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What is Astrology – Science or Magic?

Astrology as Science

To decide whether astrology works, it is necessary to define how it is supposed to work; and to do that, we need to know what astrology is supposed to be in the first place. And so, in the wake of Chapter XI, we are brought at last to ask what astrology is. Is it the expression of some ubiquitous law—like the law of gravity? If it is, then the discovery of the mechanisms by which it works can only be a matter of time, and likewise it is inevitable that science will eventually recognise that astrology works and welcome it back to the faculty of respectable studies.

This is the perspective of some astrologers, including Pat Harris—whose research into the medical application of astrology was described in Chapter VI.

Q: Do you think that scientific research (if done properly) could potentially be used to validate all of astrology, or only a small amount?

Pat Harris: I believe that all things in the universe are comprehensible to us given enough time. I mean that history shows that what we do not understand in one age, we can fully master/control in another—certain forms of disease, the very nature of disease and infection itself and the control of certain types of disease such as polio and measles through vaccination programmes.

Superstition and magic evaporate in the face of knowledge that develops, over time, into wisdom (despite, in some cases, interim abuse of that knowledge). In fact, I think it inevitable that we will come to understand how and why astrology works eventually, when we have evolved scientifically to a level where we are equipped to recognise the processes behind apparently mysterious events.

Another advocate of astrology-as-science is Dennis Elwell, who (a propos of his predictions, covered in Chapter VII) commented:

Dennis Elwell: With so many predictions being ventured, worldwide, the chances are that somebody will get it right sometime. So you can't take any particular comfort when your turn comes around. The only merit is to be able to get it right consistently, because your methods are reliable, which means you can show everybody else how to get it right consistently. Given our pretensions, it is crazy that we cannot reach a consensus on what astrology says, rather than what this particular astrologer says. *We are here in the domain of testable science* [my italics]. Astrologers who insist that astrology is merely divination are indistinguishable from the Tarot readers and rune casters—my vision for the future of astrology is something altogether more tangible and objective.

Dennis Elwell and Pat Harris distinguish between 'science' on the one hand, and 'divination' (or 'magic') on the other. They consider astrology to be a science—with the rider that the partial state of our knowledge currently prevents it from being appreciated as such. This view of things is easy enough to understand (compared, that is, to the view of astrology as magic); astrology is like the law of gravity (or, perhaps, a combination of several such laws), so its workings can in principle be discerned and measured by humanity, and therefore—when or if that happens—it will be possible to formulate reliable and consistent techniques.

There is little more to add, if astrology is viewed in this way (as a long-lost cousin of gravity). Arguments in favour of astrology as a science will need to address criticisms of the kind raised by the Researchers in Chapters IX and X—either by presenting new data, or by criticising the methodology employed for testing, and suggesting more relevant techniques (as, for instance, Pat Harris does in Chapters VI and XI).

As the Researchers remark in Chapter X, investigation of parallels in the lives of time twins seems a most promising way of circumventing many of the problems encountered when research methods are applied to astrology. It is curious that relatively little work has been put into this topic. Appendix 3 contains contributions from Professor Peter Roberts and an astrologer who is the mother of twins; it would be good to think that these two different angles on time twin research might stimulate further investigation.

Astrology as Magic

The view that astrology is an objective, natural law (like gravity) is not the only way in which astrologers see their subject. The division of astrology into 'natural' and 'judicial' has been revisited since Nicholas Campion introduced it in Chapter XIII. The 'astrology-as-science' view is the view of natural astrology; the alternative to this approach is judicial astrology, also known as 'divinatory astrology'. To point up the difference between this and astrology-as-science, here are two quotations from Geoffrey Cornelius and Maggie Hyde, co-founders of the Company of Astrologers—a group that describes what it teaches as 'divinatory astrology':

Geoffrey Cornelius: In many ways I accept St Augustine's statement, where he attacks astrology and says, "When astrologers give answers that are true, it is not because of the technique, because there is nothing in that technique; it is from some other agency that the answer is true." I think there's a great perception in that particular line of criticism of astrology.

Symbolic perception appears to me to be a natural human faculty, or faculty of mind; and all the technical superstructures that then are built up around it advance that perception not one inch. It's like saying, "How can you improve your sight?" One sees, and everything we do around that might complicate the act of seeing.

