

Metaphysical Psychology: The 8th Great Problem of Astrology

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Abstract

Astrology has a history of accepting the metaphysical psychology of Jung and others, often failing to fully engage with its implications or using such theories to underpin natal work. This paper critiques this tendency along with the Cartesian implications of much depth psychology, and offers alternative perspectives drawn primarily from the work of Nietzsche and Wittgenstein. The work of these philosophers highlight the manner in which metaphysical explanations become factual descriptors, in which such concepts as archetypes, internal psychic objects and a dynamic unconscious are used to explain human behaviour. An unquestioned acceptance of such ideas contributes to much academic confusion, and an example of an example of current astrological thought is given. The paper explores some common approaches towards seeking an explanatory theory for astrology, though questions why a theory is deemed to be necessary and what this has to say of the culture from which such concerns arise. It concludes with some observations regarding research practice and attitudes.

Charles Carter's *Seven Great Problems of Astrology*, first published in 1927, mainly concerned itself with a number of issues revolving around chart interpretation which, while still relevant today, lie outside the scope of this article. However, one of his observations which will be discussed asserts that '*It cannot be questioned that the unconscious is a realm wherein the stellar forces are tremendously potent*'. Adding the caveat that:

*'It is doubtful if all the phenomena of natal astrology can be explained in terms of the unconscious, unless, indeed, we were to endow that mysterious factor with even more wondrous powers than some psychologists, seeking a deus ex machina to solve their problems, have already given to it'*¹.

From this brief quote three claims emerge: that the existence of the unconscious cannot be doubted; that it might not be an adequate model in which to discuss all facets of natal astrology; that it can still be seen as an explanation, albeit in a somewhat catch-all manner.

The first two points will be explored below, but I would like to start with his use of the word 'explanation', which itself might need some explaining.

Astrologers are often unclear with this word when saying something like 'Mars in her chart explains her bad temper'. Its placement does not explain anything; the chart is a picture which the astrologer interprets, its visual components no more *explain* the native than Van Gogh's *Sunflowers* explains why people put flowers in vases. The idea of an explanation probably arises because the picture in the chart makes sense to the astrologer, where it would not for the sceptic. In the opening pages of his *Blue Book*² Wittgenstein reminds us that what we find meaningful emerges from what we have already taken from the world; our sense of what might *make sense* lies ahead of us. When seeking a meaning he asks us to consider first what would count as meaningful or explanatory. As he puts it elsewhere, we want to say 'it must be like this'; consequently there is the tendency to shoehorn the unknown into something familiar because it is satisfying to do this. Very often we are persuaded by a theory which presents a compelling word picture of a possible state of affairs. In a similar vein Nietzsche¹ draws attention to our need for seeking a theoretical confirmation of our experiences:

To trace something unknown back to something known is alleviating, soothing, gratifying and gives moreover a feeling of power. Danger, disquiet, anxiety attend the unknown -the first instinct is to eliminate these distressing states...³

Taking this point further he suggests that:

Look, isn't our need for knowledge precisely this need for the familiar, the will to uncover under everything strange, unusual and questionable something that no

¹ Nietzsche regarded himself as a psychologist, and as this quote illustrates saw as his primary task reinterpreting the stories we tell about ourselves and our motives. We make noble claims to seek truth (and invent a God to embody that concept and justify our existence as his creation) when in reality we are unable to live with uncertainty or take responsibility for who we are. To this end fictional narratives are constructed about unseen powers that make our lives comprehensible. Unlike the many psychologists who took on some of his ideas, Nietzsche regarded as Nihilists those who rejected the reality of their lived, embodied experience in preference to metaphysical explanations. As he put it, '*the significance of language for the evolution of culture lies in this, that mankind set up in language a separate world...*' Manu Bazzano's *Nietzsche and Psychotherapy* (Routledge, 2019) is recommended for those seeking a fuller understanding of Nietzsche's challenging style of psychologizing.

