knew astrology, because I wanted to ask him what he thought about my new insight. He was on familiar terms with astrology, he told me,

somberly. I sensed a great respect for the field in his voice, which encouraged me to go further: “What do you think about this idea?” I asked, “that *the meaning of a planet is its cycle*”?

I had been studying astrology for over three years. Alone. Both ashamed of myself for obsessing on “such nonsense” and defiant in the face of others’ ridicule. My continuing ambivalence was distracting attention from the full commitment needed to thoroughly absorb this ancient language. I had just encountered the single idea that would transform my entire world-view, my “weltanschauung.” Yet, because I was still skeptical, I needed a mirror. Campbell “happened” to be in town, and I “happened” to be invited to attend his workshop. Another synchronicity. Another miracle. My higher self called him to me, and he came.

In moments like these, when, in hindsight, I glimpse yet another shining, gossamer web linking events, I feel my heart burst with gratitude.

When I asked him my question, he paused, and then replied, with immense seriousness: “I have never heard of this idea. It is very profound.”

Needless to say, never again did I need assurance that astrology was a subject worth pursuing.

Essay

A Vision of the World-View of Astrology

Chapter 8, Part III

MY SECRET LIFE: Ten Tools for Transformation

© Ann Kreilkamp

Prolegamena

This is the third part of my attempt to introduce to the reader why and how astrology has been, for me, an extraordinary tool for transformation. I am not going to go into details, presenting how this or that life situation was illuminated by the use of astrology. That belongs in a later volume. Everything I present here is prologue. To paraphrase Kant, the title to his short work, “A Prolegamena to Any Future Metaphysics,” these three chapters on astrology function, for me, as a prolegomena to any future astrology.

Think about an alien being who had never before encountered water, but who had heard all sorts of things about water, most of them from aliens who had never encountered it either. So, when he finally was confronted with water, he had a bunch of assumptions about it that needed to be corrected. What water is as a phenomenon, how it tastes, how his body feels in it, how water pours, congeals, distills, etc. All this might both serve to correct the false and misleading ideas about water he had picked up earlier, and as preface to his actually learning how to drink or swim.

So here, I have attempted to give the reader a sense of the type of thing that astrology is, and why I find it to be of such extraordinary value, before I invite you to actually learn how to swim in its language.

Elucidating the value of astrology is not an easy task, given the bias of 20th century western culture, and given the — at worst, superstitious, and at best, superficial — understanding of astrology that pervades all but its most serious practitioners.

This final part depicting this most transformational tool is the most difficult for me to articulate. What I wish to do is to spell out my vision of the world-view of astrology. I debated whether or not to attempt it in this volume; since it is abstract, some might think it doesn't fit with the rest of the material presented. On the other hand, much of what I talk about in this book is to some extent abstract, not to mention downright confusing to anyone who expects a merely logical presentation.

Throughout the book, I spiral through many subjects, over and over, showing them in different lights, linking them in different ways. In this manner, I hope to implant in the reader a feel for the way a person who has absorbed the language of astrology actually thinks, how this way of thinking bends into continuous change, and therefore continuous exploration. It truly “blows our minds” to have our minds bent into circles and spirals. We are so used to straight lines. We feel so secure with straight lines. And yet what have we at the “end of the line” but death? No wonder we avoid death, since we *do* see it as “the end.”

Despite my penchant for investigating assumptions, as I said earlier, I do not pretend to know or to understand the deeper assumptions of astrology. Simply, the subject is too vast, and its origins lie too far back for me to ever pretend to uncover them. This, for me, as a Sagittarian, is a relief! It means I can stay in one place for awhile — can explore and explore and never penetrate its further reaches.

Since I was born with Sun, Mars, and Ascendant all in the sign of Sagittarius, if ever I did begin to fully comprehend the assumptions of astrology, my curiosity would dissolve and I would move on! Sagittarius is the long-range traveler, searching for the meaning of life. Indeed, in Sagittarius, the search for the meaning of life *is* the meaning

of life. Wherever I have already been, I want to go further. No matter how much I learn, my understanding of things rests in the void. Understanding is finite, and floats within an infinite sea of mystery.

