

The Decline of Astrology

A Symbol of Man's Disconnection with Nature, Self and the Cosmos

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Abstract

Throughout history astrology has functioned symbolically to represent Man's attitude to and understanding of Nature. When Man disconnects himself from Nature, Self and the Cosmos, this disconnection is made evident through a decline or dismissal of interest in astrology. The paper argues that this disconnection makes astrology at times seem like a 'superstitious vulgarity', to use St Augustine's view of astrology. Many others over the centuries have discounted astrology in a similar manner. Yet, at other times in history, astrology has been held in high regard and recognised to be serving an important role in reconnecting Man to Nature, Self and the Cosmos. The present ecological crisis is perhaps a reflection of a psychological crisis - a sign that the modern decline of astrology has progressed too far. The paper concludes with suggestions for how the emerging interest in systems thinking might enable modern man to reconnect with astrological thinking, and therefore Nature, Self and the Cosmos.

Keywords astrology; systems; health; environment

Introduction

*The history of astrology is the history of the successive
transformations of man's attitude to Nature.*

Rudhyar (1991)

The above quote by Rudhyar (1991) encapsulates what this paper will examine. Throughout history, astrology has functioned symbolically to represent Man's attitude to and understanding of Nature. When Man disconnects himself from Nature, Self and the Cosmos, this disconnection is made evident through a decline or dismissal of interest in astrology. This paper will argue that the disconnection makes astrology at times seem like a 'superstitious vulgarity', to use St Augustine's view of astrology. Many others over the centuries have discounted astrology in a similar manner. Yet, at other times in history, astrology has been held in high regard and recognised to be serving an important role in reconnecting Man to Nature, Self and the Cosmos. Given this, what are the consequences? This present suggest that our ecological crisis is perhaps a reflection of a psychological crisis, a sign that the modern decline of astrology has progressed too far. The paper

The Decline of Astrology

concludes with suggestions for how the emerging interest in systems thinking might also enable modern Man to reconnect with astrological thinking, and therefore Nature, Self and the Cosmos.

Rudhyar (1991) says of astrology that it is a science of symbolism, the *algebra of life*. It is also the science of cycles and is “rooted in the mystery of time” (p.52). In combination astrology offers an understanding of time and cycles through which individuals create meaning. Put another way, astrology can be used as a common language, a way to talk about the dynamic nature of our living process (May 1991). The language of astrology provides a system through which vital issues can be thought through in a symbolic environment that reflects back our collective understandings of the world in a structured manner.

Modern day astrology also connects natural phenomenon to human psychology. Natural phenomena are thought of as representations of psychological processes, for example, the search for identity, issues around worth and self-esteem, complexes in relationships with parents or siblings and so on. Astrology, through such psychological interpretations of natural phenomenon, provides a framework and language through which individuals can find their own meaning.

Understood in the above context astrology is a complex system, one that has a very large number of interacting parts which are nonlinear and where the whole is not obvious from the properties of the individual components.

Astrology holds another interesting and unique position. It appears to marry two opposing and antagonistic views, that of science and religion. Schoener (2009) argues that astrology is where our psychological, religious, mythological and natural-scientific understandings intersect. Thus, in one sense, astrology is a science in the form of astronomy and the calculation and prediction of celestial events. In another sense, astrology is religion in that it interprets these celestial events as having an influence on life on earth, a domain that has not yet been secularised. The union of science and religion has led some such as Kepler, Ptolemy and others to see astrology as a ‘learned’ form while others such as St Augustine have seen astrology as a “vulgar” form. This union of science and religion has meant that at times astrology has not been accepted by either field. As will be shown in subsequent sections, religion and science have not existed in harmonious union for a long time. It was only in ancient times, for example, that priests were both scientists and religious persons and astrology was held in the highest regard.

Thus in order to shed light on what has led to this disconnection and with it a more generalized Man-Nature disconnection it is necessary to examine the historical developments in astrology. The historical review given in the following sections will be twofold. It will involve a basic rundown of the developments of astrology from ancient times to the present and will be largely guided by the ideas of Dane Rudhyar (1991). Rudhyar’s account will be given to illustrate a holistic view of the historical roots of Man’s disconnection from Nature, Self and the Cosmos:

The underlying premise of Rudhyar’s works is that of holism, of which the basic premise is that existence manifests at all levels in terms of wholes, i.e., organized fields of interdependent activities. (Gilbert, 2009 p.6)

The Decline of Astrology

Astrology's Place in History

The system of astrology is at least as old as writing. It might be more accurate to say that astrology is as old as humanity but, it was the Sumerians who first wrote down astrological observations on tablets around the 3rd millennium BC.