Maggie Hyde: You have to practise your [astrological] work *as if* it were objective, and about other people and other things in the world, but every now and again that objective position is actually cut through by something else, by some other order of thing. If you notice it, you suddenly find that the symbols don't just address that objective thing in the world, but they address you and your relationship with it. Or—even more spooky in a way—they are talking, not about that thing in the world, but about you and where you are coming from, and what you are up to, in something else quite different in your life. I discuss this in detail, with examples, in 'Jung and Astrology'.

When symbols do that, I think you have to be open to the realisation that the symbols are dead things, and it's our own active imagination, read into them, that is the game of astrology... *almost all* the influential texts that we have had in this century, and our practice of astrology now, do not acknowledge this other order, *where the astrology is about your spiritual path*. The criticism of psychological astrology in my book is that it still assumes that the horoscope is a map of the psyche, but that I'm not going to find *my* psyche, or my latest love-affair, or my financial problems, in *your* map.

When that happens, there's a resistance to things being *shown* to you that are out of your control and that have sprung up. Who wants to feel that they're not master or mistress of the task at hand? So when it suddenly springs back on you, and shows you something you didn't realise you were doing, because you were unconscious of it, it's shocking. So of course people don't want to include that in the game.

With this, Maggie Hyde introduces one possible explanation for the resistance some astrologers feel to the 'judicial astrology' view. One motivation for taking up the subject (mentioned by Robert Zoller in second chapter) is a desire to become more powerful, to take control of one's life; it's not easy, then, to admit that the power and control one seeks is, ultimately, illusory. Several astrologers admitted to having resisted the recognition that they are not, finally, in control:

Christeen Skinner: There is always something that cannot be quantified, which is just not measurable. For me, with the work that I'm doing now, it is exasperating that I cannot tell you what that immeasurable thing is—I can't even find a word for it! But I have moved on to the point now where I can acknowledge that that thing exists. Until a couple of years ago I would have wanted to deny it altogether.

Robert Zoller: I've been bitten at one time or another by the same parasite that bites those people who think that astrology can be reduced to a mathematical science. I have to confess that, even now, there is something I find appealing about that idea. That which is appealing about it, I think, comes down to inflation—the idea that "I can do something without anybody

else permitting me to do it, without subordinating myself to anybody or anything." It's the prelude to a song that goes to the tune, 'The Hell with Everybody Else'.

That attitude has existed for a long time, and it's the demon behind our science essentially. I think it always falls flat on its face, because there is a faculty of the human mind that is a kind of wild card. Maybe it's a faculty of more than the human mind; maybe a faculty of the way *being* operates as a whole. Maybe it's GK Chesterton's 'God as Anarchist'—he wrote a wonderful book called 'The Man Who Was Thursday', which is about a band of anarchists. A cop infiltrates this band, and finds out that it is run by some fat fellow who is always a step ahead of the game. The fat fellow turns out to be God. So GK Chesterton is portraying God as the ultimate anarchist. The justification for that point of view, in my opinion, is that although there are laws of the universe, sometimes for seemingly inexplicable reasons these laws don't work.

With this, an important distinction starts to emerge between divinatory astrology and the law of gravity. One of gravity's most charming features is its reliability. When you get up to go to work, you don't have to look out of the window to see whether gravity is working today or not. Yet exponents of divinatory astrology such as Maggie Hyde and Geoffrey Cornelius, and Robert Zoller (who defines his position as somewhere in the middle of the judicial-natural astrology divide) talk about astrology as something that cannot be *absolutely* relied on; as something whose working is, somehow, dependent on the observer, and which may even behave arbitrarily from time to time, as if to keep humanity's hubris in check.

This picture (of astrology as an art touched by divine anarchy) is not an easy thing to make any kind of sense of, but it is essential to an understanding of how many astrologers think about their subject. The next few pages will be devoted to the pursuit of that understanding. A good starting point might be the anthropic principle.

As Below, So Above

The anthropic principle* is a theory belonging to what some have dubbed 'postmodern cosmology'. There are variants of the theory; all of them link humanity to the universe in some way, and the bolder ones make such statements as these:

- That the universe is as it is so that humanity can exist
- That the universe exists because it is observed by intelligent observers

The theory is a subject of controversy in scientific circles—hardly surprising, since its conclusions can sound more theological than scientific. What is not disputed is that there is a major mystery at the core of this universe; the principle represents the 'best guess'

* See, e.g., Collins & Hawking, 1973; Newton, 1997, p.80-3.

of some scientists to resolve it. To the physicist, the mystery appears like this:

— Why is the strong nuclear force as strong as it is? (If it were weaker, stable nuclei would be rare and in consequence hydrogen would be the only element, making it impossible for life as we know it to evolve.)

