

## Astrology—A new dimension in Therapy

A person comes to you with the problem, let us say, of inhibitions and feelings of inadequacy in relationships. Typically, he will be making matters worse by blaming himself for being a failure and feeling that he 'ought' to be more spontaneous. Yet, if we examine his astrological chart we find a combination of the planets Venus and Saturn which indicates that it is an essential part of this person's growth process to subject personal values and feelings to a conscious and careful scrutiny and to express them in very specific and practical ways.

In other words, there is a sense in which part of the meaning of his life is to be constantly challenging his personal desires in terms of how they fit in with his own feelings of limitation. As long as he is unconscious of that, the pattern is almost certainly going to manifest in the negative manner we have discussed. It emphatically does not mean that he has to go on using it in that way. As he becomes more aware of the pattern - and more accepting of it - he can start to make different choices about how to use it. Very likely his sense of personal limitation is unrealistically harsh and it may be that his value system is inappropriate to his further growth and needs to be examined and changed.

The way in which he goes about making these changes may well be through some form of therapy but, for me, the value of astrology is that not only can it pin-point areas of difficulty but that it can show a client that there is an essentially healthy, growth-orientated meaning at the core of even the most apparently negative behaviour patterns. Moreover, it can do so in one consultation, shifting a client's perspective from "I'm no good." to "I'm misusing an important part of myself." True, the realisation is likely to be in his head only and the inertia of his emotional problems may obscure it unless he consciously works with it but an important step towards growth has been made.

This is a very over-simplified example of the way in which astrology can be used to increase awareness and therefore choice. The birth chart has been described as a set of instructions for living one's life and the analogy is an apt one. If we attempt to operate a complicated stereo outfit without an instruction manual we are unlikely to get the best from it and may well damage it in our trial and error attempts to get it to work, especially if we are not familiar with this type of equipment. Yet this is virtually the position most of us are in in regard to our lives.

These claims for astrology may seem startling to the reader who has never given the subject serious consideration and perhaps even more so to anyone who has had some experience of astrology but with an astrologer working with traditional concepts. The tendency among astrologers trained to think along traditional lines is to give very fixed and often doom-laden interpretations of chart factors. A book still currently quite popular gives as the meaning

of the Venus/Saturn relationship that I discussed earlier, "Lax morals, bereavements, business losses, trouble in courtship and marriage, delay, disappointment, restrictions and ill-health."

Just what you need to cheer you up on a Monday morning! The trouble is not so much that the traditional interpretations are wrong as that they fail to recognise the wider abstract meanings of astrological factors and, even worse, are based on an appallingly naive 'common-sense' psychology and are the product of a medieval cultural system.

The Venus/Saturn person might possibly find that he does encounter the sort of misfortunes quoted as long as he is unconscious of the inner dynamic. Certainly, as long as he fights against it and continues to believe that the next marriage will be the one that really works he will only dig himself deeper into the mire. It is not, as I see it, a question of getting rid of this configuration but rather of fully accepting it and learning to co-operate with it consciously and intelligently so as to release the positive energy at the core of it. This particular combination of planets may manifest as a 'Loser' subpersonality and, as such, can be worked with according to the type of therapy one favours.

The value of the astrological perspective is that the therapist has the benefit of having the map, in the form of the birth chart, of the client's growth process in front of him and also that the client can be given some indication of the goal he is working towards. The Venus/Saturn combination, at its most positive, indicates a person who has a much higher than average capacity to be consciously in touch with his feelings and values. True, he is going to have to work at it and suffer much in the process but the reward can be that he can learn ways of expressing and accepting love in a much more satisfying manner than if it had originally been spontaneous and easy for him.

Clearly, to be of value to a person who wants to use it as a growth tool for himself or his clients, astrology needs to be redefined in terms of what we now know about the workings of the psyche. The first thing to be done is to take the stand very firmly that the planets and signs have no power of themselves; that they do not influence us but are external symbols of certain types of psychic energy. The most serious objection to any other view of astrology is that it can be used as the supreme argument for disowning responsibility. "It's not my fault my marriage has broken up. It's because I have a Venus/Saturn conjunction in my chart."

This simply won't do if we are to make use of the enormous potential of astrology. But to consider the problem fully takes us into the question of how and why astrology should work. How come a conjunction of Venus and Saturn in the sky when John Smith was born correlates with his problems in getting his lovelife together?

It would be outside the scope of this article to try to deal with the question at any length. All I want to say here is that, sooner or later, any attempt to explain astrology in materialistic terms breaks down. To make any sense of it at all we are forced into assuming a world-view in which, somehow,

every whole is contained in and is a reflection of every other whole. In some sense, beyond the limits of comprehension of the concrete mind, John Smith is the solar system and the energy patterns in his psyche will be symbolically reflected in the disposition of the planets at his moment of birth.

