

# Astrology and Philosophy

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*Time must be brought to light — and genuinely conceived — as the horizon for all understanding of Being and for any way of interpreting it.*

Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*

Heidegger believed that the phenomenon of Time 'primordially determined' the nature of Being, and that any ontological enquiry would inevitably fail if it did not address the relationship of Being to Time.

If Time 'is' something, (and the 'is' denotes a state of being), or if Time contains or expresses a particular quality that can be explored or understood, (and if we claim that Time 'is' something, then there must be something there to 'be') then we have a right to ask what might comprise this 'is', and what, potentially, can be known about it.

Thus Heidegger directs his primary questions to the nature of Being, and to the quality of the Time from which that Being emerges. In many respects astrology has been addressing these fundamental questions for thousands of years.

To astrologers, as with the majority of philosophers, Time is not a measure but some form of entity, process or continuum. Astrologers see in the symbols and dynamics of planetary motion a way of assessing or interpreting qualities believed to be inherent in the nature of Time. Put crudely, astrologers endeavour to find out what Time is 'doing'.

Whatever happens at a particular

moment — a birth, an event or an idea — bears the stamp of that moment upon it as a unique picture of the nature of that moment. The horoscope is a way of laying out that picture in an objective manner; the interpretation of the signs and planets gives powerful clues as to what has been drawn upon the individual or the event at that instant. Traditionally, once the individual or the event takes on a life of its own it can be thought of as beginning the process of 'becoming' that which it already holds in essence.

From the time of Plato a central issue in philosophy has been the matter of Being and Becoming: in modern, existential terms, Essence and Existence. At their



extremes, these twin polarities encapsulate very different visions of humanity, though many philosophers grant them, often of necessity, an equal space.

The neo-Platonic concept of Essence claims there is an ideal, absolute realm of timeless truth, of which this world is but a poor reflection. In this timeless realm all possibilities already exist within the mind of a rational God. What we see in our own world, and in our own selves, is the expression of eternal principles and Ideas. Nothing exists, not even a table or a chair, that does not reflect a pre-existing concept of an Ideal 'tableness' or 'chairness'. A divine essence is claimed to underlie all earthly manifestations, visible in such essential concepts as truth, goodness and beauty, or operating through fundamental mathematical principles, inherent in the nature of numbers, which are said to give shape and form to both matter and thought.

The neo-Platonic vision, then, is rational (the nature of existence is theoretically accessible to introspection); deterministic, (the universe functions according to divine laws and is thus ultimately predictable); and hierarchical, if there is an ultimate Truth then my view of things is not just a matter of opinion, it is either more or less correct than your view.

As far as astrology is concerned, Plato described the planets as the 'first formed thoughts of God'. The fixed stars represented inherent Being, the moving planets the process of Becoming. As the planets move in their cycles so eternal Ideas are brought into the world of Becoming, via the events, sensations and experiences taking place at such time

on Earth.

The birth chart as a map of the individual's capacity to articulate these primary Ideas fits quite well within neo-Platonic philosophy, more so in the light of certain astrological techniques which are based on the harmonics of prime numbers — a major Platonic/Pythagorean theme.

While only a few astrologers would formally describe themselves as neo-Platonists, there is a general recognition that most of the numerical relationships and mathematical divisions both of the planetary cycles and of the zodiac itself borrow heavily from neo-Platonic sources. In reality, most counselling astrologers translate the Platonic vision of Form into the Jungian concept of Archetype, and view the process of Becoming as operating through something like Jung's theory of synchronicity. The energies symbolised by the various planets are seen as shared processes existing within the collective unconscious rather than in the world of Forms and Ideas.

The Jung/Pauli concept of synchronicity is often used to 'explain' astrology. It is certainly a most useful introduction to the idea that events can be intimately related without a need for underlying causal physics, though it is not a wholly original concept. The Catholic philosopher Malebranche (1638-1715) had God play the part of the Collective by suggesting that God, knowing all things, cunningly arranges for simultaneous events to co-exist where necessary — and thus provides their meaning. Jung's insistence that synchronicity exists to bring meaning to an individual's life may also owe something to Malebranche.

