

Astrologers and Psychics as Therapists

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It was suggested that astrologers and psychics may play a role similar to that played by psychotherapists, and that they serve clients who do not wish to characterize themselves as having psychological problems. These ideas were documented by extracts from the writings of astrologers and by transcripts of visits to astrologers and psychics by a client.

A number of writers have examined nontherapeutic activities and drawn attention to the similarities between such activities and those of therapy. For example, Frank¹ has compared therapy to revival meetings, thought reform, education, and so on.

Frank reviewed the techniques of many systems of psychotherapy and concluded that they shared four features: (1) a particular relationship between patient and therapist, in which the patient has confidence in the therapist's powers, (2) therapy takes place in a locale designated as a place of healing, (3) therapy is based on a rationale or a myth which explains the patient's disturbance, and (4) the therapy system prescribes some procedures for the patient and therapist to follow, which involve some effort on the patient's part.

These techniques have an impact on the patient by providing him with the opportunities for cognitive and experiential learning, enhancing his hope, providing success experiences for him, overcoming his alienation from his friends and relatives, and arousing him emotionally.

Schofield² listed what he thought were the common structural elements of all systems of psychotherapy and counseling: (1) conversation with a therapeutic intent, (2) a status relationship, with the therapist having more ascendancy, authority, and power, and the patient—usually the supplicant—seeking out the therapist to ask for help, and (3) a relationship that is, controlled, circumscribed, and limited rather than spontaneous. The frequency, timing, and duration of visits are all determined.

Schofield noted that many "invisible" therapists function in our society, people who are turned to for help and support by those in need. Most notable among these invisible therapists are the clergy, teachers, attorneys, and physicians. The use of these people as counselors has become so

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widespread that often these persons receive formal training in counseling and crisis intervention. Schofield also noted that work supervisors, respected colleagues, good neighbors and close friends are used in a quasi-counseling role.

Personal encounters with those who visit astrologers and similar figures suggested that such authorities play a role similar to those of therapists. For example, one person whose husband was having an affair was told that such behavior was in his astrological chart and so predestined. The woman was able to feel reassured that she was not failing in attractiveness and that the marital rift would end in time as the planets moved on. Her anxiety and emotional upset were thereby reduced. Another person who felt unloved and rejected was told by a "spirit" speaking through a medium that all the love that she had given to others would not be reciprocated in this world, but would benefit her when she passed on. This enabled her to bear her lonely and embittered life more easily.

ASTROLOGERS AS THERAPISTS

Many people consult astrologers for reasons that would lead others to consult psychotherapists. Perhaps they are not sure whether to leave a spouse or to change jobs? Astrologers, therefore, are called upon to offer guidance similar to that offered by psychotherapists. An illustration from the writings of Evangeline Adams³ clearly shows the parallel.

Up to this time, I have neither asked nor attended to questions. My attitude has been wholly and intentionally impersonal. I have been dealing scientifically with the chart. Now I enter into a personal relation with my caller and realize him as a human being and together we discuss his horoscope from his standpoint. His problem becomes a personal concern. He is my brother; indeed, often he seems to be my child. Our contact is no longer a matter of impersonal science, but of intimate, warm human relation (p. 22).³

The astrologer behaves in a genuine and empathic manner with the client, as a client-centered therapist would advocate.

... I believe it to be my task, with the light of astrology, to assist him so far as possible to regulate his powers and so bring balance or harmony into his life. I strive to be governed by honesty and charity, but I do not burden my client with my considerations of general truth and balance. I deal with his situation. If he comes with shoulders bent under the burden of life, I am usually able by studying his stars to help him to distribute the weight so it may be carried without loss of equilibrium (pp. 22-23).³

Adams does this in part, she feels, by putting the present problem in a broader perspective. The present crisis may serve to shape the client's personality for future events, events which will bring the client happiness,

prosperity or peace. Adams counters euphoria in the client with cautious reason, depression with optimism.

How did the clients of Adams respond to her interpretations? Two examples will illustrate their reactions:

My dear Miss Adams: The Planetary Indications arrived safely some weeks ago. After reading them I wondered whom they were for. They seemed quite alien to me. But they soon revealed themselves, and I've enjoyed every minute I've spent in reading them. After studying them, I have been more at peace with myself.

