

Physics vs. Metaphysics: A False Divide

by Jessica Murray
February 1997

"Everything you see has its roots in the unseen world." --Rumi

The physicist Will Keepin, a scientist with a distinctly metaphysical bent, has organized the objections he hears to astrology into two categories: the first being the claim that there is no evidence for astrology, and the second being the claim that there is no theoretical mechanism for it.

The no-evidence claim is invalidated by the much-touted studies of Michel Gauquelin, who began with a quest to disprove astrological correlations and ended up compiling reams of data validating them. Whether all this statistical corroboration is relevant, however, is perhaps a more interesting question than whether it exists. It must be stated up front that astrology has a preeminent spiritual component, and any attempt to reduce a numinous symbolic system to patterns of numbers has built-in problems. At the very least, much will be lost in translation.

Attempting to answer the second claim is proving to be highly enlightening, for it leads the writer, an astrologer, into the alien world of science.

Why does the very idea of giving astrology unbiased consideration elicit such exaggeratedly dismissive reactions from so many self-avowedly serious scientists? Even just positing the existence of a theoretical mechanism for astrology seems to incite disturbance; for it flies in the face of epistemological developments religiously held to as modern, and therefore presumably superior.

The irony missed by many in both battling camps is that astrology's conceptual underpinnings are not only very, very old, but also very, very new.

The assumption astrology makes is that there is some form of invisible order that constructs the physical universe.

Plato's God

Students of classical philosophy will recognize this as Plato's view: that the cosmos is a living body of ideas. He believed that thought is fundamental to matter, and that there exists some supreme organizing pattern, call it the Universal Mind, that pre-originates and underlies everything we experience.

"We know things because they are; things are because God knows them".* ---Plato, cf Charles Harvey

Let us consider for a moment the use here of the word "God", which translations of pre-Judeo/Christian/Islamic edicts misleadingly employ without factoring in the difference between ancient and contemporary connotations. For the purpose of this discussion, I propose that the modern word "God" conveys a concept of far less subtlety than was intended by ancient thinkers. The word has come to signify an anthropomorphized deity, a religious cartoon in the bearded-white-man-in-the-sky mode.

If we wish to approximate more closely the notions classical and pre-historical peoples had in of the numinous, more apt might be the Chinese concept of the Tao: not a supernatural being, but an all-encompassing cosmic intelligence characterized by neutrality, mystery, dynamism and impersonality. Or instead of "God" we might say Divine Law; or, as even, as George Lucas would have it, The Force.

As the astrologer Rob Hand has observed, the Biblical pronouncement that "In the

beginning was the Word (*Logos*)" could be interpreted to mean: *It was an idea that started the universe.* This is to say that ideas, not pieces of matter, are the basic building blocks of life.

If ideas create and underlie matter, what is the cybernetic world view but neo-neoplatonism? As any computer geek will tell you, the universe is made up of information. Life itself is information.

How might we apply this concept to the realm of human function?

Archetypes

Hand reminds us that the term *logos* refers not to alphabetic language, but to archetypal language: key ideas that organize all aspects of existence into equivalent layers.

Here is where literalism begins to fail us. So let us turn to the vocabulary of psychology, which was the first of the new sciences to attempt to map terrain beyond the literal.

Jung's early 20th century discovery of archetypes reintroduced a very ancient understanding: that the universe is made up of parallelisms, interrelated layers of meaning, all having something essential in common but manifesting in an infinite variety of ways. Though the focus of Jung's theory was the human mind, his position was that archetypes are transcendent essences that govern more than just the psyche. They pre-date and live on beyond the individual. For example, the multidimensional symbol going by the name of a particular god or goddess in a myth is an archetype.

Jung, like Plato, saw the human psyche as penetrating the whole cosmos. For him archetypes were ideational chunks of meaningfulness, linking things and events through their same quality. They pertain to both inner and outer realities.