From these records we know that the first organised system of astrology arose in Babylon during the 2nd millennium BC. During this time omen-based astrology was taking shape. Omen-based astrology consisted of recording mundane phenomena associated with the celestial occurrences at the time of the phenomena. Babylonian celestial omen-based astrology spread to India, China and Greece where it combined with pre-existing indigenous forms of astrology. Omen making was important in the lives of our ancestors as it allowed them to predict the best times for planting of crops, going to war and so on.

In ancient Babylonia, astrology was one of two main methods priests used for determining the will and intention of the gods, the other being the analysis of the liver of a sacrificial animal. It was the task of the priests to develop a system of interpretation through observations of correspondences between events on earth and phenomena in the heavens. Astrology in Babylon did not concern itself with individual horoscopes as does present day astrology. Instead it was concerned with public matters and welfare of which the King or Ruler would be the representative, if all fared well for the King then all fared well for the Kingdom.

The Animistic Phase of Astrology

According to Rudhyar (1991), astrology at any given moment is the result of a particular stage of the relationship between conscious self and Nature. In this view, the astrology of antiquity reflected that particular phase of the relationship between Nature and Man's conscious ego. In the animistic stage, primitive Man is seen as living in the womb of Nature. In this stage Man has not yet developed the ability to differentiate between the inner and outer worlds. Man is as if an infant and is completely one with Nature. Similar to the way that an infant develops its selfhood through projections onto the Mother, so Man develops his selfhood through projections onto Nature. These projections become states of consciousness which through unconsciousness identification become Man's selfhood, (Spitz, 1965). This process reflected Man's cyclic separation and reintegration with Nature.

In animism, all objects are animated by a spirit. There is a chaos of entities and the only law is that of the jungle; that of self-preservation and survival, whether this be by strength, cunning or intimidation. Through these actions, a sense of causality emerges. Rudhyar (1991) goes on to note that following the process of causality is the emergence of naming things and the relations between them. The "naming" process Rudhyar likens to Freud's psychoanalysis where treatment is through the talking 'naming' of events/problems. The most obvious relation between events is that of blood kinship and thus it would follow that an elementary mythology is created based on mating and bearing progeny (cf the numerous

The Decline of Astrology

creation myths). The “naming” process continues the separation between Man and the outside world as boundaries are formed around entities, objects and events.

Following on with the analogy of Mother and Child above, the baby must eventually leave the womb or it will die. Man needs to leave the womb of Nature (which is the essence of the animistic stage) if he is to grow and develop otherwise he remains at the mercy of a chaos of entities. Once the baby leaves the womb it still needs Mother and so too Man still needs Nature for survival. Here we have connection but with some degree of separateness. In a sense it is like the ebb and flow of the tides. Man reaches out and away from Nature (Mother) for analytic purposes (i.e to sort and organise the chaos of entities) but he then needs to come back to Nature (Mother) for synthesis (symbiosis), the putting together of what he has learned. Rudhyar (1991) notes that the collection of elements resulting from analysis, can only become operative when they become “holized”, that is, synthesised into a whole.

During the animistic stage the focal emotion of primitive Man of the Jungle is fear, and what one fears becomes “evil”. Evil entities must be overcome by ruse or magic. As Maus (1972) noted, the essential principle of magic is “sympathetic action”. Primitive Man through, sympathetic action, projects his feelings and reactions to Nature onto Nature which then become the personification of his impressions.