— Why does gravity have precisely the strength that it has? (If it had been stronger or weaker, stars and galaxies would not have developed as they have and, again, life could not have evolved.)

The anthropic principle has, therefore, evolved as an attempt to answer the questions "Why are things the way they are?" and "Why do we exist?" The suggestion is that, somehow, there is an interaction, a reciprocity, between the universe and humanity. This principle is an essential foundation for the judicial astrology model. A useful next step in the attempt to characterise this elusive view of the world is to compare the 'postmodern cosmology' of the anthropic principle with a pre-modern cosmology that also attempted to answer the question "Why are things the way they are?" Robert Hand describes this as providing the philosophical ground for astrology:

Robert Hand: I don't know whether you are aware of it—most people don't know the full statement at the beginning of the Emerald Tablet. It's usually cited as 'As above, so below.' The full statement goes:

'As it is above, so it is below;

As it is below, so it is above;

In order to accomplish the miracle of the one thing.'*

What that tells us is: we not only get created; we *create*. But it's not what psychologists would say—projections. *This stuff is really there*. In any meaningful definition of existence, that stuff is real. It's only if you narrow your definition of existence down to that which can be weighed and measured by laboratory instruments that [our creation] ceases being there. But by those criteria we cease being there also.

I think consciousness enters into a dialogue with the apparently external (it may be external, but I'm going to call it the apparently external) and creates, with that apparently external, a series of language systems. And these language systems, like the language you and I use with each other, begin to determine the experience of a phenomena. But it isn't quite the same as projecting, because the 'apparently external' has an equally powerful role in determining the nature of the language. What makes this different is, *there is no one correct language*. Just as you can say the same thing in French, German, English, Italian, Chinese, Japanese—more or less—you can say the same thing in different languages of this kind. These are what the Renaissance called 'natural languages'—the languages of nature. They would have thought they

* cf Copenhagen, 1992; for an historical overview of hermetic magic and philosophy, see Baigent & Leigh, 1997.

were wholly external. I would say that it arises out of this dialectic between consciousness within and consciousness without.

So that when we forcefully create, collectively, a construct, that construct becomes a part of the forming of our experience, and we get a feedback loop going. Now, can any construct be created? The answer is no, only some constructs can be created—maybe a large number, but it's finite. And these are determined: (a) by the structure of human consciousness; and (b) by the structure of nature—or 'the apparently external'.

Robert Hand's explanation of how astrology works implies that there can not be one uniquely right way of interpreting a chart; if astrology works at all, it works in multiple ways (though not, as he points out, an infinite number of ways). Different systems of astrology (such as western and Vedic) may therefore claim to be different fingers pointing at the same moon; and the complexity that can appear to astrology's critics as evidence against it, is—from this perspective—inevitable. Mike Harding makes a related point:

Mike Harding: I think astrology is infinitely complex, I think life is infinitely complex. If astrology claims to mirror life, then it will have life's complexity.

Astrology gives us a number of accounts of the human being. For me, astrology is very much a language; it can describe things that other languages can't do, it brings things together that for other people are completely separate. Astrology's usefulness is that it does bring things together, and does describe.

There isn't a language of any kind that can step outside of the world and perceive everything from some neutral position. I think that's a vanity, which some astrologers might have—I don't know. Some philosophies have had that vanity in the past, some therapies have had that vanity. But there isn't an objective position, we can't step outside our world and look at it. We can see pictures of it, and I think the different astrological techniques are better and worse *glimpses* of our world, taking in different points of reference—in just the same way, we may look at somebody's life, and they may talk about their waking experiences or they may talk about their dreams. The dreams are them, of course, in a different world—we're talking about different kinds of experiences. We can talk about parents and find fragmented examples of our self in their interactions, or we can talk about our world and see how we have adopted the values and the culture in which we live. So we get glimpses of our self in our world or in our parents or in our family, or in the ideas we have. The different techniques within astrology—looking at the natal chart of the country, or one's parents, or a relationship, or an aspect of our chart (like looking closely at midpoints or harmonic aspects)—all present different kinds of pictures of ourselves, and for me the value of it is whether somebody finds your picture useful at that particular time in their life.