*longer disturbs us? Is it not the instinct of fear that bids us to know? And is the jubilation of those who attain knowledge not the jubilation over the restoration of the sense of security?*⁴

Thus one searches not only for some kind of explanation to serve as a cause, but for a preferred kind of explanation that confirms certainty and, with it, our personal identity as someone who has knowledge. Astrologers can do much the same, of course, but there appears to be something so fundamentally unsettling about astrology, which may account for so much of the wrath it calls down, and the consequent need to make it 'safe' by speaking of it in terms of an idea that holds some public recognition, such as the concepts of causality that underpin the idea of an explanation (it is *this* because of *that*) and latterly the unconscious which, as Carter reminds us, can be used to explain just about anything. While the Jungian concept of the unconscious is anything but a placid ocean it remains, for its adherents at least, to some extent recognisable. It is also an example of what Wittgenstein would call a 'picture'. By this he meant a form of words that may captivate us because it offers a kind of explanation that is reasonably coherent in its own terms. Ptolemy's picture of a geocentric system with planets moving in epicycles also made sense (and could be used to predict planetary positions) but was an erroneous depiction of the solar system.

When Carter makes the claim that the unconscious cannot be questioned as a realm of potent stellar forces he nevertheless goes on to question its general applicability. His use of the term 'stellar forces' is another picture, taken from scientific enquiry into gravitational influences, which many astrologers use in a metaphorical manner without subscribing to the medieval idea of a planet's physical effect on the native. Yet it still lurks in the writing of many astrologers when considering the human condition. There is no doubt that the picture of an individual beset by conflicting desires originating in the unconscious, whether or not allied to the planets, is a compelling one. Besides influencing innumerable psychological theories, it has informed sociological and historical perspectives, art and literary criticism, it formed the basis of the surrealist movement, is implicit in structuralist and post-structuralist theories of language and, like a thief in the night, has slipped effortlessly into the everyday, replacing treasured ideals with baser motives. Like dark matter -another endlessly debated concept - it is everywhere and nowhere, a picture ready to hand that might fill an unforgiving lapse in an otherwise compelling story. But does it actually exist? More importantly, as we shall come to, the Jungian model gives us a picture of the unconscious that at its core holds a serious confusion that has been part of western thought since the time of Plato. While it is not alone in this, its picture of the human predicament can be seen as substantially flawed,

and consequently fails to offer the astrologer a more open way to explore how we embody the world in which we live.

The Unconscious/s

Those seeking a history of the concept of the unconscious are referred to Ellenberger's *The Discovery of the Unconscious*. This remarkable work of scholarship explores the emergence, development and utilisation of this idea by many different schools of psychotherapy -and many variants they are -which alone should alert us to the problematic essence of this concept. What follows below concerns the Jungian claim that the unconscious is a dynamic 'other' residing within us. To clarify: the picture is of a self or ego, of which we are basically aware, but is held in thrall by a variety of unconscious forces that have their own agendas and work through us in mysterious ways. The human being is seen as arriving into the world underpinned by psyches, part objects such as animuses, animas, archetypal energies in various unconscious strata, and so on.

Here it is important to note the central difference between 'being unconscious' and 'the unconscious.' The first is a common, indeed an inevitable part of life. I meet someone and take an immediate dislike of them. Later, on reflection, I realise that something about them reminded me of the boy who bullied me at school. We are not transparent to ourselves and much of psychotherapy is concerned with bringing to light our unconsidered experiences and how we are entangled in our past in ways which we have (or have not) understood who we are. The second is a reification of such an event in which a verb (the act of being unconscious of) is turned into a noun -the unconscious as some form of object or centre with its own ways of working that lurks within us. Wittgenstein drew attention to this with regard to the verbal transposition that Freud used when claiming that we had 'unconscious thoughts'.⁵ As thoughts are conscious by definition this is akin to the idea that we might have an unconscious toothache. Wittgenstein pointed out other ways in which Freud used (or was used by) language to speak of the unconscious as a secret realm to be discovered when in fact it is a particular form of *interpreting* everyday phenomena. While I do not doubt that many may find a psychoanalytic interpretation useful (Wittgenstein also felt that Freud's method had much to commend it, both for its originality and its capacity to puncture human vanity) it remains an interpretation in much the same manner as a chart reading: it is a picture of some event. Problems arise when the suggestion is made that the efficacy of either method proves its underlying theory. As with Ptolemy's universe, one can be right in practice while holding a theory that is hopelessly wrong, one in which planetary epicycles were invented to support a particular picture, as could be suggested for psychologists who create mythological psychic components to make sense of the phenomena they observe.