In this sense the whole life of man is psychological, for he lives in a world peopled by the very projections of his own reaction; but these reactions are almost solely physiological and biological.
Rudhyar (1991, pp.7-8)

In this way the Sun, which dispels the darkness through its light is seen as the giver of life. Similarly, Man notices the phases of the Moon and feels a sense of security and identity with the order and regularity of the Moon’s phases. Through this animistic process, primitive Man identifies with the stars, and star-worship develops, similar to totemism (Freud, 1912-1913). Thus, the “life-quality” of the stars is given characteristics that are particular to a star-deity. As Rudhyar puts it, “objectively and analytically primitive man *experienced subjectively* this light and projected back into the stars the result of his psychic identification”. (p.9)

The Vitalistic Phase of Astrology

The next phase of development according to Rudhyar (1991) is the vitalistic stage. In vitalism Life is in everything. The vitalistic stage is when Man has to some degree tamed Nature and overcome his fear partially. Rudhyar calls this the first stage of domesticating Nature. Rudhyar goes on to say that this domestication also worked on Man’s psyche. A part of Man’s psyche was made conscious and this consciousness needed to be protected from the “possible inrush of evil forces from the unconscious (the jungle within) “, (p.10). In the animistic stage the entities were mainly evil while in the vitalistic stage the Life force could be either good or bad and was too powerful to overcome. The Life force could only

The Decline of Astrology

be worked with by knowing its Law and its cycles. Hence, domestication of both Nature and Man. Man now uses thought, understanding and consciousness as property placed between himself and Nature and the Cosmos. This process evolves into a new astrology based on an understanding of the cycles of life-processes. These processes are believed to be controlled by divine entities which are identified with the Sun, Moon and planets. Out of this process of identification and correspondences arose the 'Law of Analogy'.

In the vitalistic stage, Man develops mentally and finds security in his knowledge of Cosmic, Heavenly Order. Security, safety and a sense of control is gained through understanding Nature's Law as represented by the Order of the Cosmos. Man was able to exert a sense of power and control over his world as long as he worked within Nature's Laws and cycles. Through understanding, fear is diminished.

It is also worth noting that in the vitalistic stage Man continues his disconnection from a symbiotic relationship with the outside world which he experienced in animism. In this stage, accumulation and ownership of property becomes important. Property here is used to mean both physical property and the property of consciousness, that is, Man's understanding and knowledge of Nature. It is no longer the fear of personal attack which is the main issue but the protection and production of property. The earth as well as Man's consciousness has to be tilled, fed, bred and guarded. Man's main concern now is the protection of property, which has come to be a barrier between himself and the outside world. The property which surrounds him (and which he must now protect) continues the process of disconnection from Nature, the outside world. In animism Man "identified himself with the feared object". In vitalism he places property between himself and the feared object.

Man is growing up so to speak and is no longer totally at the mercy of elemental beings. He can now make plans for and safe guard his future through his mental processes, by learning and understanding cycles, periodicity and Cosmic Order.

Astrology, Time and Cycles

The knowledge and understanding gained during the vitalistic stage necessitated the development of a calendar for the purposes of timing activities. The zodiac wheel was developed as a calendar to measure time for agricultural activities as well as religious and sacred festivities. The zodiac wheel begins with the Sun entering zero degrees Aries on March 21st which is the astrological New Year. The wheel is then divided into twelve segments of 30 degrees representing each of the twelve months and the start and end of each season. The zodiac was based on the Northern hemisphere with the entry of the Sun into Aries corresponding with Spring, zero degrees Cancer with Summer, the entry of the Sun into zero degrees of Libra with Autumn and zero degrees with Capricorn with Winter. Spring, or more specifically the first part of the Spring energy, is represented as the seedling bursting forth with new growth. The second or middle part of the Spring energy is invigorating and strengthening while the last part of the Spring energy is that of the blossom. In this way the whole year was symbolically represented, see Table 1.

The Decline of Astrology

Table 1: Gilbert's astrological representation of the seasons and their psychological correspondence

Sign	Season	Psychological Correspondence
Aries	Germinating time, unfolding of energy	The will, the urge to act, the spirit of enterprise, the desire to lead, self consciousness, breakthrough
Taurus	Invigoration and Strengthening, creation of form	Perseverance, consolidation, the power to shape, sense of form stubbornness, strength
Gemini	Blossom-time vivification	Vivaciousness, versatility, superficiality, mental agility
Cancer	Fertilisation, producing	Feeling of father and motherhood, caring for other
Leo	Maturity of the seed	The will to create, self-confidence, pride
Virgo	The harvest of what has been grown	Diligence and care, tidiness, a domesticated nature, orderliness
Libra	Balance and adjustment in nature	Sense of justice, striving for harmony, sense of community
Scorpio	Life-terminating forces in nature, continuation of life in the seed	Endurance and Perseverance, struggle for survival inner awareness
Sagittarius	Winter dormancy	Cultivation of the inner spiritual, planning for the future, inspiration
Capricorn	Crystallisation of forms in winter	Untiring struggle for self-preservation, patience, structured social forms
Aquarius	Waiting time before spring	Expectant attitude, good powers of observation, planning
Pisces	Swelling of the seed in the earth	Stirrings of new life, new life within the old, visionary idealistic, hopeful, trust in the universal forces.

