

## Two issues for astrologers to debate and discuss

By James Brockbank

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At a Company of Astrologers' beginners class last December, when the story of sexual abuse of young football players by coaches in club youth teams dominated the news, the following chart was shown.

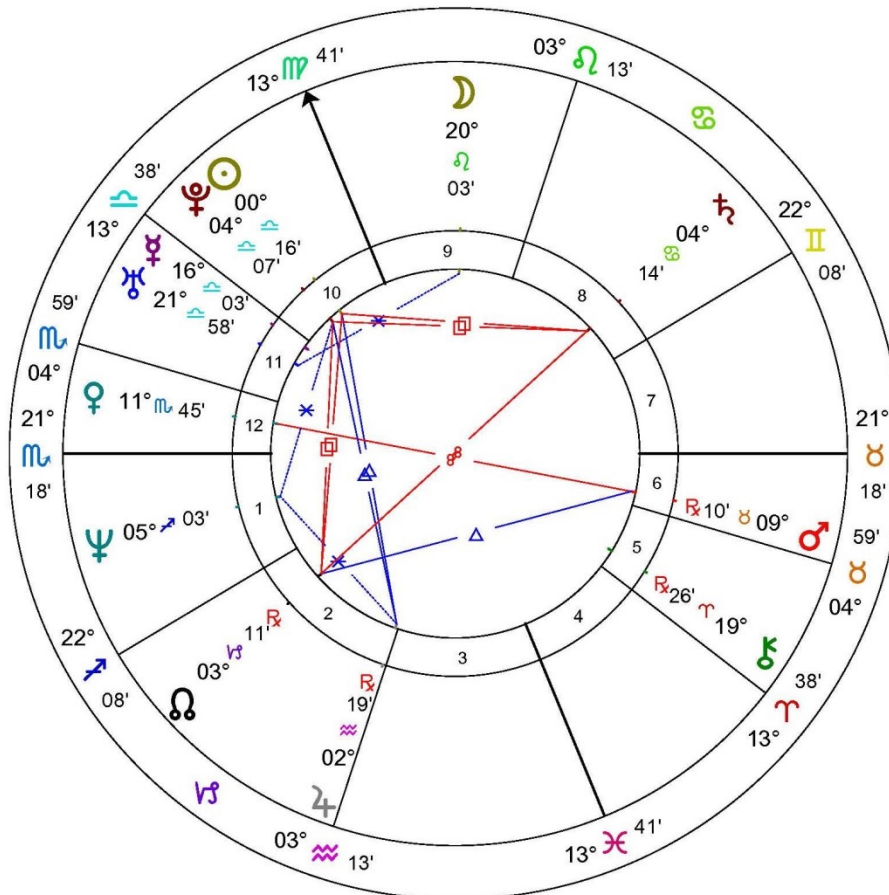


Chart: 23/09/1973 Stockport, England (Untimed)

It immediately struck me that everyone who has studied astrology would recognise that Venus opposite Mars, the planets both in fall and mutual reception, and the Sun conjunct Pluto square Saturn are appropriate significations for sexual abuse. It seemed to me that an astrologer could say with confidence that the sexual abuse this footballer experienced is described by the planets in his birth chart.

This led to two questions, both of which go to the heart of the nature of astrology and deserve more discussion from astrologers. The first was, what sort of methodology are astrologers using so that all trained astrologers would understand that the birth chart of this footballer depicts sexual abuse? The second, how would one explain why this chart, of all the possible charts that might have come to light, is the one that did come to light?

Even if one believes (which I do not) that one might find a correlation between sexual abuse and this particular astrological configuration the methodology astrologers use to reach an astrological judgment - that this footballer was sexually abused - cannot be entirely empirical. The nature of empirical experiments is that they attempt to produce statistical support for certain hypotheses; support that will be measured in terms of probability so that one might be able to say, 'this person with Pluto square the Sun is more likely to be sexually abused than this person without that square'. But with the chart above we are not saying that this footballer has a certain probability of being abused; we are saying that the astrological configuration in the chart, using the rules of astrology, describes sexual abuse. There is no probability involved at all: it is not something that can be shown to be right or wrong with reference to empirical tests but with reference to the rules of astrology and astrologers' interpretation of those rules.<sup>1</sup> But perhaps one would say this does not matter, that the rules of astrology will follow the empirical evidence and what matters is what allows us to move from saying that an astrological configuration describes sexual abuse to making a prognostication that the person will experience sexual abuse.