Despite Jung's interest in astrology he was primarily a psychologist, and never fully recognised astrology's potential, or even really understood how it was used. Consequently the concept of synchronicity falls far short of astrology's requirements, though the idea of non-causal connectedness is an important one (and primarily astrological), and has implications far beyond analytical psychology.

Phenomenologically orientated therapists, many drawing upon the philosophy of Heidegger, have long rejected a causal, mechanistic view of the psyche, where the personality 'above' results from an unconscious 'below' and can be explained by specific theories of psycho-dynamics — a view which mirrors Platonic determinism. For the phenomenologist the human being is not knowable in such a manner, as if 'being human' were a thing to be objectively inspected. Indeed, many would argue that there is, essentially, no 'thing' there to know in the first place, and certainly no objective place from which to view it. The phenomenologist is concerned with understanding the human being in terms of the experience of being human, as if the process of existence were the unique activity of the human being, and to this end applies an approach to therapy that is primarily philosophical.

It is at this point that the concerns of philosophy, psychology and astrology co-exist. Astrology not only speaks of the constant interaction between Being and Time, it provides a vocabulary of symbols with which to explore the quality of that evolving relationship. The language of astrology is not seen as a static phenome-

non, separate from the flow of events, but one constantly engaged in the process of 'being in the world'.

Here we can think of astrology as depicting how 'shared variables' (the psychic, cultural and biological similarities between people) might be individually expressed within Time. The birth chart is not a map of a fixed or 'fated' individual. It charts the starting point, in each of us, of all that is common to humanity, and shows how such similarities become uniquely oriented moment by moment. We can think of these affinities as instincts, or drives or needs; in each case the chart depicts our unique attunement to experience, and what we might bring to our own interpretation and understanding of it.

Most importantly, astrology reminds us that we cannot be defined or explained in static terms, somehow separate from the fact of our 'being in the world'. We are constantly involved in all that we experience, and in the process of interpreting or making sense of this state. Exploration of the astrological symbols gives powerful clues as to how we may be going about this, and what values we



may place upon our own sensations.

For the psychotherapist, as well as for the philosopher, astrology offers a challenging framework in which to work. It can describe many of the complexities of human interaction for which other disciplines have no effective vocabulary. It is not tied to one perspective of the psyche, it does not seek to pathologise or reduce,

nor are its roots embedded in one specific age or culture. Astrology is flexible enough to encompass both the rational and the phenomenological approaches to understanding our existence, and it allows for both the analytic and the experiential. For these reasons alone it deserves much closer attention by all those concerned with exploring the processes of life.

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## ***Chiron — The Bridge between Personality and Soul***

*Laura Ribbons*

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**O**n the 1st of November 1977, the astronomer Charles T. Koval discovered a new planet lying between the orbit of Saturn and Uranus. Because of this position he called it Chiron.

In mythology Chiron was a Centaur, son of Cronus (Saturn) and grandson of Uranus. The versions of Chiron's myth differ slightly but in essence he was the result of the illicit union between Saturn and a nymph called Philyria. Philyria had changed herself into a mare to escape Saturn's amorous advances, but taking the form of a stallion he managed to mate with her, and at the same time deceive his wife Rhea about the whole affair. Philyria was horrified at giving birth to this creature with human head, arms and torso, and the body and limbs of a horse, and totally rejected and abandoned Chiron. The god Apollo took pity on him and brought him up in a cave below Mount Pelion. Chiron grew up to become one of

the wisest beings, gifted in the art of divination, herbal medicine and music as well as archery and other martial skills. He was mentor and teacher to heroes like Achilles and Jason. Then one day Chiron was accidentally wounded in the leg by one of Hercules' arrows, poisoned with the blood of Hydra, the nine-headed monster. The wound was not fatal because Chiron was immortal, but from that moment on he was in great pain, and all his endeavours to cure himself with the herbal potions he knew so well, and had used so successfully on others, were to no avail. Ultimately he made a decision to end his suffering by sacrificing his immortality.

At that time the Titan, Prometheus, had been condemned by Zeus, the ruler of Olympus, to be chained to a rock because he had dared to steal fire from the gods to give it back to humanity. An eagle came to the rock every day to devour his