I don't understand the sea of mystery from which astrology emerges. Nor do I understand how or why I was led, early on, from one thing to another, always searching for a way to more fully comprehend the phenomenon of my own life. Looking back now, I discover early seeds of my fascination with astrology, and see how these seeds germinated into vision.

Teilhard de Chardin and Jean Piaget

While still a senior in college, and pregnant with my first child, I was riveted by the theory of evolution — not as formulated by Darwin, wherein mutations are “random,” but by Teilhard de Chardin, for whom evolution is purposeful and meaningful, tending toward an “omega point” which he called the “noosphere,” the One Mind of collective consciousness. Many years prior to discovering astrology, this mystical interpretation of evolution had already altered my thinking, filling my imagination with visions of an ever-expanding universe, wherein consciousness is continuously catching up with creation.

Another whose vision has influenced my own is Jean Piaget, a psychologist whose “developmental epistemology” pioneered the study of the way children's minds develop over time. Piaget understood the changes children's perceptions undergo as occurring within a dynamic, ordered process. The child, he said, goes through a process wherein he or she is sometimes at one with the world, and at other times seemingly under great stress. This alteration is accounted for by the formation and subsequent breakdown of what Piaget named “stages of equilibration,” each of which becomes more and more differentiated and complex. The final stage, he said, forms when the child reaches the age of 12, when she or he becomes capable of thinking logically, like an adult.

According to Piaget, by the time a child is 12 years old, she or he has learned to re-present the world outside within his own mind. Ideas now substitute for objects, which are combined and recombined according to the rules of formal logic.

Piaget's theory was both descriptive and prescriptive. He assumed that not only was this the way adults *do* think, this is the way they *should* think. Logic, one might say, is the final word. This is not surprising. Piaget is a product of the same culture he was attempting to describe.

When, years after absorbing Piaget, I began to study astrology, I discovered that Piaget's final stage is equivalent to the 12-year Jupiter cycle in astrology. Expansive, generous Jupiter, the "ruler" of philosophical Sagittarius, is known as the "Greater Benefic." It makes us feel good by connecting us to a greater whole. The first "whole" to which we connect is the culture into which we were born. Since the meaning of the planet is its cycle, we can say that the completion of the first 12-year Jupiter cycle signifies that the 12-year-old child has incorporated the values and perspectives of the culture of which she or he happens to be a member. Thus, to look at Piaget's theory astrologically, is to relativize it. Piaget's logic is *not* necessarily the adult point of view; it is rather, the point-of-view-of-western-culture.

If one thinks of human learning as developing through stages, and compares Piaget's developmental stages with astrology's planetary cycles, then what immediately stands out is the fact that there are planetary cycles *beyond* Jupiter, at least one of which can be fully incorporated (and thus considered a "developmental stage"), namely Saturn, with its cycle of approximately 29.5 years. And what is even more interesting, there are (at least) three more planetary cycles which last long, indeed longer than our lifetimes, namely Uranus (84 years), Neptune (165 years) and Pluto (248 years). With the possible exception of Uranus, these cycles can never be known to us, because we do not live long enough to experience their fullness. This means that when these planets activate natal planets within our birthcharts, their action is beyond rational control, being essentially unpredictable (Uranus), mysterious (Neptune), and destructive/regenerative (Pluto). Within the domains of the three outer planets, the much vaunted "logic" of the so-called "adult" western mind has no application.

Given my earlier absorption of the ideas of de Chardin and Piaget, once I had been struck by my third epiphany, that the meaning of a given planetary energy is its cycle, a new world-view arose within my imagination. This world-view uses the symbolic system

of astrology to extend Piaget's developmental theory of incorporating meaningful conceptual structures, and it represents a chronological structure for de Chardin's interpretation of evolution.

Why "Vision"?