It might be added that scientists working in the field of particle physics are also being forced to adopt this view and it is becoming increasingly evident that our ideas of mechanical cause and effect collapse when we start dealing with subtle states of matter. The interested reader is referred to Fritjof Capra's 'The Tao of Physics' for a full discussion of this.

Physically, a birth chart is nothing more or less than a map of the solar system as seen from the place in which a person was born and at the time he was born. If a baby were able to see the planets at his moment of birth (and perhaps he is aware of them at some level) he would see them as they appear in his chart. It is important to be clear that it is the apparent position of the planets that matters. For instance, if Pluto was seen to be rising at birth, this would correlate with a personality characteristic. The light from Pluto takes about five and a half hours to reach the earth so the real position of Pluto would be nowhere near aligned with the horizon. This fact seems to me alone sufficient to dismiss any idea that astrology may work through some kind of electromagnetic influence and to force us to the view that the birth chart works symbolically.

There are three main physical factors in a birth chart; the planets, the signs of the zodiac, which are equal divisions of the Sun's apparent path starting from the Spring equinox, and the 'houses', which are a division into twelve of the space surrounding the earth.

Each planet, sign and house has a very wide spectrum of meanings and, within certain limits, it is doubtless possible to define these factors in terms of whatever psychological model one likes. The sequence, astronomically, of the planets and the sequences of the houses and signs need to be recognised as logical cycles and, within these cycles, each factor has a definite essential meaning. Thus, Aries always relates to beginnings, Virgo to analysis and discrimination, Saturn to boundaries, the Moon to creating a safe and automatic support system. Each planet has a special affinity with one or more signs - in the old terminology it 'rules' the sign. Venus, for example, rules the signs Taurus and Libra.

I have personally found it convenient and productive to think of the signs of the zodiac as twelve fundamental human needs, the ruling planets as the drives to do something about those needs and the houses as life goals and experiences. A useful analogy is that we all have a need for food (sign) which remains latent until we get hungry and feel driven to eat (planet). We then set up the goal of eating and have the appropriate experience (house). If there is no food in the fridge or we are on a diet we may have the experience of **not** eating and, in practice, some houses of a client's chart may have to do with the lack of certain essential experiences.

Each planet is placed in a particular sign and house so we can see how a drive is working through needs and with experiences which may or may

not be congenial to it. It is impossible to do more than hint at the complexity and subtlety of the information thus available but, as an example, let us suppose that we have a chart with Mars in Libra in the fourth house.

Mars is essentially the drive to act, to assert one's personal will regardless of others. Yet here it is working through the need (Libra) to feel related, to respect others and see them as equals. The fourth house is the experience and goal of creating a safe support system designed to afford comfort and avoid pain. It can be seen that a person with such a configuration will find himself in a rather complex situation when required to assert himself. It does not mean that he will be unable to assert himself. In the larger context of the total chart and the life, it is possible that the person may be able largely to ignore the qualifying needs and goals and express the drive in more or less pure form. Rommel had Mars in Libra and he was noted for his ability to act very forcefully and decisively. He was also noted for a strong sense of fairness and justice, which are Libran qualities. I merely wish to stress the point here that there are many ways in which even a single astrological factor can work and at many levels - something which most astrological textbooks tend to ignore.

Nor, of course, is this the whole of the story. Even if everything in the chart matches up nicely we still have to consider the effects of the early environment which can distort and discourage the inherent potential. It is by no means uncommon to find a person whose birth chart suggests a powerful personality but who is in fact hesitant and uncertain because the expression of his power was denied in early childhood. The Transactional Analysis concept of the script is useful here. It is as though the scripting takes a small area of the potential shown in the birth chart and crystallises it into a repetitive pattern.

In this short article I cannot hope to have done more than draw attention to the possibilities of astrology in giving a new perspective to the therapist. I am indebted to one of my own clients for summing up the value of astrology more succinctly than I had at that point formulated it myself. In essence it is that the, perhaps unique, contribution of astrology is that it can distinguish the natural response from the overlaid pathology - and do so virtually at a glance to the properly trained astrologer.

Therapists are confronted mainly by the overlaid pathology and, though it is true to say that most of us in the humanistic field subscribe to the view of the essential health and wholeness of a client, I would suggest that some understanding of the pattern of that health and wholeness as shown by the astrological chart must be of value to any therapist and possibly shorten the period of time needed for working with a client.

Most of the credit for seeing the potential of a modern psychological depth approach to astrology must go to an American philosopher and astrologer, Dane Rudhyar. In his first book 'The Astrology of Personality', written in 1936, he defined the function of astrology as being. . . . "to release and increase the significance of an individual destiny and of a unique personality". This new view of astrology is still very much in its infancy but I hope the

time is not far off when it will be an accepted addition to the therapist's armoury of techniques.

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