So it is with astrological principles. The old doctrine of the four elements, for instance, was seen as applying not merely to objective reality. As Stephen Arroyo has pointed out, the human and natural realms were seen as one and the same thing; and the elements were descriptive of modalities of existence, characteristics of /subjective as well as objective reality/ the exterior world and the interior world as well. Whatever was hot, sharp, active or strikingly individual, was referred to as "fiery".

We still use such terms in our current vernacular, and everybody knows instinctively what they mean. For example, the characterization "She's a fiery woman" needs no explanation. How can this be? Jung would say it is because they are innate images that dwell within the collective unconscious. We are all born with a set of universal pictures. Every human imagination is pre-equipped with the same raw building blocks.

Pool-Table Universe

The idea that there is an omnipresent unifying Force, an unseen matrix of patterning beneath the explicit realm, has been a constant in religious and philosophical thought all over the world and in every age.

In European culture this idea went underground in recent centuries, when the "Age of Reason", reacting against the draconian excesses of the church, repudiated it as intellectually indefensible. But what is so intriguing is that in our age it seems to be science -- and not even the "soft" social sciences but the hardest of the hard sciences: physics --- that is bringing this idea back.

Nonetheless, outdated modernism is dying hard. Since Descartes in philosophy through Newton in science and Skinner in psychology, we have upheld as our unquestioned truth the theory of mechanistic materialism, applying it to every arena of human life -- even demanding that it explain The Mysteries, a job that it is fatally unequipped to do.

Astrocartographer Jim Lewis has likened the mechanistic model to "a pool table universe". Everything began at the Big Bang, we are supposed to believe; and ever since, all the atoms just keep bumping each other around, arbitrarily, through pure cause-and-effect. If life was somehow born out of the mess, it was a freak accident.

This model of the universe posits the existence of independent, isolated forces impacting

each other in an untouchably objective outer world (the only "real" world). In this view of things, there is no place for the numinous, so the numinous has been dismissed.

Stanislav Graf has noted how, as modern rationalism took root in consensus thinking, intellectuals began to look upon spirituality as the refuge of the uneducated. Experiences of the divine came to be diagnosed either as eruptions from an infantile part of the mind that projects deific qualities onto a parent (and vice versa), or as pathological illusions to be cured with pharmaceuticals.

Yet until very recently in human history, science and religion were the same thing.

Everything is relative

Eighteenth and nineteenth century science has given rise to a great many machines. But one begins to wonder, looking around at the ecocidal mess we are in physically, and the nihilistic pathos we are in philosophically, whether this perspective has not left us rather in a lurch in the areas of life that really count.

Now, when it looks as if science has gone just about as far as it can go in banishing the spiritual, bursting upon the scientific scene comes quantum mechanics, the key theses of which seem stunningly close to the assumptions held by the ancient mind.

Heisenberg's uncertainty principle has posited that if you look at "objective" reality closely enough, it is in fact subjective in the most literal sense of the word: the presence of an observer measurably impacts the object observed.

In recent decades the phrase "everything is relative" has entered into common parlance, and so little by little is the idea gaining currency that at the most microscopic levels of matter, the sacrosanct rules of cause-and-effect are flagrantly violated. Even the laws of temporality seem to fail. Sheldrake, carrying on the Heisenberg torch, has shown that not only does there seem to be an acausality in time, linking events through some mechanism Newton never dreamed of, but in space as well.

Beyond Quantum Physics

Will Keepin has integrated the ideas of the theoretical physicist David Bohm, a colleague of Einstein's, into a far-ranging postmodern framework of understanding. Using Bohm's term, holomovement, Keepin describes existence as having a unifying quality, "a single unbroken wholeness in flowing movement", and a holographic quality, each piece of it containing the whole.

We already know that individual cells of the same body "know" what each other are "thinking"; and that each cell houses the DNA which contains a map of the entire organism. That there is a parallel connectivity of life force at work on the pre-physical level as well does not, in fact, seem like such a leap.