We are interconnected; I think this is the central message of astrology. We

are together with the world all the time. It may be hard, sometimes, to feel it—but I do think that's how it is, and we are all products of our collective background and culture, it's embedded in us.

Rituals and Reductionism

It is now time to revisit an objection to judicial astrology. In response to the suggestion that divinatory (or judicial) astrology might not be susceptible to scientific testing, the Researchers' comment was:

Researchers: [This] view is hard to understand. It is like saying we don't know how gravity works, therefore we cannot test the fall of apples. The issue is whether the astrology ritual works better than a control ritual, e.g. by providing new information or by improving self-esteem. Much is testable here.

Their point is that, even if astrology can not be reduced to a set of laws capable of being tested, if it works for individual astrologers then it should be possible to test it by getting individual astrologers to do whatever they do in a test situation, and then evaluate their results (this is the methodology of the Vernon Clark tests, for instance). Since such tests have been performed many times and have not produced convincing results, the conclusion still has to be drawn that astrology fails under circumstances where it would be expected to perform.

Does the case for a type of astrology that cannot be tested collapse at this point? In order to evaluate that, it will be useful to look into the implications of an interconnected universe (the kind of thing to which Robert Hand and Mike Harding refer) a little more. A useful way into this will be to consider reductionism.

Reductionism is the approach of explaining a thing by breaking it down into smaller units. This is a necessary step in many scientific procedures, but it is sometimes considered that, having found it to be useful in certain cases, science has taken it to be applicable in all cases. The objection to it was neatly put by PW Anderson: "The ability to reduce everything to simple fundamental laws does not imply the ability to start from those laws and reconstruct the universe." (Anderson, 1972, Norretranders, 1998 p.356.) I can analyse the atoms of my car forever, but this will not tell me why it won't start in the mornings; when a complex system functions, its functioning involves elements that cannot be understood in terms of the simple elements. The assumption that it should be possible to take astrology apart, investigate the parts and find out how it works, is sometimes seen as the start of astrology's loss of credibility in this scientific era:

Bernadette Brady: The big problem astrology has had is that it's the only 'science' (in inverted commas) that wouldn't go over to reductionism. You couldn't do it, because if you went over to orthodox science (I think of it more

as reductionism)—well, it can't take it. The very centre standing stone of astrology is the interconnectedness of things, so it can't say that you are totally isolated and that's it. It can't!

There are several issues that could be discussed under the heading of reductionism; some have already been raised in the interview with the Researchers in Chapter XI—particularly those centred on the complexity of an astrological chart. Interesting as those issues may be, it may be more relevant to the matter in hand to consider a different form of reductionism—one that tends to be overlooked when evaluations of astrology are considered.

Since astrology is done by astrologers, to test and evaluate it without considering the mental state and motivation of the astrologer is reductionistic, insofar as it excludes an integral part of the system through which astrological interpretation is achieved—at least, in the 'judicial astrology' frame of reference.

When astrologers take part in tests to evaluate the validity of astrology, the question they are actually being asked is, "Does astrology work?" This is problematic for two reasons:

1. There is a logical paradox in asking astrology whether astrology works (to open the paradox, imagine receiving the answer 'no');
2. If the astrologer takes the question seriously, they doubt astrology whilst using astrology. The suggestion is that this doubt can, in itself, prevent astrology from working.

A parallel for the neo-Platonic philosopher would have been to question whether the gods existed. Iamblichus rejected the question: "...It is not proper to grant this, as if it might not be granted, nor to admit it as ambiguous... nor are we worthy thus to explore it, as if we had sufficient authority to approve or reject it. For we are comprehended in it..." (Taylor, 1997, p.23/Ch.3.)

The argument, applied to astrology, is this: astrology is possible because everything is interconnected. Since 'everything' must include the astrologer, it is inconsistent to imagine that their mental attitude (for instance the presence, or absence, of doubt) will not influence a reading. Under judicial astrology, the astrologer does not discern the workings of the cosmos in an objective way; they can gain insight into specific things and events, but cannot look on the universe from outside (as a creator God might) and report on how it all works—whether, for instance, astrology works or not. As Mike Harding observes, "There isn't a language of any kind that can step outside of the world and perceive everything from some neutral position." A similar point was made by the physicist Niels Bohr: "It is wrong to think that the task of physics is to find out how nature is. Physics concerns what we can say about nature." (quoted Norretranders, 1998, p.201.)