Before I wrote you, life seemed such a turmoil. After I had written you, the objects that had caused the strife came one by one out of the blue, giving me a greater understanding of life. I have profited even in these few weeks from your Planetary Indications; and so I go forward, I think I shall grow bigger and better than I had hoped for (pp. 204-5).³

When I first received my horoscope, I thought that it had not helped in the way I hoped for to bring about a better understanding between my husband and myself; but between the reading of his horoscope and my own, harmony reigns once more. Though my husband's business is having a hard pull, and other conditions are hard and unpleasant, we are traveling hand in hand, helping each other over the tough places. Reading his horoscope helped me to a better understanding of him and showed me what to avoid, when to help, when to urge, and when to hold him steady. And my horoscope has had the desired effect in giving him a better understanding of me after many readings and much thought (p. 205).³

The therapeutic aspects of the interaction between client and astrologer have been largely ignored by psychologists. Only one report exists in which psychologists have taken the therapeutic role of the astrologer seriously.

Sechrest and Bryan⁴ posed as an engaged couple seeking advice as to whether to get married. They sent their birth dates to astrologers *by mail*, enclosing one of three kinds of letters: neutral; stating how well they got along; mentioning that they had frequent arguments.

Sechrest and Bryan noted that the service was cheap. The most common fee was \$2, with a maximum of \$10. On the whole, the higher the fee the longer the report. The replies arrived within a couple of weeks; those to the letters mentioning arguments came back soonest.

Sechrest and Bryan, although they believed astrology to be invalid, were impressed. They noted that the advice they had received was forceful, sound, and realistic and matched the bias given to the letters quite closely. The astrologers' writing was personable, friendly, and folksy. They showed interest in their clients.

ASTROLOGY AS AN EXPLANATORY SYSTEM

We are not concerned here with whether there is any empirical evidence that astrology is valid. Nor are we concerned with whether the theoretical

basis for astrology is scientifically logical or not. Rather, the concern here is whether astrology provides concepts and terminology that are useful for describing people's life-states and problems. It will be argued that astrology is outstanding in this respect.

Astrology is based upon astrological concepts which are numerical. An astrological chart is divided into twelve houses, and the sun's relationship to the earth is cyclical and divided into twelve signs of the zodiac. This use of "twelve" is most useful for fitting psychological and philosophical theories into astrological terms. Most psychological categorizations are dichotomous and at the most have three or four categories. Twelve is divisible by two, three and four and so can incorporate all such psychological categorizations. Here is an example taken from Meyer:⁵

fire signs	Aries, Leo, Sagittarius
earth signs:	Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn
air signs:	Gemini, Libra, Aquarius
water signs:	Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces

Fire and air signs are considered to be *masculine* and *extraverted*, while earth signs are considered to be *feminine* and *introverted*. Again, the point here is not whether these identifications are sensible or not, but rather that the twelve signs of the zodiac enable an astrologer (in this case, Meyer) to incorporate two important psychological concepts (masculinity-femininity and extraversion-introversion) and the four basic elements of Greek philosophy (and thus the four humors and the four temperaments).

Meyer goes much further. He notes that an astrological chart has four quadrants, and these Meyer identifies with the four types proposed by Jung: intuition, feeling, thinking and sensing. Furthermore, Meyer identifies the planets with the Jungian division of the Psyche: the Sun, Mercury and Venus with the intrapsychic processes of the conscious and personal unconscious, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto with the intrapsychic processes of the collective unconscious, and Mars, Jupiter and Saturn with interpersonal behavior.

Dobyns and Roof⁶ identify the water signs with the Freudian unconscious. Schulman⁷ identifies the South Node of your astrological chart as symbolic of your past, revealing the combination of events, ideas, attitudes and thoughts from all of your previous incarnations, whose unresolved and accumulated effects create your present life. The North Node of the Moon is symbolic of the future, and reveals the future events that you will experience. Meyer⁵ identifies the ascendant on your chart with your selfhood and the descendant with your social experience. The *imium coeli* reveals your feminine aspect and the *medium coeli* your masculine aspect.

