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ASTROLOGY AS DIVINATION

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I think we all realise that astrology, on one side of its nature at least, is a species of divination. Of course, that is not the whole story; Astrology has other aspects, some of which transcend its divinatory function. For one thing, it is a system of symbolism of a high order which can be a most valuable aid to the contemplation of the truths of mystical philosophy.

But it is with astrology as divination that we are here concerned. First though, a word about the term 'divination' itself. It is something of a paradox that the greater the element of the truly *divine* in divination, the less the word tends to be properly applicable. Where insights or utterances are truly the result of divine inspiration the more we would be inclined to use, say, the words 'revelation' or 'prophecy', in its higher sense as used of prophets, ancient or modern, who have been vouchsafed deep insights into spiritual laws and their outworking in human life.

(I recently read a rather pompous article which claimed that as astrology was divination, it was therefore divine knowledge! This is nonsense. If I leave my car in Queen Square while lecturing to the Lodge and come out to find it gone, I may put up a horary figure to find out what happened to it. This is divination, certainly; but note: 1) I am not seeking knowledge of divine things, I just want to know what happened to the car; 2) I am not seeking the aid of angelic or other divine agents; 3) I am not using any kind of knowledge of divine things—just my understanding of astrological symbolism. Astrology may be divination but that does not entitle us to give ourselves airs and claim divine knowledge!)

But to return to 'divination', the word is more commonly and accurately applied to a wide range of mantic arts all of which (with the exception of those which depend upon the intervention of higher, or *supposedly* higher, powers) have this in common: that they perceive a subtle inter-weaving and inter-relationship of all things and events in such wise that it is possible from a close examination of things present to derive a knowledge of things hidden or at a distance in space or time, past or future.

Having said that, I believe it is important to emphasize that there are a number of quite different methods which are or can be employed in 'reading the signs'. By 'quite different' I do not mean merely that one method uses cards and another the flight of birds and so on. I mean that quite different principles and quite different faculties are applied in different types of divination.

Perhaps one may distinguish three *main* types:

1. The first (and the one which gives us the word 'divination') is that in which the guidance of some supposedly higher power is in some way sought or invoked. This includes a host of practices from the Oracles of the ancient world to temple dancers who are trained to go into a trance so that the 'gods' may speak through them, or

to the sorcerer who believes he has the power to command supernatural entities.

The position and value of all such practices can be summed up by pointing out that no truly *divine* agent can be 'commanded' nor do any such traffic in trivialities. However, the true devotee who seeks divine guidance in the right spirit, for the right purpose, with humility and detachment, may receive it . . . but there is obviously no sharp dividing line, in practice, between this and certain aspects of prayer. More might be said about all this but since it does not concern astrology we may pass on.

2. The second type of divination is that which in large measure is covered by the principle of psychometry. It depends upon what we may call, for want of a better term, a certain psychic sensitivity. Objects receive cryptic impressions of events, people, emotions, circumstances which have been, or are associated with them, *directly or indirectly*, and these may be 'sensed' and their future developments foreseen. Sometimes the connecting link between the diviner and the knowledge he seeks may seem very tenuous indeed—he may need only the faintest lead—but the *broad* principle is the same.

The faculty involved here is closely analogous to the physical senses . . . things are *perceived* physically just as the senses perceive sensibly and, indeed, the closer the parallel the more successful the exercise tends to be. I take it for granted that a good dowser (he used to be called a 'water diviner') does not make mistakes at all, or only in exceptional circumstances; on the other hand, the rectification of an Ascendant by means of a pendulum (by those who claim such abilities) is, in my limited experience, much more likely to produce false results than true ones.

It goes without saying that there is nothing in the least spiritual *per se* in the faculties required for this species of divination, nor is the reason involved. (Of course, rational and spiritual judgements may be made in the light of the data gathered by these means, but that is something else). In general, this type of diviner is a *receiver of impressions and information*, and these may be accurately or inaccurately received according to the abilities of the operator. This type of sensitivity has its uses but the higher human faculties of reason and intuition are not involved. Again, much more might be said but we must pass on.