Trying to explain what one can see by recourse to something one cannot see is problematic enough, but the central issue for psychological astrologers is that Jungian theory, rather than supporting the astrological paradigm of a seamless merging of heaven and earth, is relentlessly Cartesian.

Descartes' error

The philosopher Anthony Kenny wrote of Descartes: *you could put [his] main ideas on the back of a postcard: man is a thinking mind; matter is extension in motion*⁶. This is the essence of Dualism : the mental and the physical are *separate realms that interact, if at all, only in a mysterious manner that transcends the normal rules of causality and evidence*⁷ -a thought that in some ways echoes the issues raised by Carter. Descartes, who laid down so much of the scientific method, supports his assertion with metaphysics, as nothing is more metaphysical than the concept of 'mind' or, as we shall see later, the *self*. Unlike the body, both mind and self are theoretical and intangible. When Descartes claimed that mathematical logic was so pure and perfect it can only have been put into his mind by God, he overlooked the fact that all his ideas about, God, mind, ego etc. have nothing to do with him; they were part and parcel of the world into which he was born. Indeed, they were there long before him, for Descartes formalised dualistic concepts that have been embedded in western thinking since the time of Plato. Plato gave us the following picture: we live in an imperfect, temporal world; but there is another realm, *Aion*, a timeless, infinite and perfect realm of Ideas and Forms. Neo-Platonists claim that these, like the mind for Descartes, are immaculate and owe nothing to our earthly realm, despite the fact that these concepts emerged from human beings, using the language which they embodied. While we can hint at what might lie beyond our awareness, it stands to reason that we cannot legitimately describe it. In these imagined waters many psychologists swim, employing all manner of internal psychic objects to keep them, and their theories afloat. It is this emphasis on the 'internal', this picture of the human being coming into the world with pre-formed psychic parts that owe nothing to the circumstances into which they were born that is not just Cartesian, it is also -as I will discuss later -seemingly at odds with astrological practice.

While all languages can hint at what might lie beyond their literal application, trying to name what this might be is an obvious paradox, which risks the psychologism that bedevils so many theories, when an idea, or a picture, is turned into a causal agent. With regard to astrology, we can certainly think of it in terms of archetypal theory, but it may be more accurate to see how language itself sets such parameters from the start. We are thrown into the world like stone-age babies, named boys or girls, given words for all our body parts, told what is expected of us in the language of our culture, later to be surrounded by innumerable

images in which we find or lose ourselves. As with the concept of archetypes, the language that defines our possibilities is trans-individual and rich with its own mythology but is far from unconscious, even if its many implications are not always grasped in terms of our actual, lived experience -especially so if we move away from who we are into a picture that comes from reifying theories. For example: who would say *I met a very attractive self the other day and my self hopes that neither of our selves project their internal contra-sexual components onto the other in a manner that inhibits our respective selves from individuating as a discrete Self in its own right*. While some might see this as an uncharitable application of Jungian terminology, it is far from being inaccurate. It captures the manner in which traditional analytic psychology frames its central concepts, by placing certain observed interpersonal phenomena 'inside' the individual. Having been placed by theory inside us, they now have to get out. To do this they are aided by the 'mechanism' of projection.

Projections and Confusions

Jung's view of astrology shifts over time and despite the plethora of astrologers referencing his work there has been little rigorous examination of his many claims. Suffice it to say that at times he appeared ignorant of the astrologers' use of precession (at a several points his writing assumed that they did not know of this) but as he stated that his own chart had Aquarius rising⁸ he was clearly familiar with how charts were calculated. His much quoted research into the charts of married couples further emphasis this, though many questions have been raised as to the accuracy, or indeed the honesty of his account⁹. However the debate may turn out, his central view of astrology is abundantly clear:

[Astrological] influences are nothing but the unconscious, introspective perceptions of the activity of the collective unconscious... projected onto the heavens¹⁰.