Bohm's holomovement contains:

- 1) the implicate order, a "ubiquitous wavelike information field that interpenetrates every point in space-time", not manifest but perfectly real, which co-exists with
- 2.) the explicate order we can see and touch.

The implicate order is an aboriginal pool of data: it prefigures the physical universe, it brings information to the physical universe about the rest of the universe, and it creates a blueprint of what will become manifest.

Here it is again: a model of the cosmos as an unbroken flow of information, with ideas creating form.

And there is reciprocity between the two worlds. When he talks about the relationship between the implicate and explicate orders, Keepin makes mention of the resemblance this idea bears to Aurobindo's theory of involution and evolution, which outlined the dynamic dance between spirit and matter.

Bohm went beyond the quantum theorists who gathered the correlations. He believed that

their descriptions were merely statistical averaging operations, imposed upon as-yet-mysterious situations. He wanted a deeper look at the exotic new micro-landscapes which ultimately elude the measuring process.

He proposed that the material world is not in fact caused by some invisible pre-material world, a notion as limited by our conventions of time as conclusions based on quantification are limited by our conventions about space.

It is rather that the two realms interact constantly, bleeding one into the other. Jung might have termed this interaction continuous synchronicity.

Mirrored realities

Boem et al have given us a mathematically derived model of two mutually reflecting, mutually supporting dimensions, one material and one ephemeral. One is reminded of the beautiful dynamism between Dream Time and the waking world described by Australian aborigines.

This is in essence what is meant by astrology's most basic law: As Above, So Below. Planetary cycles are the explicit representations of the non-explicit cycles that order the experiences of human beings and all the rest of life.

The sun, moon and planets move in regular patterns, so predictably that they have come to represent those patterns. Thus they have always served as clocks. The cycles that the planets describe --not the planets themselves -- pertain to both macrocosmos and microcosmos. As above, so below; as within, so without. These cyclic patterns are what astrologers study. Arroyo has called astrology "an operating manual for monitoring the underlying order".

In earlier times, prediction was held to be the sine qua non of astrology. The inexactitude of such attempts should cause us to doubt not astrology, but this use of it.

Planetary archetypes

The principles encoded by celestial cycles can manifest in an infinitude of ways. Jupiter, for example, is a symbol for the law of expansion, which takes many forms. To the 19th Century astrologer, this planet governed mind-broadening long journeys as well as advanced study; a generation ago its meaning came to include the "mind-blowing" experience of an acid trip. Jupiter represents all forms of expansion. It can mean changing from a regular camera lens to a wide-angle lens; it can mean building an addition to a house. How do we know which version of the archetype will manifest? We don't. We limit ourselves by needing to single one out.

Who knows what will happen when Venus, the principle of attraction, cycles around and "makes a return" in someone's chart? Experience has shown this astrologer that mutually magnetic meetings are quite likely under such transits, but one does not have to meet a lover to feel the magic of Venus. Simply being aware that you are coming under the influence of the planet of love and beauty can open your heart, perhaps more so without a concrete expectation of what that will look like.

Beyond literalism

Literalism can stifle the living magic of astrology as surely as fundamentalism snuffs out the numinous in religion, as James Hillman has warned. When we try to use the age-old correlations between sky cycles and earth cycles to chart our fates, we are "caught by time", he says, rather than "regarding" time. The best use to which this multi-leveled symbolic language can be put is to use it as a tool to focus the intuition.

The hieroglyphics of astrology mean nothing without our creative use of them. The rocks and gas balls orbiting the sun are not where the meaning lies. The dynamic between their patterns and our understanding of their patterns is where the meaning lies.

This is a verity not confined to astrology. As the great spiritual teachers have always tried to

tell us, consciousness is the only reality. In every facet of life, in every moment, it is our understanding of a given situation that gives it its meaning and impact.

¹. Astrology, Psychology and the Four Elements, S.Arroyo CRCSS 1975