I have been describing precursors to this "vision of a new world-view based on astrology," because I wish to lead the reader up to the vision the way I was led up to it, step by step, so that, when I finally describe it, it will seem not only easy to grasp, but obvious. On the other hand, the reader may well be asking, why do I wish to describe this vision, why does it matter so much to me? What would be lost without it? Again, my answer has to be that I am Sagittarian, a "the philosopher of the zodiac." For me, what counts is the overall perspective within which I see everything. Unless I do have an overall operating perspective, then nothing that I do or think or feel makes any sense. Unlike many people, I cannot live in a world without asking questions of it, questions about meaning. And since giving meaning to something seems to be equated with perceiving it as a whole, I ask about the whole, its meaning, or structure, or gestalt — and how, inside that whole, the parts settle into their rightful place.

This discussion may seem too abstract for some readers, who are used to looking at the world piece-meal, and asking questions about what lies within the world, rather than questions about the world-as-a-whole. Perhaps it would help to make the place and importance of philosophy in life more concrete.

Imagine yourself on your death bed, needing to complete what Elizabeth Kubler-Ross calls your "unfinished business" before you die. We all know about this business. Perhaps your father or mother died before you could forgive him or her for whatever he or she did to you that left you crippled emotionally. Or perhaps your lover died before you could show how much you loved her or him. You know how this hurts. How awful, how incomplete you feel, when you know it is too late for . . . for what? What does it mean to say we have unfinished business, and what is this need of ours to "finish" something?

Well, think of any good story. What we call a “story” is not just a series of random (or even chronological) events strung together. In order to be emotionally and/or intellectually satisfying, a story has to have what can be perceived as a beginning, a middle, and an end. The end of the story, if consciously appreciated, renders the whole story meaningful. We understand the beginning and the middle parts of the story in a new way, as a result of how it ended. Once it ends, we “get the point of the story,” and can work to understand it as a whole.

At the end of this life we are at the end of our own particular embodied story. It is not unusual for one who is dying to want to complete the story by coming to peace with his or her unfinished business. One might say that on our death beds, we naturally become philosophers, wanting to see our world-as-a-whole.

Now think of a “world-view” (or a paradigm, as we call it these days), as a huge, abstract, collective story, allowing for the possibility of many and various individual stories within it. Each particular story, without our knowing it (since the assumptions of a world-view function automatically and unconsciously), conforms to the hidden rules of the larger, more abstract story. In our culture, for example, with its linear view of time, we don’t like to think about death, because we view death as the “end of the line.”

When we are forced to think about death, we tell stories about it; for example, about the time when we almost died and “our whole life ran in front of us, in the space of a few seconds, just like a movie.” For those few seconds, during which we presumed we were near death, the entire cycle of our life was recapitulated. Why? Why does our unconscious give this movie to us? As the person on her or his deathbed consciously enters into a philosophical mode of thinking, so does our unconscious, when faced with a sudden, unexpected near-death experience, insist that we enter that philosophical mode quickly and intensely, by heaving our whole life story up for review.

I notice the same thing sometimes happens with astrological cycles. The meaningfulness of, for example, a two-year cycle (the Mars cycle) will be recapitulated at the end of that cycle in, say, a 24-hour period. When this happens to me, I am instantly alerted; I think: “There is something about this 24-hour period; the day is charged, somehow, with meaning, what?” Then, if I look up the astrology of the day, I might find .

.. “Aha! The meaning of this day mirrors the meaning of the larger, two-year cycle which is now completing.”

So, there seems to be something in the very nature of the human psyche — or of consciousness itself — which yearns for meaning, and which gains that meaning at the end of cycles — often through a shortened cycle of recapitulation — whatever the original cycle’s size. From one short day to one long life, what we perceive as meaningful is gathered from cyclic wholes.

Now, instead of a cycle, think of a circle, which one might liken to a dynamic that has already unfolded in time. Rather than a time period (the dynamic cycle), we now have a space period (the structured circle), and a world-view can be likened to that “space”: it is of a certain size, and it allows certain possibilities, certain stories, and not others, to be told within it; we can live our lives in certain ways, and not others, within the space of any particular world-view.