Similarly:

Astrology is the psychology of the ancients projected onto the heavens¹¹.

Thus, for Jung, the 'influences' of the planets are the result of humanity's unconscious processes projected, that is brought to consciousness and made comprehensible, by situating them elsewhere. While I will return to the idea of 'projection' below, it should be noted that the actual practice of astrology is primarily one of applying different kinds of rules that take some years to learn. This appears to be true, whether one is practising the astrology of Lilley, or Hindu, Chinese, or Mayan techniques, following the method

suggested by Ebertin and Witte, or indeed the path of the psychological astrologer. Each approach carries its own acquired assumptions and, more importantly, emerges from its own cultural and temporal situation. Progress is made by extending astrology's language-use to meet new circumstances, as do poets and writers. Jung's *ex cathedra* claims ignores such cultural realities and in this respect has been accused, with some justification, of creating a racist model of the unconscious, valuing the European over non-white groups on their assumed levels of unconscious development. While this matter will no doubt continue to be debated, I will return to its Cartesian nature, and the implications for the astrologer.

Inner and Outer

As Anthony Kenney's earlier quote makes clear, the essence of Descartes' philosophy is dualistic, favouring an 'internal' mind that apparently owes nothing to its cultural and linguistic heritage, a view adopted by much psychology. When Wittgenstein claims that *nothing is hidden*¹² he appears to be flying in the face of both reason and common sense. After all, is it not obvious that I might have thoughts and feelings which are unknown to others unless I give voice to them? While this is clearly the case, these are not in any genuine sense 'hidden' -for example, / know what they are. I know this because they are part of the world into which I was born, and have their roots there. Even if I do not *understand* what these images might be, the concept of 'understanding', 'making sense of', etc. are ways of thinking that come from the world. The meanings of the words I use do not reside in some conjectured 'inner language' of symbols and images, for these would be utterly unintelligible to me without the shared language I use to describe them. While the idea of some inner or unconscious vision may have poetic or metaphoric usage, when applied literally as an explanation it can only further confuse the astrological paradigm.

A recent paper by Laura Andrikopoulus¹³, while both thorough and thoughtful, can also be seen as an example of how academic research can at times get caught up in the very concepts it seeks to clarify. Andrikopoulus' paper addresses the different ways in which the idea of an 'inner landscape' can be considered, and how this might influence the way in which the world at large is interpreted by the astrologer. Beginning with traditional concepts such as 'landscape', 'seascape', etc., she draws on the work of James Hillman and Henri Corbin to argue for the addition of an 'inscape' to describe '*a particular internal landscape, accessed through the imagination*'. For Andrikopoulus the term inscape refers to the process of interpretation which '*is particularly concerned with the analogies that form the basis of translating astrological symbols to real world problems and questions.*' These views

contrast the use of 'landscape' with the 'real' world which *'lacks precision, given its association with the world outside the individual psyche'*. Overlooking the fact that an actual landscape is amenable to very precise description via mapping, photography, physical analysis, etc., while the imagination is not, the picture it gives us remains Cartesian, splitting psyche from world. Much like the familiar astrological homily 'as above, so below', the world is seen as 'out there' while our view of it is 'inside' and separate. But her paper also offers suggestions as to how astrologers might engage with symbolism to enrich a sense of their own, and their clients' experience. The examples given are clear and evocative, and demonstrate the potential of active imagination which has much to commend it. There is no sense of some inner alienation from the world, but a creative engagement with what can be gleaned from all that can be perceived. It would seem that, like so many examples from psychology, a useful practice, which can stand on its own, is supported by an explanation that omits the fact that an 'inner' world cannot be a discrete realm of its own. As Wittgenstein succinctly put it *'an "inner process" stands in need of outward criteria'*¹⁴,

Andrikopoulos' theory seeks to represent an 'inscape' without acknowledging that it ultimately depends on the nature of the world from which its descriptive language originated. How might this quandary be unravelled?