Freud and Erikson have both emphasized the importance of particular ages during the development of the child, and the importance of events experienced during these stages on later behavior. Stearn⁸ noted that

astrology also offers a descriptive analysis of developmental stages, for the planets have cyclical influences on our lives as they revolve around the sun. Jupiter has a period of 12 years (giving stages of three years in length), Saturn a cycle of 30 years, Uranus 84 years, Neptune 168 years and Pluto 248 years. Jupiter provides critical periods at ages 0, 3, 6, 9 . . . , Saturn at ages 7, 15, 22, 30 . . . , Uranus at 21, 42, 63 . . . , Neptune at 42 and 84, and Pluto at 62. For example, adolescence is characterized by Saturn in opposition to its position at birth, and so the influence of Saturn is critical during this stage of development.

These examples can be multiplied many times over. Since most psychological and philosophical categories comprise two, three or four items, they can be fitted into astrological terms.

What does this mean? First, it means that astrology provides a good medium for incorporating modern psychological theories. Secondly, it makes for an easy translation of a person's psychological state or problem into astrological terms. Whereas a psychoanalyst might discuss the influence of your unconscious processes on your behavior, an astrologer can talk of the influence of Mercury and Venus in your natal chart. When a Jungian analyst would refer to the four basic processes of the psyche, an astrologer can refer to the four quadrants of your natal chart. The same issues can be talked about, but in concepts from alternative systems.

Thirdly, Meyer⁵ has shown the influence of the humanistic psychological movement in a most ingenious manner. Natal astrology (based upon the time of your birth) can view man as helplessly determined by the influence of the planets, sun, and moon. Or the astrologer can view the natal chart as a seed-pattern which describes what the person *may* grow to become. Meyer takes this latter approach. The natal chart is a clue to your self-actualization possibilities, to use a term from Abraham Maslow. The planets do not exert an external influence on us. Our lives and the movements of the planets are parallel. There is no cause and effect between them; only a mirroring. Your natal chart is a personal mandala (in the Jungian use of the term).

A similar point is made by Rudhyar:

The basic purpose of studying a birth-chart and discussing it with the person to whom it refers is to help this person to become more positively, more meaningfully, more creatively, more totally what he potentially is (p. 78).⁹

Of course, if you prefer to see yourself as helpless in the face of external influences (an important psychological dimension of belief recently introduced by Julian Rotter), then you can always follow the more traditional astrological explanatory system.

Meyer's ideas also parallel modern psychological testing. Few clinical

psychologists are happy with a sign approach or a simple statistical approach to psychological test interpretation. Especially among projective test users, we find a preference for holistic interpretation. No part of the test protocol can be interpreted in isolation. The whole protocol must be taken into consideration. Meyer makes the identical point about the interpretation of a natal chart.

Finally, Meyer notes that conventional astrology has two parties; one who understands and knows and a client who seeks knowledge and understanding. The parallel with psychotherapy is obvious. However, Meyer notes that one can cast one's own chart and study it, an astrological self-therapy or self-practice, which again parallels a growing trend in self-help psychotherapies today.

Meyer is not alone in his approach to astrology. Dobyns and Roof⁶ are aware of the projection of the astrologer into his or her interpretations. They see an interpretation telling us as much about the astrologer as about the client. They also conceptualize the natal chart as a blueprint, giving the core of our psychological or spiritual life, but permitting many variations in the specific circumstances and events.

EXAMPLES OF THERAPEUTIC BEHAVIOR IN ASTROLOGERS AND PSYCHICS

In order to explore the therapeutic role of astrologers and psychics in detail, I visited three such people and made transcripts of the interaction. I visited three women (roughly aged thirty to fifty): an astrologer, a palmist, and a psychic (who also read palms).

An Astrologer

When I called Jane to make an appointment, she said that she was in the midst of counseling and would call me back, which she did promptly. After arranging a date for my visit, she asked my birthdate. I saw Jane in her office, a room in her apartment. She sat behind a desk in a room cluttered with books and papers, giving it a professional ambience. She began by checking to see whether the chart she had drawn up for me was accurate. This involved Jane mentioning several significant years in my life, with myself telling her what had happened in those years. In this way, she extracted a reasonable life history before the session started.

Initially, much of what Jane told me was complimentary. I have an excellent mind and an intuitive mind. I am going to be famous. Other material was neutral. I like to be busy. I need security, both family and career. I do better at writing than at speaking. I am a romantic.