When I spent that year investigating my assumptions, deconstructing my (our) world-view, I was left with nothing, no way to make sense of my experiences. My “paradigm” for making sense had been destroyed. What was next? As a human being, I needed to have an overall structure through which to see the world. Like a set of glasses, a world-view functions as a lens with a certain refraction; change the refraction, and the world appears a different place.

The philosophical sign of Sagittarius is one of twelve 30° signs of the circular zodiac, signifying a certain phase of action and comprehension in the world. All 12 phases are equally important, and all of them necessary to complete the whole. In 20th century western culture of materialism, however, the way Sagittarius usually manifests is through mainline religious doctrines and other fundamentalist beliefs. There is seldom the play of ideas, the open-ended questions about value and meaning which the evolved Sagittarian hungers for. Since I happen to be Sagittarian, at a certain level of my own development I naturally began to question the overall philosophical structure within which I was operating, and found that it was too limiting for my evolving taste. That world-view felt like a static two-dimensional grid, whereas what I was seeking was expansive, multidimensional.

Please bear with me now, while I (finally, after this rambling preamble) attempt to flesh in with words what I live inside of every day, but which most people have never imagined. We don't imagine it partly because it is so abstract, but mostly, we don't imagine it *because our minds have not been trained to work that way*. Looking back now, I realize that by investigating my own assumptions, I de-constructed the world-view into which I was enculturated and thereby opened to the possibility of receiving a vision of this alternative world-view.

Please think about what follows as one possible conceptual structure for understanding human evolutionary possibilities. And in thinking about this structure, please remember to ask, not, "Is it true?" (since "truth" cannot be justified, or proven). As the philosopher Sir Karl Popper said about scientific theories, ask instead: "Is it rich? Is it creative? Does it lead to further questions? Can it help us to live more fully and harmoniously — and if so, how?"

A Vision of the World-View of Astrology

Imagine: That the old mystic maxim describes our reality: As Above, so Below; As Within, so Without.

Imagine: That an earth-bound human can learn to psychically and experientially attune to the cycles of the planets of the solar system.

Imagine: That these planets, in appearing to surround Earth, function as a set of both collectively archetypal and specifically individual timers, pulsing out moments of quickening — both in our individual lives, and in the life of humanity.

Imagine: That the universe is continuously expanding — so that its center is everywhere, and its circumference, nowhere. If this is so, then each and every entity that can be said to be "born at a certain time and place" stands in the exact center of the universe.

Imagine: Each individual, standing in the center of the universe, surrounded by a series of concentric rings representing the orbits of the planets of our solar system. At the time of this individual's birth, each planet occupied a certain degree in its nearly

circular path around the sun (as seen from Earth). Together, these planets created a geometrical configuration that is unique for the individual born at that moment. This (circular) map in space also functions as a (cyclical) calendar in time — of the unique rhythmic unfolding of the laws of that individual's life as a process.

Imagine: That each individual's life process configures into multiple and interpenetrating time/space meanings which are generated by the pulsing of planetary cycles of varying lengths through their circuits and back again, going round and round. These various cycles are constantly creating ever-new geometrical patterns, each of which develops further what has gone before, and refers back in time to the birth pattern as the constant which, throughout life, is continuously unfolding.

Imagine: that the soul of each individual chooses his or her moment of birth, the birth pattern most attuned to the developmental needs of the soul in this incarnation.

Imagine: that each individual, moment by moment, continuously chooses whether or not to act in accordance with the divine plan of his nature as chosen by the soul, and as signified by the geometrical pattern in the birth chart.

Imagine: were each individual to consciously act in harmony with her or his own soul's growth, that the planetary "music of the spheres" would be duplicated, here, on Earth. Each of us, acting in accordance with the divine plan of our own unique soul, moves in harmony with all others.

The implications of this "new" (very old) world-view are revolutionary. They include the following:

- 1.** Since every entity born is both central to the universe and utterly singular and individual, then everyone born is both equal and special. The rule always holds: only one entity can be born at a particular time and place. Even twins, born via caesarian section, occupy different spaces in their bodies, and are usually lifted from the womb at least a few seconds apart.

