

WHAT IS ASTROLOGY

Introduction

A couple of years ago, my mother visited me, and for the first time she looked at my, through twenty years collected, astrology books, and said, that she would like to borrow a book about astrology. I was surprised and happy and started finding beginners books about astrology, but then she said no no, she wanted a book about what astrology was : “What do you believe in?” she said. “Why does astrology work?”. And I had to conclude, that I didn’t have one single book about that subject, and she went home with no books.

This, I think, is symptomatic for most astrologers attitude. After all those years with astrology, I am convinced that it works, but I still don’t have a fixed idea about why it works. There seems to be a correlation between celestial events and human events, and as we always say “As above, so below”. In the question about fate and free will I believe in “The stars incline, they do not compel”. But this is as far as most astrologers go in trying to explain astrology.

The hermeneutic model

Geoffrey Cornelius ¹ describes an old hermeneutic model with four stages, that has inspired me to structure my thoughts about this subject as follows:

1. The literal

The first stage is the concrete facts, the rules and technique, which in the case of astrology is the astronomy and the calculation and the drawing of the horoscope. Already here we are lost for the sceptics, for several reasons. We operate with a geocentric model of the solar system, which science left many hundred years ago in benefit of the heliocentric model. Our star signs doesn’t correlate with the constellations because of the precession (except for the siderealists), retrograde planets is only an illusion seen from the earth and the more science explore the universe, the bigger the risk for that the characteristics of the planets does not correlate with the archetypes as we describe them in astrology (Venus has for example a very unhostile environment). And the more celestial objects science discover, why shouldn’t they have any influence in astrology? And the other way around – now Pluto is not a planet anymore, so why give it an extraordinary meaning?

2. Allegory

The second stage is the matching of facts to symbols. We match planets, signs, houses and maybe aspects to symbols, and use this in our interpretation. Here we talk about archetypes, although we do not exactly map with Jung’s archetypes. As Maggie Hyde ² describes it, Mother is an archetype, and Moon can mean mother, but Moon can also mean a lot of other things. At this stage we can talk about synchronicity I ², where we see correlations between celestial phenomena and human phenomena, but this is with the observer (astrolog) as an objective part. Jung’s first definition of synchronicity says:

“The coincidence of a certain psychic content with a corresponding objective process which is perceived to take place simultaneously” ³

Maggie Hyde calls this definition for synchronicity I, and points out, that this form of synchronicity does not involve the consciousness of the observer. Here we might call astrology a craft.

To this stage belongs all our textbooks and computer-interpretations, and it is at this stage that sceptics would like and have tried to make scientific tests. The problem with that is, that cookbook-interpretations are vague and imprecise, and give too many possibilities, so they are impossible to test in a scientific manner, which implies a precise result.

3. Tropology (or moral)

The third stage involves the observer (astrolog), and maps to what Maggie Hyde calls synchronicity II ².

Jung's second definition of synchronicity says:

“The coincidence of a subjective psychic state with a phantasm (dream or vision) which later turns out to be a more or less faithful reflection of a “synchronistic” objective event that took place more or less simultaneously, but at a distance.” ³

Maggie Hyde calls this form for synchronicity for synchronicity II. Here is the astrologers consciousness an active part of the interpretation.

As I see it, the synchronicity of the moment can give the astrologer the often mentioned intuitive insight, that gives him/her the possibility for choosing the right signifiers and selecting the right combinations of symbol-interpretation. Here we might call astrology for an art.

Angela Voss says about this stage:

“It can arise at that moment when you realise that your client's chart mirrors your own current preoccupation, when you utter words you do not intend which shock you with their truth, or when you are moved by the meaningfulness of a synchronistic event which calls you to action. It is experienced as a revelation which arises in the moment and spontaneously connects your inner life to the outer event or image, beyond your conscious intention.” ⁴

As far as I know it is only Vernon Clark ¹ who has tried to design a scientific test which included this stage, and he did it with success for the participating astrologers. But of course the sceptics rejected the positive result and declared that instead of astrology there was ESP included. And this is exactly the problem with scientific tests trying to test the astrologers work in the consultation situation, that the results will be rejected as caused by ESP. That astrologers never could get the results without astrology is beyond the understanding of sceptics. Geoffrey Cornelius ¹ talks about “divination” at this stage, and I don't know if divination is the right word here for me, for in my opinion the word divination has connection to the existence of gods, and I don't believe in gods, but if we understand the word “divination” as being in contact with something mystical, I think the word can be used both for this stage and the next stage.

4. Anagoge

The fourth, and last stage is the most mystical stage and it has to do with prophecies – predictions about the future. Here I come to think of Lilly and Nostradamus, who both with success predicted future events, and this was independent of the situation of the consultation. Jung has in fact a third definition of synchronicity:

The same (as the second definition), except that the event perceived takes place in the future and is represented in the present only by a phantasm that corresponds to it. ³

As we see, this definition has exactly has to do with predicting the future, so I think that this level too can come under the definitions of synchronicity. As far as sceptics concern, this predicting about the future can hardly come under suspicion for being ESP, but successful predictions can always be rejected as being pure luck.

Conclusion

As I see it, there is no possibility for designing scientific test, which result can be accepted from the sceptics, no regards what of the above mentioned levels of astrology we are talking about. That is if we accept the existing definitions of science.

To explain astrology with synchronicity is not a big help, for even if Jung has a certain aura of science about him, his synchronicity has never been accepted as science, and sceptics reject it as being pure coincidences.

But if I look at the discoveries that new science is making, I think there is hope, that one day synchronicity can be accepted as science, and maybe that opens up for, that astrology gets more accepted. First of all I think of chaos-theory, in which scientists has proven, that there are mystical connections between big and small patterns in the universe. This is one step on the way (as above, so below) and the astrologer Bernadette Brady⁵ has also tried to map astrology to chaos-theory. The next I can think of is a relative new discovery, that photons (subatomare particles) that are being split, keep a connection, regardless of distance. If you affect the one half, the other half – far away - acts as if it was the one being affected. This can in traditional science only be explained with speeds that are quicker than light, so something mystical is going on here. Scientists call it “Spooky”.⁶ So new science is opening up for, that everything maybe is connected in a way, that reminds me of Jung’s “Unus Mundus” (One World”), inspired by the alchemists.

Some astrologers say, that what is going on behind synchronicity and astrology always will be beyond human understanding, but I will not give up the hope, that one day science will change so radically, that it opens up for these now inexplicable things.

This is maybe understandable if I look at my own horoscope – I have Mercury in Pisces, which makes me open for mystical things, and this Mercury is in opposition to Moon in Virgo, which makes me most comfortable with the belief, that one day we find a reasonable explanation.

/Annemette

Word Count: 1482

1. Geoffrey Cornelius ”The Moment of Astrology”
2. Maggie Hyde “Jung and Astrology”
3. C.G.Jung “Synchronicity, an acausal connecting principle”
4. <http://www.skyscript.co.uk/allegory.html>
5. Bernadette Brady “Astrology, a place in chaos”
6. <http://www.nature.com/news/2008/080813/full/news.2008.1038.html>