Realities

We could start by questioning what is meant by a 'real world' when so many perspectives abound, noting at once that the world of the scientist is typically different from the world of the astrologer. Scientists view the planets in terms of their physical constituents, their rotational speeds, their orbital trajectories and so forth. Planets are seen as objects of enquiry, having no purpose or meaning. For the astrologer things are very different. Planets are endowed with a variety of assumed qualities. This is not to suggest that astrologers believe that the planets actually *contain* certain essential qualities; they are using language differently, and consequently creating a different picture of the world -indeed, a different world. Wittgenstein addresses this problem with a simple statement: *it is clear that the world of the happy is a different world from the world of the unhappy*¹⁵. He is not falling into the error of psychologism by suggesting that some inner emotional state is being projected onto the 'real' world. His move is far more radical as he is drawing attention to the manner in which we and our world are one. As he put it in the Tractatus (para 5.632): *The subject does not belong to the world: rather it is the limit of the world*. There is no discrete 'self' that observes the world from some objective Cartesian position. The world I see is my world, seen and experienced through the language and mood in which I perceive it. That language,

be it scientific, astrological, psychological, or whatever, makes my world as a human being possible. As Wittgenstein put it:

*The self-evidence of the world expresses itself in the very fact that language can and does only refer to it. For since language only derives the way in which it means from its meaning, from the world, no language is conceivable which does not represent this world.*¹⁶

Let us unpack this sentence, for it contains much. Wittgenstein, who was a deeply spiritual man, is not suggesting that nothing can exist outside of language. Indeed, he is clear that language has its limits. Many important aspects of life can never be formally stated: ethical behaviour, aesthetics, religious and mystical states, and so on all lie outside of what language can sensibly describe. At a mundane level, who could describe in words the difference between the smell of coffee and the smell of petrol so that someone unfamiliar with both would recognise them when encountered? Wittgenstein was addressing those things that could be said, and how often we attempt to put into logic experiences that, however profound and important to the individual, are essentially un-nameable. For example, the twelve signs of the Zodiac can be arranged in 479,001,600 different ways. This will always hold true. What cannot be done is to establish a hierarchy of values for them, for this would require something like a God-given perspective in which we had access to all potential examples of their expression from now until the end of the world. It is when we try to use language that is logical in one form of life to describe another situation that confusions arise. It makes sense for a doctor to enquire what may be going wrong inside my body, for internal organs can be x-rayed, scanned, etc. It is non-sense to suggest that I have an equivalent, hidden inner world that can be similarly inspected for malfunctioning psychic objects. All that can be seen is my body, my behaviour, etc. from which all sorts of conjectures can be made, but they remain purely theoretical even if treated as factual. With regard to the 'self' the psychotherapist John Heaton commented thus:

*When psychoanalysts substitute the ego for the use of 'I' they identify the subject as a thing among things. As it is a thing it must have predicates and properties. It can then become a fixed thing, in the inner world, determined and known. Experts can lay claim to having authority, their interpretations of it must be correct. But when 'I' is used authentically it expresses the world as a whole.*¹⁷

Going further, he clarifies a common misunderstanding of the self or 'I'; noting that that it plays an important role in grammar, but does not refer to anything in the way that 'table' signifies an object:

Someone may ask me: 'What is your name?'. I may reply 'I am J.H.' But the word 'I' does not mean the same as J.H. even if I am J.H. The word 'I' does not name a person or object but names are explained by it. The moment 'I' is named its use is lost and replaced by a name that corresponds to it. 'I' is used differently from J.H. You can point to J.H.... I do not point to my 'I'. J.H. has an identity, 'I' does not, all English speakers use it.. We do not possess an 'I' but use the word according to rules.¹⁸

Despite the claims of philosophers, research scientists and those of mystics from many cultures that there is no self or ego, something often experienced by lesser mortals using psychedelics, the myth persists and psychotherapists, astrologers and others are often required to answer a question such as 'Who am I really?'. While we can suggest that this question might mask a whole range of confusions about their wishes, desires, behaviours etc., the claim is often made by astrologers that the natal chart is a unique portrayal of the native. Is this really the case?