She went on to suggest problem areas. "First of all, you're insecure about yourself at times. If you ask about what, you don't know. "You don't think you're stupid. You don't think you're bad looking. You're just

insecure and you don't know why." I replied, "Yes." The only reason you're insecure is that you have an underlying feeling that you should be achieving something you're not. You came into this world with the purpose of establishing your own name. Here you are. Thirty-eight years of age and you have not established it. So you're getting paranoid."

Eventually, she went on to give advice. With respect to a job interview I was going to the next day, she advised me that I needed job security. "You don't function well without security, let me tell you that. In fact, you would be a prime target for a stomach ulcer without it. All right?" She advised me to write, for that was where my fame lay, and to stay in my present academic job. I should not take a job with pressure.

She warned of problems. My present wife will not like me traveling too much. My son will have emotional problems as a result of the break up of my marriage with his mother, especially in his teenage years. My wife will die before I do. With these predictions, Jane can be seen as preparing me for potential problems. By working them through now, I can be helped to deal with them when they eventually happen.

Occasionally, the interaction, even at this first meeting, became a counseling relationship:

Jane: ...I get the feeling very strongly that you were a stranger to your father.

David: Probably.

Jane: Not that he didn't like you. He didn't understand you.

David: Right.

Jane: He felt that he couldn't communicate with you and there was no sense in continuing.

David: Yes.

Jane: It was a very misunderstood relationship between you and your father.

David: Right. We eventually started seeing each other again. . . .

Jane: Only when you were an adult?

David: Yes. When I was an undergraduate and visited him twice.

Jane: But he wasn't very warm.

David: Yes.

Jane: Your father did not know how to give love.

David: Oh, right.

Jane: So that made a problem.

David: He'd give me money instead.

Jane: That's not what you wanted.

David: Right.

Jane clearly has picked up a lot about me as a person and about my life. In this interaction, she uses her knowledge to lead me into thoughts about my father. Such interactions would presumably become more and more common in future visits, as she got to know me better.

Jane charged \$25 for a one-hour visit. She was happy to tape record the

session for future use, and in fact kept a recorder on her desk for her clients, who had only to supply a tape.

A Palmist

The interview with Peggy took place in a restaurant where she worked, just prior to its opening for lunch. She and I sat at a small table, and she examined both my palms through a large magnifying glass. She began to interpret immediately and seemed to require no feedback or initial information from me. As the twenty-minute session progressed, we conversed more, and she obtained more feedback.

Her interpretations were on the whole positive. I was sensitive and creative, and had a high need to achieve. I would soon get much richer, move into higher levels of consciousness, travel, and become famous.

She mentioned that the age of nine to eleven was a rough time. When I told her that my father left around that age, she zeroed in on that. She required little feedback, but stressed that I had to go back and forgive him. "He was not perfect. He was scared . . . And you might say, 'I don't feel anything for him anymore.' But you love him dearly. And you have a tiny bit to work out especially at that age." I had given her minimal feedback or information, compared with my previous visit to the astrologer.

Eventually she began to focus on my tension. "Your insides are a jumble of knots." When I spoke of my desire to be more successful, she told me to relax more, to stop trying to prove myself, to get rid of some of my anger. She also mentioned a conflict between me wanting someone to take care of me and my refusal to let anyone do that.

Peggy: You're cold to everybody lately. . . .

David: They annoy me.

Peggy: Yes. But you let yourself be annoyed. They are not doing it to you. You're afraid to feel afraid, in a nutshell. Will you please let yourself be human! . . . You've got to get rid of this bitterness though. Because bitterness causes cancer sometimes. But who are you mad at? You're mostly mad at yourself. You're doing the best you can. You're doing beautifully.

David: I get mad at myself for being mad too.

Peggy: Right, Oh! You're not allowed to be mad. You had the same kind of mother I had. Right? You're exhausted.

She stressed that I had to forgive myself, that I had to like myself, and that anger over trivial situations served as a distraction to help avoid the real problem. Anger is a secondary emotion. It covers up hurt and humiliation. These were the themes with which she concluded the session.