Another perspective can be found by analogy with the I Ching. The relevance of the Chinese 'Book of Changes' to judicial astrology emerged in discussion with Geoffrey Cornelius:

Q: Do you think it's useful to have a knowledge of I Ching and Tarot in

addition to astrology?

Geoffrey Cornelius: Well I do, but I wouldn't want to get doctrinaire on this—I appreciate that people have many paths. Nevertheless, I don't know how you can arrive at the same perception of astrology unless you do have experience in the other main divinatory forms—especially the I Ching above all. Tarot will give you the practical understanding of divination; the I Ching will give you practical understanding of divination *and* will give an ethical and philosophical structure to take you some way deeper. That's my general view of it.

The attitude of the I Ching to being tested is given in hexagram 4: "...It is not I who seek the young fool; the young fool seeks me. At the first oracle I inform him. If he asks two or three times, it is importunity. If he importunes, I give him no information." (Wilhelm, 1951, p20-1.) It adds: "If mistrustful or unintelligent questioning is kept up, it serves only to annoy the teacher. He does well to ignore it in silence..." As on the previous page, the point emerges that questions based in doubt about that which one consults can not be valid.

The suggestion is that astrology (or the I Ching) has to be approached in the right spirit, as one would approach an honoured teacher. This is an approach that many astrologers have espoused. The 17th century English astrologer William Lilly, for instance, whose works are seen by many as a high-water mark in astrological excellence, advised the would-be astrologer: "Be thou humble, and let no natural knowledge, how profound and transcendent soever it be, elate thy mind to neglect that *divine Providence*... being confident, the more holy thou art, and more neer to God, the purer judgement thou shalt give. Beware of pride and self-conceit..." (Lilly, 1985, p.9.)

The Astrologer's Mind

Most of the astrologers I interviewed agreed that it is necessary to reduce pride and conceit in order for one's astrological work to be accurate and well-balanced:

Robert Zoller: One of the lessons that I've been learning in connection with astrology is the importance of humility, the importance of subordinating the individual will to a higher will. Which has not been an easy lesson for me, and I won't claim I've got it down yet; but I at least think that it's something that should be done. I recently had reason to go to a *santero* in New Jersey—a practitioner of *santería*, an Afro-Cuban religion. You go to them with a problem, and they begin their analysis with certain questions, and then they get out their cowrie beads and do a divination.

At the beginning of the divination, and before every move in the divination, there is a prayer. Now contemporary occultism is quite capable of taking over the methods of the *santero* or any other traditional practitioner, keeping the strict technical aspects of what they do to arrive at their answers

whilst, at the same time, excising the prayers. When a Moslem does this, and excises the pagan prayers of the *Ifa* from their geomancy—they don't leave it at that, they substitute the *Ifa* pagan prayers and sacrifices with Koranic verses and Koranic practices of some sort, which are regarded as being equivalent in some way to what they have excised. But when a contemporary westerner does the same thing, what they want to find if possible is a mathematical law that they can use instead of having any prayers at all. So they try to reduce the whole thing to binary mathematics, or to some sort of totally secular and scientific endeavour, which the individual human mind can do, *despite* the state of the individual operator.

First-hand experience of the way in which the state of the individual operator can affect astrological work was provided by John Frawley:

John Frawley: After my TV predictions, I found myself under pressure from various quarters to provide lucrative predictions, and did disastrously. It's only now, when these people have washed their hands of me and I can do it for fun again that I'm getting predictions right. It's a question of focus: like in tennis—if your focus is on hitting the ball, you'll do fine; if it's on lifting the trophy, you'll lose. So in astrology—the focus must be purely on the prediction, not on the consequences of that prediction.

Lilly's exhortation to be holy and humble may sound very different from John Frawley's approach of 'doing it for fun'. However, Robert Hand made a connection in his response to Lilly's words:

Robert Hand: Lilly put it in Christian terms: to be 'holy' is to be 'conscious'; and I don't just mean 'awake', either; it's a little more elaborate than that. The single greatest component of how I would describe 'being highly conscious' is that you have an accurate perspective on the relative significance of things. Because—to take a simple-minded example—people who are all hung up on earning money may exalt the earning of money to a status it's not entitled to. And consequently their lives may be made miserable by this. Now not all people who go out to earn money are made miserable. But, if you look at them, they are having a good time playing the game. My favourite comment along those lines came from a financial astrologer. He said, "The money isn't important—it's just a means of keeping score!" This is quite a different attitude than the one that makes money almost a god.