Charting the Moment

Every chart is created to establish the planetary positions for a specific time and place so that it can be interpreted by the astrologer. Charts might be set for a variety of reasons, but there is nothing in the chart itself that defines its purpose; it is the intention of the astrologer that determines *how* the map will be interpreted.. While the angles and houses will shift with geography, the planetary positions and their resultant aspects will constant throughout the globe. Every chart set for a specific time can in some manner apply to *everything* that is taking place in the world at that moment. It is the world into which we are born. In a typical town all sorts of things will be happening as the baby takes its first breath. In the next ward a nurse may be closing the curtains around a silent figure. A shop may be opening for the first time, another announces the close of business; there may be car crashes, robberies, hirings and redundancies; two strangers bump into each other and a love affair begins; a writer gets yet another rejection letter while the actor in the next street gets a phone call from Hollywood. Same moment, same chart. As the late *News of the World* used as its slogan: 'All Human Life is There'. Thus we might ask: to what extent is the birth chart a unique picture of the native and, more importantly where is the individual 'self' located which the astrologer is called upon to describe?

Typically, astrologers interpret the planetary picture according to certain rules that they have learned, and from experience found to be useful. In doing this they will adopt a certain perspective based on what the chart is *for*, extracting from the myriad possibilities held in the moment only those attributes of the planetary signifiers that pertain to the business of

interpreting a natal chart. From this abundance the astrologer selects signifiers appropriate for what is to be discussed in the consultation, for the astrological language is particularly rich. Lee Lehman's *Book of Astrological Rulerships* lists hundreds of possible expressions for each planet or sign, only a fraction of which may apply to the chart that lies between the astrologer and the client.

While we can see that the astrological language can symbolise qualities that may not be definable in other linguistic systems (as is the case with all languages) there is a tendency to ask of astrology: how does its language work? To ask how a language works is, for Wittgenstein, an example of 'a confusion expressed as a question'. It is a confusion because it is framed in the language of science while addressing something that neither science nor philosophy can answer. Yes, we can give example of how any language can be *used*, as can the astrologer, who can also offer alternative descriptors for the non-astrologer, but we cannot step outside of language while simultaneously using it, for we remain within its structure and effects.

While some astrological researchers are tempted by the idea of physical causality^{19 20} language is not a causal agent, but a mode of description. A particular description may alter one's perspective of a person or an event but it does not create it. -obviously so, as description is invariably *post facto*.. The impossibility of seeing what is 'behind language' is wonderfully illustrated by Derrida²¹ with the following metaphor. The mirror might reflect the world's reality, and also give us a picture of ourselves, but what makes the image possible resides in something unseen -the mirror's silver backing. Language seems always depends on something that remains out of sight, and there is a similar limit on our ability to conjecture what this might be. Hence Wittgenstein's critique of the so-called 'thought experiment' as opposed to an actual experiment carried out by scientists. The real experiment may have totally unexpected results, but a 'thought-experiment' cannot have consequences beyond the thinker's imagination.²² We are held to what can be said. Similarly Wittgenstein noted with regard to Frege's and Russell's attempts to define the underlying rules of mathematics: whatever they came up with would still be a mathematical expression, and hence fall under the auspice of what it is endeavouring to get beyond.²³ While we may have new insights into our world -as did Frege and Russell and many others innovators -using language differently to illuminate new possibilities is still using language, and we cannot go beyond what it gives us, as there would be no way of saying what that was. While none can ignore the implications of these two observations - that we cannot step outside of our language or imagine coherent circumstances that lie beyond our descriptive powers - we can at least acknowledge the problems that emerge when our language 'bewitches us' into reifying what are essentially metaphorical interpretations. Hence Wittgenstein's gnomic conclusion to the

Tractatus: *whereof we cannot speak, thereof we should remain silent* warns us against trying to fill the silence with the noise of theories, though the urge to do so is hard to resist, particularly in the area of psychology.

We can certainly think of astrology in terms of archetypal theory, but it may be useful to recognise how language itself sets our parameters from the start. We are thrown into the world like stone-age babies, named boys or girls, given words for all our body parts, told what is expected of us in the language of our culture, later to be surrounded by innumerable images in which we find, or lose ourselves. As with the concept of archetypes, the language that defines our possibilities and behaviours is trans-individual and rich with its own mythology, though far from unconscious even if its implications are not always grasped.