In addition, she warned of trouble with my son, mainly concerned with feelings of frustration of mine toward him, again with no feedback from me a

first. Also, she advised me not to get caught up in the emotional problems of my mother and wife.

On the whole, Peggy asked for less information about me than Jane did. Yet, when I gave it, she moved in a therapeutic direction. She was far less client-centered in her approach, instead being more didactic, perhaps like a rational-emotive therapist.

Again, as with Jane, I got the feeling that if I visited her often, the conversation would become more of an exchange of thoughts and more therapeutic. However, Peggy's style was more active than Jane's.

Peggy charged \$10 for the session and was happy to let me tape record the session. I had to use a tape recorder that I had brought with me.

A Psychic

Sheila had an office, with a receptionist and a waiting room, in a wing adjoining her house. She sat in a chair with a small coffee table beside her, while I sat opposite her. She began immediately with no information or feedback from me. She talked, eventually had me open a Bible, whereupon she read from the passage on that page, and looked at my palms toward the end of the session. She had a tape recorder into which she placed my cassette, and she held the microphone to her mouth. She spoke crisply, but rather impersonally.

She made a lot of predictions about the future, often involving people for whom she would provide a name or an initial. She talked of business loans, travel, future marriages, outside income, buying a house, and so on.

She advised me to write, because I had a literary talent, especially on historical subjects. She warned me that my mother might die soon. She advised me to be careful and discreet in my extramarital affairs. She saw several future marriages. When I asked her about a possible position abroad that I had applied for, she enthusiastically advised me to take it. She advised me not to jeopardize my marriage since it was a good one. She warned me of a driving injury to myself in the future.

She asked about kidney or bladder problems, and when I told her I had colitis, she said I was high strung. She advised me that I had to learn to calm myself down. If I would meditate each day, I would be able to cope with life more easily.

On the whole, she talked more and conversed less than Jane or Peggy, and she was less therapeutic in style. However, the session included warnings of possible traumatic events, which would therefore permit anticipatory working through. She also focused on my tension and my need to calm down and relax. It would appear that all three people were sensitive to verbal and nonverbal cues from me about this trait.

Sheila charged \$40 for a thirty-minute session, which I paid to her receptionist.

DISCUSSION

The three people I visited differed considerably in style. However, they each predicted future troubles, along with their many predictions of positive events. The prediction of positive future happenings can be seen as raising the hopefulness of the client. The prediction of a few traumatic events makes anticipatory preparation and working through possible. They all said highly complimentary things about me, which can be seen as building up my self-esteem. All of these facets of the interactions can be seen as supportive psychotherapy.

In addition, they focused on my tension level and anger and gave me advice on how to handle it, or at least told me that it was a problem that I had to deal with and find a solution for. They advised meditation, relaxation, and liking myself more. They also related my tension to my father's leaving the family when I was young. They also concerned themselves with possible problems involving my son by an earlier marriage.

Their advice was pertinent, useful, and sensible, given their knowledge of their client. Since I tended to be accepting of most of what they said, I do not know what tack they would have taken had I denied strenuously their proposed analyses of me.

Their style varied, with Jane (the astrologist) being the most therapeutic, interacting more with me, leading me to explore feelings, and trying to be empathic. Jane had also elicited the most information from me about my life prior to beginning her interpretations. Peggy (the palmist) and Sheila (the psychic) were much more directive in their advice.

On the whole, none of the three communicated much about the theory and philosophy behind the system. Perhaps they assumed I knew and accepted the rationales. Jane did talk of reincarnation and communicated her philosophy about it.

On the basis of the books and articles cited and of the interviews with astrologers and psychics, it seems reasonable to conclude that the role played by astrologers and psychics vis à vis their clients is, in part, a therapeutic role.

SUMMARY

The writings of astrologers and psychics document quite clearly that they see themselves as performing a counseling role vis à vis their clients. In addition, astrological theories lend themselves easily to the incorporation of Freudian, Jungian and humanistic concepts. Thus, the clients of astrolo-

gers and psychics may be those who do not see their problems as psychological or psychiatric and would feel stigmatized by a visit to a psychotherapist. Transcripts of consultations with astrologers and psychics provided examples of advising, increasing the client's self-esteem, preparing the client to face future trauma, and empathic client-centered dialogue.

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