I believe that people who play life as a high-level game—I don't mean trivially, but who play life as the spontaneous, exuberant outpouring of energy along certain lines (whether they do it consciously or not) are going to be happy people. What these people who say that 'money is merely a way of keeping score' have done is restored the perspective. What's really fun is the

game; the money is just a means of keeping the score!

I think all people who are happy in their lives do this at some level. I've stated many times that, if you define play or a game as an activity pursued for its own sake, rather than for the pursuit of something higher in a hierarchy, this is usually—in our culture—considered to be trivial and unimportant. What's important is work. And we define work as an activity that is pursued for the sake of something else—maybe higher, maybe not.

But at some point, unless you are going to have infinite regress, the answer to the question "Why is this happening?" has to be [to further] a *game*, which means that, at the top of all of this, is a colossal game—in the highest sense of the word. This is overtly stated in Hinduism as *Lila*. And playing games, therefore, is an emulation of the divine (in the highest sense of the word; I don't mean 'playing games' in the sense of tricking people and that kind of thing. I mean being a manifestation of divine energy, purely for the sake of being a manifestation of divine energy). One acts, not to get Brownie points with God, but one acts just simply as a pure manifestation of divine energy, playing. This is a very high activity. If you do it consciously, and you know what you are doing, it's even higher. But I think it's so good, that even if you are somewhat unconscious about it, you're still going to have a good time.

I'm not saying that we don't need discipline, that we don't need to work at all, because all good games require discipline. My favourite example is an athlete: he has to train.

That analogy is worth pursuing. It is now a commonplace in sport that training and technical ability are only part of the picture, and that sportspeople need to work on "performance-influencing factors such as under or over-motivation, self-doubt, lack of confidence, loss of motivation or fear" (Gyr, 1998). And John Frawley's comment, "If your focus is on hitting the ball, you'll do fine; if it's on lifting the trophy, you'll lose," has a clear parallel in Zen archery instruction: "The right art... is purposeless, aimless! The more obstinately you try to learn how to shoot the arrow for the sake of hitting the goal, the less you will succeed in the one and the further the other will recede..." (Herrigel, 1985, p.46).

The picture that emerges is that, so far as judicial astrology goes, it is more accurate to compare astrology to (say) archery than to the law of gravity; the involvement and attitude of the astrologer are key factors. This raises a practical question: if astrology is such a subtle skill, how—given the plethora of conflicting systems and techniques—is it possible for anyone to learn it in the first place? How is it possible for astrologers to teach what they have learned? The question had taxed a number of the astrologers I spoke with:

Robert Hand: One of the things that prevented 'Horoscope Synthesis'* from

* A book he had planned to write on how to interpret charts. 'Synthesis' is the process of deciding how the numerous, sometimes contradictory, influences in a chart will blend and manifest.

being written was realising how one does chart synthesis—*really*. You look at the chart, and you look at the chart [again], get familiar with all the components of the chart, and all of a sudden, bang! They come together. That's *not teachable*. It's an entirely intuitive process.

Lee Lehman: I realised that the teaching of astrology works when you, as the teacher, provide a field, or an environment, for your student to then be able to sweat; and that the sweating process is basically examples, examples, examples. It's only through actually working with charts that you get it. And I can't tell you whether a particular student will get it the first time, the hundredth time, the thousandth time. But if they consistently work the material, they *will* get it. There is information out there, there is history out there, there are citations, there are procedures, there are ideas that have come across and sources and all this other stuff. But ultimately, the synthesis is individual. And that is the art of astrology. You can't get to the art of astrology without mastering the technology of astrology; but ultimately, astrology done well is an art.

Mechanistic World, Organismic World

Nearly all of the astrologers I talked to contended that the art of astrology has to be built upon a firm grounding in technique; astrologers who consider that astrology is not 'objective' (not based on natural laws at all) still emphasise that the astrologer has to work as if they are applying objective laws. Looking from the outside, therefore, it is generally difficult to tell whether someone is a natural or judicial astrologer. The distinction may only come to the fore when astrologers are faced with scientific research into astrology, and discover that they have different expectations of it.