- 2.** Since the planets are always in motion, both their positions and relationships to each other are always changing, as ordered by the laws of geometry and planetary

motion. There is no security or certainty or stability, no “bottom line” outside the pattern imprinted at birth by the Self. For each of us, *the Self stands at the center of the universe — expressing through its original pattern that unfolds naturally according to its own internal laws*. Creation is continuous, ever-flowing through the still point in the center of the Self.

Indeed, each expanding human is a species unto him or herself. Since each human being is utterly unique, there is no one upon whom anyone can model the growth of his or her Self. Only by looking within, and forming a relationship with that inner world, can we discover who we are, where we are going, what we are here for. We can no longer compare ourselves to others; all we can do is live up to the potential within ourselves, to which we alone have the key.

3. Since the individual stands at the center of the universe surrounded by a series of concentric rings which represent the orbits of the planets (from the 29 day cycle of the Moon out to the 248 year cycle of Pluto), and since each planet’s space/time sphere is a dimension of awareness incorporated through the process of experiencing its full cycle, then *growth beyond physical maturity is defined in terms of expanding awareness*. The cycles of the longer-cycled planets, from Saturn (30 years) on out to Pluto (248 years) represent these larger dimensions of awareness. Continuous growth in awareness is both natural and inevitable for those who are truly learning from their own experiences.

4. If the cycle of any planet is its meaning, and if we cannot understand a cycle until we have completed it for the first time, then there are certain planetary cycles which operate in our lives in an entirely different manner than others. These “outer planets” are Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto, and their cycles are, respectively, 84, 165, and 248 years. *The processes of evolution and transformation via individual, generational and collective life are symbolized by the cycles of the outer planets*. (Some of us do complete the cycle of Uranus, but not until very late in our lives. Conceivably, if advances in understanding the process of aging lead to a longer life-span, then some people who complete the Uranus cycle will have time to *consciously put into practice* what this cycle represents.)

Since we cannot complete the cycles of the outer planets, we do not understand what those cycles mean, what experiential whole each of them signifies. Our experience of them is always fragmentary, partial. We can never learn to totally control and focus these energies, use them for our own purposes. We can only surrender to them, and hopefully, attune to them — either consciously or unconsciously.

These outer planets, with natures greater than our own, are the sources of genius and madness, of whatever magic, miracles, mystery we accept into our lives.

5. Whereas the above implications of the world-view of astrology focus on individuality and diversity, astrology also accounts for community or unity. This happens at every level. For example, two people born the same day do share certain similarities — since most of the planets (all but the Moon) do not move faster than one degree per day. People born the same year share characteristics of planets with longer cycles, from Jupiter and Saturn on out. And generational astrology has to do with periods during which outer planets occupy certain signs. (For example, the “Pluto in Leo” generation includes all those born between the years 1938 and 1958; except for short retrograde periods, “Uranus in Gemini” generation includes all those born between May 1942 through August 1948.) Sign placements of outer planets describe the unconscious urges and attitudes of generations, and transits of outer planets through the signs describe epochs in the political and cultural life of humanity.

The most profound unifying idea is the central axiom of astrology — As above, So below. This mystic axiom connects our lives on Earth with a greater whole, the solar system of this small sun which is itself connected to a greater whole since it is also a star within the milky way galaxy, and so on out to infinity.

Astrology honors the central question of philosophy, namely how to simultaneously account for both Unity and Diversity, The One and The Many. The Many consists of equal and diverse Ones, each imprinted by the planetary pattern present during its date and time of birth at a certain point on Earth. Each small One is a unique being unto itself with its own set of laws; and all Ones are evolving according to the greater Law of One: the interpenetrating field of the ever-cycling planetary energies in the solar system, and its cycling beyond into the galaxy, and so on into infinity.

This astrological world-view includes uniqueness, since we are all born into our own unique time and space, but not separation, since we are all living within the same field of interpenetrating energies; nor is there judgment, since everyone is unique and no one can be compared with anyone else.