3. The third class of divination is that which is based on symbology and depends for its effectiveness upon the ability of those who have closely studied a particular branch of symbolism to understand and interpret it in such wise as to reveal unrecognised truths about the existences involved, including if need be, knowledge of the unfolding course of their past and future manifestation (although again one should emphasise that this predictive function is only one of many uses of symbology).

Every kind of existence in the entire cosmos gives expression to its nature according to the familiar ten categories of substance, quality, quantity, relation, place, time, condition, situation,

activity, and passivity. It is via these ten modes that an observant person may learn the secrets of the inner natures of particular things, and these categories separately and in combination form the principal basis of the different types of divination through symbolism.

The *qualities*, for example, are the symbolic colours, sounds, shapes, smells, etc. with which existences clothe themselves; so that, for example, the herbalist may judge the curative properties of a plant from its appearance and the physiognomist knows that a pale face and drawn features tell a different story from rosy cheeks and a cheery countenance. The category of *quantity* gives rise to all those forms of divination which depend upon number; *place* and *situation* give us geomancy and the like; the symbolism of *activity* (i.e. what a person/thing does—always linked to that of *passivity*, or what is done to him/it) is always interesting, "observe a man's habitual practice", says Lao Tse, "and you may tell his future weal or woe".

Every one of these ten categories is intimately related to those which precede or follow it so that the whole forms one sequence, and thoroughly to understand the symbolism of any one stage in the sequence is to know any other stage.

Thus the astrologer is specially and specifically interested in the category of *time* but, by thoroughly understanding the symbolism of the time when a thing manifests, he can work *backwards* to its quality and substance (what a thing is really like in itself) as when he reads the character from the chart; or he can work *forwards* to activity and passivity as when he studies the directions to see what kind of thing a person is likely to have the opportunity to do or what is likely to be done to him.

Now it will be obvious that when we enter the realm of symbolism we open the field to the higher human faculties of reason and intuition and to science and philosophy in their true and integral sense. The fact that some kinds of divination have a more limited potential than others and, indeed, that some may easily degenerate, in practice, into superstition and dependence on omens, does not invalidate the principle involved, which is that the higher and inner expresses itself through the lower and outer and that through the manifest actuality the unmanifest reality may be known.

But this form of activity: to see the inner reality behind the outward appearance, is one of the highest activities of the mind, and, if it is to be exercised with insight, calls for a real knowledge of spiritual laws. To us the *I Ching* 'cook-book fashion' is one thing; to understand the inner content of the 64 hexagrams and how they relate to the unfoldment of the unmanifest into manifestation through successive orders (two raised to the sixth power) is something else again. This kind of activity does not call for the abandonment of reason but for its enhancement.

But here we must say something about the word "reason" itself, for it is a word around which much confusion has gathered and which is today being used in two quite opposite senses.

It is sometimes said that modern science is rationalistic, and so it is in the *narrow sense*. The rationalism of modern humanism (the rationalism that led to the famous attack on astrology some years ago) is the mere application of the processes of logic to phenomena and to the results of materialistic observations. But this materialism actually arose simply because modern science itself represented a *revolt* against the higher reason, the reason which concerns itself with noumena—which is indeed interested in phenomena (as every true philosopher must be) but which sees them only as manifestations of higher and inner causes which can be apprehended by reason.

In a chapter on *The Origins of Modern Science*, A. N. Whitehead spells this out: "Galileo (the representative in this context of the emergence of modern science) kept on harping on *how* things happen, whereas his adversaries . . . had a complete theory as to *why* things happen . . . Galileo insists on 'irreducible and stubborn facts', (his opponents) bring forward reasons . . . It is a great mistake to see the historical revolt (of science) as an appeal to reason. On the contrary it was through and through a thoroughly anti-intellectual movement . . . Of course the historical revolt was justified . . . but it was not a protest on behalf of reason".