However, it would require an unrealistically high empirical probability to ignore the chance of failure - say over 90% for specific astrological configurations - and make the step from astrological configuration to prognostication. Even then one would have the problem of conflicting astrological rules. At the simplest level 'a planet in the twelfth house is weak' might conflict with 'a planet in its own rulership is strong'. One would have to start jettisoning the rules<sup>2</sup> so one was left with a series of mega-rules which were empirically based. However, even then one would require a methodology for determining between these mega-rules and this leads to an infinite regress. The problem is that astrological signifiers are multivalent so one requires some methodology to determine which of the many possible meanings is appropriate. A list of probabilities of different ways a particular astrological configuration might manifest, presumably the hope of the empirical researcher, is insufficient because there will be no empirical way to determine between them.

With the chart on page one it is clear that what enables us to say that the astrological configuration describes sexual abuse is context. We know that he has been sexually abused, we look to see if there are appropriate astrological configurations and we find them. But at what point would one feel confident to make a prognostication of sexual abuse? Would one feel confident to make the prognostication of sexual abuse if shown the chart at birth? Presumably not because the astrological configuration might manifest in an entirely different way. Would one feel confident if one was asked by a mother if it was okay for her fourteen year old to be coached by the local football club? Possibly. Would one feel confident if one was specifically asked if there was a danger of abuse. Probably. (But why would anyone ask that question unless one was looking for confirmation of a suspicion?)

Context can be an important part of astrological methodology because it provides a way of determining which of the many possible meanings of an astrological signifier is appropriate. Other methodologies are possible: perhaps the astrologer uses a back and

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<sup>1</sup> For more detailed discussion of why astrological methodology cannot be empirical, see: James Brockbank, *The Responsive Cosmos: An Enquiry into the Theoretical Foundations of Astrology* (PhD, 2011) at [www.cosmocritic.com/pdfs/Brockbank\\_James\\_Responsive\\_Cosmos.pdf](http://www.cosmocritic.com/pdfs/Brockbank_James_Responsive_Cosmos.pdf) - the whole of chapter 1 but in particular pp. 34-7; pp. 39-41; and pp.134-6.

<sup>2</sup> As Gauquelin did in *Neo-Astrology: A Copernican Revolution*.

forth discussion with the client to determine which of the possible meanings of an astrological significator makes sense; perhaps the astrologer 'channels' some sort of outside force to help make a determination. What is clear that some sort of non-empirical methodology is required if the astrologer is going to avoid being vague and meaningless. This is an area that deserves more discussion and debate from astrologers.<sup>3</sup>

But none of this explains the extraordinary fact that it was this chart in particular that was shown to the class. There are now several hundred footballers who claim to have been sexually abused; this footballer was the one who first brought the issue to the public so his name was known and his birth date could be found and it 'just happens' to describe sexual abuse in a way that all astrologers would recognise. Why this chart and not one of the several hundred others? Why did he feel impelled to come forward? Is it coincidence that the footballer who comes forward 'just happens' to have a chart pertinent to the matter or is something else involved?

I say it is extraordinary that it is this particular chart which came to light but it is not really extraordinary because it is what happens in astrology - it just defies rational explanation so it is easier to call it extraordinary - and I was not surprised that this chart 'just happened' to be pertinent. If an astrologer is considering a particular matter then inevitably a pertinent chart will 'just happen' to come to light. Inevitable here is meant in the sense of fated or bound to happen and not in the sense of certain because it is never invariable that the right chart will occur. This is what I expect and I don't find it extraordinary anymore. My own explanation, argued for elsewhere on this site, is that a non-material power is involved, what I term the Responsive Cosmos.<sup>4</sup> The divinatory school of the Company of Astrologers provides a similar take from a different perspective. There may be other approaches but no coherent ones have been offered and until they are, and are argued for in an intelligible manner, what I will continue to find inexplicable is the reluctance of the world of astrology to accept the involvement of a non-material power, the responsive cosmos, the world of spirit, the divine, or whatever.

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<sup>3</sup> There have been surprisingly few discussions of astrological methodology, given how crucial it is; in my view the best analysis can be found in Geoffrey Cornelius' *The Moment of Astrology*. See also my thesis (full reference at note 1 above): the whole of chapter 4 but in particular pp109-16.

<sup>4</sup> For further discussion of the Responsive Cosmos see my thesis (full reference at note 1 above): Cosmos the whole of chapters 3 and 5 but in particular pp. 75-6; pp. 83-90; pp. 180-94.