This concludes what I can articulate of this vision of the new world-view I have gained through my absorption of the language of astrology. I realize that this vision is difficult to grasp, that it tends to make one feel as if one is floating, swirling, ungrounded. This is not surprising, since it describes a universe in constant motion, constant change, with no “bottom line.” We are used to bottom lines — in economics, in epistemology, everywhere! Like our linear view of time, our assumption of the “bottom line” falls under the rubric of the straight line, with the “bottom line” being either the lowest run of a ladder of straight parallel lines, or the lower end point of a single line. This rubric operates wherever the structure of things is conceived as a hierarchy. One might say that the hierarchy, the bottom line, clock time — all these belong to the particular space of our “world-view,” the greater story of our culture.

Through astrology we surrender to a different kind of world-view, or greater story. A story in which the universe is in constant motion, and the center of the universe is everywhere, its circumference nowhere. In order to surrender to this new world-view, we must center ourselves. We no longer need a bottom line, nor do we need justification or proof. For our security, our safety lies in the center of the Self that stands at the still point of the turning world.

Grounding the Vision in Experience

This vision of the circular/cyclical way the world works has ramifications beyond astrology. For example, it gives me a methodology for pushing through my own tendency to polarize with others, and thus to create conflict with them.

I discovered this some years ago, when I wrote an essay on an astrological topic, first presenting my own view, and then comparing and contrasting it with the view of another. I didn't consciously realize that by doing this I set up a polarity with him. It felt

so natural to do it this way. So real. So definite and clear. No wonder it felt natural; it was how I had been trained.

In that essay, it was as if I was standing on one point, my “position,” and looking across to another point, finger cocked like a child using her hand to mimic a pointing gun.

Luckily, with my dear friend Claudia’s help, I threw the essay away. I caught myself in time to not make enemies. To not get trapped once again in that polarized place, that limited space where I distract myself from presenting what I see. Instead of allowing my imagination to proceed further, I had been getting caught up in defending my position in the face of real or imagined attack.

Here is my take on the underlying motivation behind our culture’s psychological/sociological mechanism for “making enemies”:

When I begin to describe the further reaches of what I see, at some point I grow afraid. What I fear is infinity, endlessness, continuously opening space. (Review that classic nightmare, “falling through space.”)

In response to fear, my mind contracts, to a level at which it feels secure. First, I posit a point in space where I “take my stand.” From here, I look out and create (project) another point, at a certain near or far distance from the point upon which I am standing. And then I say “this . . . is not *that*.” This point is not that point. I define myself through what I am not. I am *not* like him. He becomes my “opposite.” We are polarized, and competitive. “There is only room for one at the top” (of the ladder, the hierarchy). We are in a battle for survival, the “survival of the fittest,” and only one of us “wins.”

This time, immediately prior to the whole sorry cycle of conflict beginning again, I caught myself preparing to do it and recognized where it would inevitably lead.

I create my own reality. In order to change that reality, I must first change my mind, by enlarging my vision. I do this by considering the psychological/epistemological mechanism of projection and its hostile repercussions in behavior from within the perspective of geometry.

Thinking visually, I can view my “opponent” as merely the other end point of a line that I have just created through positing a point across from my own.

This line, in turn can be visualized as the diameter of a circle, the size of which is determined by the length of the line, by how near or far away I originally posited my “opponent” to be.

Now I have created a circle around myself, where formerly there was open space. I have created a circle and I am caught inside — without realizing it.

Whereas before I was afraid of openness, now I am afraid of its opposite — claustrophobia! I seek a way out, want to break out, to punch my way through by destroying the point opposite to the one upon which I think I am standing.

In reality, I am no longer standing upon this point, which is now a point upon the circumference of the circle. Somehow, I have jumped to a point exactly halfway to the other side. I am standing in the middle of the circle now. I must be. Otherwise I wouldn't feel so enclosed, so surrounded, on all sides by potential enemies . . .

So, in order to first visualize and then resolve this self-created conflict, I first visualize the initial polarity geometrically, as a line, which in turn becomes the diameter of a circle. The third step is to consciously realize that I have placed myself “squarely” in the center of that line, that circle.