It was justified because of the *excesses* of the higher rationalism, which had reached the point where it needed the corrective influence of hard facts.

To set these thoughts in a broader context, we can say that in all efforts by man to preserve, utilise and extend his knowledge, there are three basic modes, and three only, which he can use. The first is by *deductive* thought, starting from first principles and considering why things are as they are and how principles will work out in practice; the second is by *inductive* thought by which man collects and studies observational data with a view to arriving at the laws and principles which govern how things work. The third is by dependence upon the traditional or authoritarian mode which co-ordinates and utilises the fruits of past thought and experience.

Each of these three modes is not only a valid but a *necessary* element in man's truth-seeking and it can be seen, over and over again in the history of human thought and progress, that to neglect any one of them is sheer folly.

Deductive thought must, in certain respects at least, be considered as the leading element of the three for it alone can show not only that a thing is true but *why* it is true. But observation and inductive thought are always needed to check the results of deductive thought; a thing may seem fine in theory but is it true in practice? If not then an important principle has been over-looked or a false premise has crept into the reasoning. Galileo's opponents were absolutely right to insist on the superior validity of reason, but they were utterly wrong to neglect the fruits of observation, and if they had been prepared to open their eyes (and minds) they would have learned something to their advantage.

Tradition is the third factor; it is the great reservoir into which the fruits of thought and experience flow. It is in fact the mode we draw upon in all practical work, for not until there has been time for the fruits of the deductive and inductive modes to be scrutinised and digested, as it were, so that they can be assimilated into the tradition, can they be of much use. This must take time and those who try to make original contributions to astrology should be prepared to be patient, just as those who receive them should be fair-minded and receptive as well as prudently critical.

It is worth saying all these things for the knowledge (science) and practice (art) of astrology do not differ in these respects from any other subject. To hear some people talk one would think that to interpret a horoscope one had only to pick it up and hold it in one's hands or press it to one's forehead for the interpretation to spring into one's mind! The true practice of astrology depends upon reading the symbolism of the nativity and a good synthesis depends upon a good analysis and a good analysis upon a knowledge of the laws and principles of astrological symbolism.

In this matter there is obvious uncertainty today about many features of horoscope symbolism (not to mention many uncertainties which are not so obvious), and this gives abundant scope for investigation and learning from experience *which, in the case of man, includes experiment.*

Postscript*

For forty years, I have read rather mindless criticisms of astrology by those essentially ignorant of the subject. For at least ten years, I have read equally mindless criticism, in the Lodge "Quarterly" and elsewhere, by people who have similarly made no effort to understand it.

You simply cannot get away from the empirical element. It is a crucially important part of astrology. Efforts to ignore it not only impoverish astrological understanding—they divide astrologers one from another, when we should be co-operating and trying to understand one another.

In astrology, there are (broadly speaking) two kinds of empirical approach: (1) an in-depth examination of individual charts, and (2) looking at large numbers of charts, with the help of statistics. *Each* kind is valuable, each is empirical, and the two together are far stronger than either approach taken in isolation.

Why do I feel so passionately about this? I do so because what went wrong at the time of the Renaissance was not (for example) the wicked materialism of Galileo, insisting that his telescope showed 'actual', physical mountains on the Moon whether theology permitted their existence or not. The failure of this time was due to those who should have been *big enough* to realise that there is no inconsistency between such observations and the 'higher reason' of a truly philosophic view.

Today, it is the observations of Michel Gauquelin that are supplying the needed 'brute facts'. It is up to us who are real astrologers not to repeat the same kind of mistake. We must try to understand these facts in the full astrological context—to get the best out of them, in the true astrological spirit.

1 A. N. Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World* (Cambridge U. Press, 1930), p. 10.

* Taken down by P. Curry, 1st March, 1982; amended and approved by JMA, 8th March, 1982.