Bringing Things Together.

In his paper *'On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense'* Nietzsche reminds us that we tend to find 'truth' within systems of thought we have already created, without considering the possibility that they have arisen purely for self-fulling and ego-centric purposes, thus ignoring their myriad, alternative readings of observed phenomena. Interestingly, he uses astrology as a metaphor for this, suggesting that astrologers assume that everything going on in the heavens refers exclusively to them -a thought that has played its part in this paper. In suggesting that the natal chart is not a map exclusive to the individual, but a picture of the world of the native, several thoughts follow. Instead of the chart showing the individual as a discrete self, owing nothing to the nature of the world it could be seen instead as depicting our entanglement in the world. Here, the planets and signs are not immutable essences but reflect different forms of perception and ways of experiencing who we are and the manner in which we make sense of ourselves and our circumstances in different areas of life, rather than depicting ourselves as discrete entities which 'project' unconscious issues onto others. That we may come to notice unpalatable behaviour in others prior to recognising it within ourselves does not require an explanation couched in mechanistic theories of psychic components. It devolves to how honestly we acknowledge who we are and how we see the world. If self-awareness is required, then astrology tends to place this problem under the auspices of the sun, typically seen as depicting the self or ego.

Interestingly, its ambiguous nature is actually mirrored in the mechanics of the solar system. Instead of the planets revolving around the sun, as were told in school, the planets actually revolve around an empty point in space called the Centre of Mass (CM). This point is created by the interplay of the planets' combined gravitational forces, and the sun is also affected by it, being pulled to-and fro in an erratic 22 year cycle. Sometimes the sun's

position is coincident with the CM, but much of the time it is not. Thus we get the picture of the sun's place being to a large extent determined by the planets themselves, a not inaccurate metaphor for the manner in which the idea of a self is not a pristine centre of being, but a concept created by an ebb and flow of all that floats around.

While the idea of a having a self or ego remains a linguistic concept, it should not be confused with having (or not having) a clear sense of who we are. The sudden loss of this sense, as is often the case for those subsequently diagnosed with psychotic conditions can be catastrophic and, significantly is invariably coincident with the patient making claims that their *world* has changed. As the psychotherapist Miles Groth puts it with regard to what may be taking place then '[the] *pathology is in the patient's world, not inside the patient's psyche. It is impossible to separate his experience of things from this world and lived time*'²⁴.

Extending Groth's claim to include the manner in which this sense of agency is fundamentally embedded in our world, the work of Jim Lewis, Erin Sullivan and others have extended Firebrace's²⁵ original mapping of natal charts across the globe with many examples demonstrating how common, lived experiences vary with geography, and bring to the fore aspects of the birth chart that may not be immediately apparent in its natal situation. Groth's emphasis on the lived experience of our world in which all is shifting and moving as our perceptions change, whether in accord with the planets or not, is of great importance to the researcher. Even a journal such as *Nature* has acknowledged that such fundamental matters as bodily responses to medicines when given to a patient for the first time in the past, are no longer effective when given for the first time in identical current circumstances²⁶. In 2011 *Nature* carried a research paper that drew attention to this phenomena (Schooler, 2011, vol. 470 :p437) intriguingly termed Cosmic Habituation by the author. The article suggests that somehow or other we appear to be living in a world that is time-dependant. In some case the same medical procedures do not produce the same results over time. This would appear to echo the astrological model which claims that all is in flux, and raises important questions for the researcher, who tends to assume a temporal and geographic fixity in data sets, generally seeking evidence for a static 'self' describable in terms of having this or that planet situated in this or that placement, correlating to this or that set of *a priori* descriptors, which in the main utilise the language of western academic psychology. Is there or is there not a fit?