As long as I stand in the center of the circle without awareness of being there, I feel surrounded, enclosed, claustrophobic, even paranoid. Once I recognize that I am standing precisely there, and that this circle is one that I created through the psychological mechanism of projection, my experience of the circle changes utterly.

Now I feel myself in the center, equidistant from all points on the circumference of this particular circle I have created to “orient” myself.

As my goal, in childhood, was intellectual certainty and emotional security (the “bottom line”), so now the goal of both head and heart is that of centering. As I ground myself in the precise center of the circle I have created, I find I am standing upon the very ground I was seeking all along.

Standing in the center, I sense the circumference of the circle I have created as a membrane, rather than a wall. It breathes, it pulses, vibrates in resonance to the beat of my heart. Rather than being something I must break through to once again express my freedom, I can now rest centered within the circle, as one more form through which I both orient myself and direct energy.

For I sense, in myself, the capacity to create an infinite number of concentric circles, both larger and smaller than this one. The circles radiate in all directions. The circles are frameworks or structures, paradigms within which I “make sense” of perception.

Each of these circles can be visualized as a globe or sphere or dimension of awareness. Each one contains an infinity of points, both upon its outer and inner skins, and within the space which it encloses. Even in a limited space there are no limits. *Between any two points, there is always a third.* Which means that between any two points there is space, which itself blooms into infinity. (In mathematics, these spaces are known as “_____’s Cuts.”)

In order to bypass my old habit of limiting my perception by tying it down to work as merely one end of a polarized point of view, and then creating conflict, I recognize myself as the center of a continuously expanding universe.

Each of us, as unique and singular individuals, stands centered, radiating outwards from the center of a universe with no outer limits, no circumference. Each of us as the eye of our own storm, the stillpoint of our own turning world. We are creative agents, attuning ourselves to and expressing ourselves through larger and larger spheres of awareness — forever.

We are all creators. We all breathe the same air. Our hearts beat to a universal biological rhythm, a rhythm entrained with other more subtle rhythms, all of them in concert as the universal harmony, the music of the spheres, the song of ourselves. We are one. We are many. We are the one in the many. All polarities dissolve in the swelling sea of infinite space.

ADDENDUM

A future Appendix to this collection will feature numerous articles, columns, letters to editors (and responses, often nasty and incredulous) on or about astrology published in various local newspapers and magazines chronologically during my adult years in Idaho and Wyoming (1974 - 2003). These were the three decades of my “second Saturn cycle,” when I individuated as a unique person, offering hard-won, joyful mastery of this extraordinary language to the public professionally as consultant, teacher, writer, and conference presenter.

All of this extra material is also introductory: each public notice was done in an effort to help the general public begin to transform the usual assumption that astrology was utter nonsense.

Keep in mind that computer generated ephemerides for astrologers did not begin until 1976. And that open-source astrological software to construct charts was not offered until the early 1990s.

1976 happens to be when I formally launched my career as a professional astrologer, interpreting charts for others. But in order to do this, I had to painstakingly construct each chart by hand. Which meant that I, always terrible at math, was so determined to learn the language that I actually mastered the required math, including logarithms.

Each natal chart took me about an hour to figure out; drawing a beautiful colorful chart on special paper for the client took another hour.

Astrologers, back then, were not a dime a dozen! Nor could we rely on computer generated data and “interpretation.” Rather, each of us had to undergo an extended apprenticeship, not just to learn how to speak the language, but how to generate charts, by hand.

The actual process of constructing each chart for that particular hour and minute of that particular day and year in that specific location — first the houses, then placing each planet, one by one, in its correct house and noticing its growing configurations with other planets and the two axes of the chart — was itself, though tedious, both an exciting discovery process and a contemplative meditation. Planet by planet, I was learning to absorb and integrate this ancient, venerable language that links Above to Below and Inside to Outside.

All that was so long ago, that, should the internet go down, I would no longer be able to set up charts. Thus would I reluctantly dispense with one more aspect of my long and unusually fertile life.