One more perspective can be figured into this consideration of judicial astrology—the characteristically optimistic view of Adrian Duncan:

Q: Do you really believe that astrology will experience a significant change of status in the next hundred years or so?

Adrian Duncan: I have chosen to believe that!

Q: How far do you see it going?

Adrian Duncan: I see it going pretty far. People will take it for granted that they are living their lives in harmony with planetary movements. I know there are a lot of good and bad [consequences of] that, but I think it's going to have a better result than the prevailing scientific/materialistic view, which is very unecological. The crucial thing with astrology, and the idea of being in harmony with nature, with the planets, is that it's ecological and therefore less harmful.

This is a point to dwell on. I alluded, in the previous chapter, to the criticisms of post-modern thinkers of the consequences for man and the planet of the technological/scientific drive to a "fully designed, fully controlled world." (Bauman, 1989, p.93.)

A vision of such a world was, strangely enough, provided by the Researchers in Chapter X when they discussed how things would be if astrology worked to the extent claimed in some astrology books: "Hunger and hardship have disappeared because economic trends and climate are predictable. Science has disappeared because horary astrology answers any question. So has competitive sport for the same reason. Cars and planes are hazard-free because assembly times conducive to accidents are routinely avoided. Crime, war, illness and divorce are unknown because predictable. Every person is empowered, self-actualised, spiritually enlightened, and knows their individual purpose and direction. Abuse of astrological knowledge is prevented by restricting it to those whose charts reveal due merit. This is astrology world."

This was, for sure, intended as no more than a light-hearted hint of the consequences of claims made in some astrology books. But what is of interest is that it might show how astrology *should* function, according to the conventional scientific view. In 'astrology world', astrological understanding is pictured as resulting in a dystopia similar to 'Brave New World', with all uncertainty, choice and challenge removed by astrology (instead of the drugs and genetic engineering used to the same end in Huxley's book). Let us consider why this should be significant for the present discussion.

In a talk he gave in 1984, the physicist David Bohm spoke of two worldviews. The 'mechanistic world view' says that the world is a machine, with stars, galaxies and so on built from atoms and molecules; each part independent, each blindly exerting forces on the other parts. "The ultimate implications of this view of universal order are, of course, that man is basically insignificant. What he does has meaning only in so far as he can give it meaning in his own eyes." (Bohm, 1985, p.2.)

The alternative is what he calls an 'organismic' worldview. Here, "The very nature of any part may be profoundly affected by changes of activity in other parts, and by the general state of the whole, and so the parts are basically internally related to each other as well as to the whole." (ibid p.3.) He points out that these two different perspectives have different consequences for the way in which we live, and that humanity is much more at home with an organismic view of life.

From these two views of the world, follow two ways of viewing astrology—as a natural resource of the world, to be investigated and (if possible) exploited to the hilt; or as a part of what we are, something to be respected, learned from and co-operated with. In the former view, astrology's role would be to control things and make life conform to a pattern imposed by humanity on a fundamentally chaotic, unintelligent world. That (I suggest) is the approach that underpins 'astrology world'.

The implications of the 'organismic' view are different. Based on the assumption that life is somehow intelligent, astrology is seen as a way to understand rather than to control. At an individual level, this means focussing more on changing one's understanding of what is happening than on changing what is happening. (Robert Hand describes this approach in Chapter V, in his comments on the 'contemplated Saturn'.) The implication

here is that as we learn to co-operate with the universe at an individual level, so humanity will gradually come to see its collective relationship to the Earth (and its environs) as one of mutual dependency and involvement. Hence—to return to Adrian Duncan's point—the view of man as an interconnected part of the world, which supports judicial astrology, is ecological. This raises the interesting conundrum that, even if astrology were not true, a world in which people believed in astrology as part of an organismic universe might be qualitatively better than a world in which they did not.

What is Real?

In the last few pages the mechanism through which judicial astrology works has been edged around, alluded to in terms of reciprocity between human being and cosmos, defined as indefinable. The suggestion of the Researchers that, when under pressure, "astrologers retreat behind a smokescreen of speculation about the nature of truth, reality, perception, language, and so on" might be revisited at this point. Is this entire definition of judicial astrology simply an exercise in obfuscation, undertaken by astrologers to prevent their subject being seen for what it is?