For example Robert Currey's recent investigation into the character traits of those whose birth was placed in either the Tropical or the Sidereal Zodiac is a case in point²⁷. While Currey's discussion on the findings addresses some of the concerns mentioned here,

particularly the western perspective of Hans Eysenck's categorizations, one could also ask if Eysenck's categories 'proved' astrology, or whether astrology's categories 'proved' Eysenck. With a variety of different Zodiacs, concepts of elements, usage of cycles, and in many cases a completely different philosophical underpinning, it is difficult to be enthusiastic about the many research projects that have sought to impose a 'one size fits all' paradigm on such disparate phenomena. Such endeavours are not improved if allied to the wholesale application of the west's psychological perspective on radically different cultures, especially when so much of its this psychology is fraught with errors and assumptions.

Some Implications for Research

Except for a number of well reported research projects that have established a convincing relationship between planetary position and either birth time or event moments, the majority of research outcomes tend to be more ambiguous. Perhaps one of the main issues revolves around the mind-set of the investigator when it comes to selecting suitable data. As has been stressed above, the human being is not a discrete 'self, but born into a moment where much else is taking place. This can be seen as a metaphor of the human condition, of which Nietzsche has much to say. For him we are not '*individuals*' but '*bividuals*': we are an amalgam of many drives that seek expression within us - which astrology seems also to suggest. Our task is to live with this and not seek to become the individuated 'self' of Jungian psychology, or the strong ego of much post-Freudian thinking, for such possibilities ultimately devolve to theory. However, much research assumes that we are all of one piece and seeks to confirm this unity by attempting to establish a correlation with appropriate astrological signifiers. Such a move often overlooks the manner in which shifting cultural assumptions designate our qualities via a sort of tick-box approach. I will give a practical example.

In the Schneider-Gauquelin Research Journal (Vol3, No2) there is an analysis of some 68 'terrorists', all but two being Italian. What might they have in common? Well, for a start they are mainly Italian. Would we expect to find an astrological signifier for Italians, for that is the clearest factor they share? If only one person in the world spoke Italian would be expect to find a marker for that individual. Is it that they have killed people? Well, so have millions of those in the armed forces. While Gauquelin establishes a convincing case for the sectors of Mars, this placement is lacking in the 'terrorist' group. Should those who paid a terrible price for attempting to kill Hitler also be in that group, for that was how they were described? If I take a different view of the 'terrorist' group and suggest that they were people who pushed their views to the extreme, then what about the man who, fed up with his council tax, drove a bulldozer to the steps of the council office and dumped a £1000 worth of pennies through their door.

From such brief thoughts two important points emerge.

1) For understandable reasons researchers tend to adopt data sets that have been created by others (murderers, alcoholics, psychotics, etc.) without considering how, and for what purpose these groups have been established. One might include drug dealers here, but in Victorian times the importation of opium, marijuana etc. was perfectly legal. Social values ebb and flow. Until 1967 male homosexuality was illegal in this country, thus such men could have been classified as criminals. Here it is interesting to note that many astrological research projects have sought to establish a 'gay' signature. Would they also seek to establish evidence for straight sexuality? What might it be?

2) If researchers seek to establish an astrological correlation with specific character traits, a stance taken, amongst others, by Ertel and Irving in their reworking of the Gauquelins' research, then such traits should be apparent across a wide variety of situations and not necessarily show only under one particular career heading. While it is unlikely that MI6 would ever reveal the birth data of its employees, one of the primary qualities sought is that of an exceptional memory. So too for chess masters, some academics across a range of diverse disciplines, as well as Scrabble players, train-spotters and those whose collection of beer bottles or Barbie dolls fill their homes and who can give chapter and verse on every item, as well as many diagnosed as being on the Autistic spectrum. All charts and lives are rich with a potential encouraged or inhibited by temporal and cultural circumstances which the astrological straight jackets of both traditional and psychological perspectives may be ill-fitted to accommodate. While much more could be written on the importance of establishing clear reasons for selecting a data set, and our own part in this process, there remains the purpose for which this task is being carried out. Are we trying to confirm the past, or open pathways to the future? If the basic astrological paradigm is correct (and it may not be) that chart patterns reflect the issues for which they are set, then any statistically significant findings in a well-chosen cohort should give us some form of answer, even if it contradicts traditional or psychological theories. If we are not prepared to take a more phenomenological stance and pay attention to what is there, rather than what we hoped might be there, but isn't, then why on earth bother with research at all?

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