Any judgement as to whether this explanation of astrology is a smokescreen, or a clue to a mysteriously interlinked world will be based on one's view of issues such as: what is real; how we acquire knowledge; and how our knowledge relates to reality. In other words, philosophical issues which are as old as philosophy itself.

A common reference point in considering such questions is Immanuel Kant's statement that "though all our knowledge begins with experience, it does not follow that it all arises out of experience." (Kant, 1929, p.41). Kant concluded that humanity was not in touch with reality as it actually is, but that everything we experience is pre-formatted, interpreted by the mind—primarily in terms of temporal, spatial and causal relationships. The universe may be timeless and acausal—an idea that finds some resonance in quantum theory—but design limitations in the standard human being prevent us from experiencing this. The mind processes the information it receives and presents us with a simplified version of things—so that, rather than our understanding being moulded by reality, the reality we experience is moulded by our understanding.

In her interview, Bernadette Brady referred to the world that rejects astrology as 'Flatland'; and the fable 'Flatland' (Abbott, 1953) provides an excellent way of thinking about this issue. In Edwin Abbott's tale, beings that exist in two dimensions (as lines, circles, squares and so on) find their world being intruded upon by three-dimensional beings. These intrusions are incomprehensible; as a sphere passes through Flatland, for instance, it appears to the inhabitants as a circle that expands, shrinks, and then disappears altogether. Their ability to make sense of the world is limited by the structure their minds impose upon experience.

It is possible that this describes our relation to astrology. Under the judicial model, astrology is not causal, not bound by the laws of time and space. If we, beings who experience all things in a framework of time, space and causality, encounter an order beyond them, it would be outside our frame of reference in the same way a three-

dimensional solid is beyond the comprehension of two-dimensional beings. Under this view, astrology's incursions into our world would necessarily defy our attempts to interpret and understand them; it would be in the nature of astrology to be incomprehensible.

This can, of course, be rejected as a fifth-dimensional smokescreen. My point is not whether it is true or not, simply that it is philosophically consistent to suggest that astrology is beyond our understanding, but nonetheless real. Certainly, this raises more questions than it answers. But every attempt to pin astrology down with a definitive explanation runs into problems of some sort. For instance, to conclude that astrology is entirely illusory is to say that each of the cases where it appears to have worked (a few examples appeared in Chapters II–XII) were due to chance alone. That seems to show an amazing faith in what *chance* is capable of.

Many questions remain. The purpose of this book was not to arrive at final answers, but to question the views and assumptions usually encountered regarding astrology, so as to create a context within which informed discussion might take place. In conclusion, therefore, I make no apologies for not presenting a conclusion. As Joseph Joubert remarked (Jay, 1996, p.200), "It is better to debate a question without settling it than to settle a question without debating it."

Back to Zero

Look at the stars of the night sky and a sense of mystery and wonder can arise unbidden. The universe seems inscrutable, remote, yet somehow in communion. Or perhaps it seems like a lifeless void, punctuated by random objects on trajectories from the epicentre of the definitive accident, the Big Bang; a universe governed by chance, rather than intelligent design. Which view, in the end, is real? The stars remain enigmatic. We, who live out our lives under them, have to decide.

It is often assumed that astrology was created as an attempt to lend coherence to the ponderings of awe-struck star-gazers. If we, now, in considering astrologers and their craft, have stumbled upon paradoxes, enigmas and the sense of a timeless knowledge that manages to be alternately profound and implausible, that seems entirely fitting.

One of the many questions that remain is how, if astrology lies beyond the comprehension of the rational mind, it could fall within the ambit of human participation. One answer was hinted at by Adrian Duncan: "The astrologer who puts doubts about [astrology's] effectivity aside and embraces the hypothesis wholeheartedly is rewarded by this intelligent universe... it is in the nature of things that events normally confirm convictions." Under this view, those who believe in astrology find their belief supported by experience; those who doubt find their doubts confirmed. Astrology, then, would be both true and not true—the outcome being decided by the way in which the observer looks at it. In the end, perhaps the answer we find is really no more—and no less—than our own reflection.

POLO: ...Perhaps the terraces of this garden overlook only the lake of our mind...

KUBLAI: ...and however far our troubled enterprises as warriors and merchants may take us, we both harbour within ourselves this silent shade, this conversation of pauses, this evening that is always the same.

('Invisible Cities' by Italo Calvino; p.93)