Reproduced from Gilbert (2009) pp.4-5

The zodiac wheel represents the whole cycle of life, death and rebirth. In the vitalistic stage even though Man is putting a barrier, that is, his accumulation of property between himself and Nature he is still living within Nature's Law.

Astrology and the Emergence of Individualism

Rudhyar notes that around the 6th Century BC a momentous change occurred as Man began to see himself as a free individual. Rudhyar calls this the psycho-mental level of development. This new level called for a new astrology and a new understanding of Order and the Cosmos. The emphasis shifted from physiological, bodily matters to psychological

The Decline of Astrology

values. This shift represented the shift from collectivities to individualism of which psychological values were the outcome. This was an important shift as it deepened the disconnection from Nature; because physiological processes are natural processes that were named rather than felt (see Schroyer, 2009). However the use of psychological and rational values was not enough to overcome the chaos of the world. Rudhyar likens the emergence of individualism to “psychological animism”.

The emergence of individualism gave rise to horoscopic astrology. Horoscopic astrology first appeared in Alexandria Egypt, under the occupation of the Greeks during the Hellenistic period. The Greeks developed horoscopic astrology by combining Babylonian and Egyptian astrology. Horoscopic astrology is a visual representation of the sky at a certain place and point in time. The belief is that the placement of the planets at a particular time and place reflects the nature of what is born at that moment. What sets it apart from earlier forms of astrology is the calculation of the degree rising on the Eastern horizon known as the ascendant. The word horoscope is derived from Greek meaning “a look at the hours”.

The horoscope of the individual was the most significant contribution made to astrology by the Greeks. The development of the individual horoscope represents the shift from omen-based astrology which was oriented towards the welfare of the collective to personal horoscopes oriented to the welfare of the individual. This represents Man’s continuing separation from the world around him as he now begins to separate himself from the collective. The use of Horoscopic astrology to represent the influence of the heavens on an individual’s life spread rapidly into Europe, India and the Middle East.

Under the Greek influence astrology became connected with all living and non-living beings. Astrology became associated with practically all the sciences including amongst them medicine, chemistry, zoology and so on. The planets and constellations had rulership over more or less everything, including colour, plants, animals, minerals etc. By this method (that is the Law of Analogy, discussed earlier), all the natural sciences were translated into the language of astrology. For instance, in matters pertaining to the head physicians would examine the constellation Aries which is said to rule the head.

In Greece, the development of intellectual and analytical aspects of the human mind was the prime focus, at the expense of the emotional realm. During the development of individualism, astrology was transformed so that now Man created his own order using his intellect. Astrology and its links to Nature ceased to be the principle provider of order to the collective. Greek intellectualism destroyed physiological astrology as intellectual order replaced biological (Nature’s) order (Rudhyar, 1991).

Rudhyar (1991) argues that the intellect is only an instrument to help raise consciousness from the biological to the psycho-mental level. The intellect;

cannot fill a human life with vital significance. It creates a separative kind of individualism based on analysis but not on synthesis – and all life is synthesis. (p. 18)

The Decline of Astrology

Rudhyar (1991) argues that this imbalance caused a psychological revulsion against analytical intellectualism, and religions advocating love, devotion and compassion captured people's attention. The domination of separative intellectual individualism resulted in great psychological confusion. This gave an opening for the Christian Church to become the symbol of Heavenly Order based on love, compassion and devotion. The Church became the integrating force during this time of mass psychological chaos.

The Cycles of Astrology's Death and Rebirth

The Greek intellectualised individualistic astrology dies down in Europe after the Greco-Latin period as Christianity replaces astrology. Rudhyar (1991) calls this the "killing" of astrology by the Greeks. However, Whitfield (2001) notes that while astrology was in decline during this period in the Western Christian world, it was flourishing in several Eastern cultures. Many Eastern cultures are characterised as being collective as opposed to Western cultures which are seen as individualistic.

During the Middle Ages Arab astrologers revived Ancient Greek learning in astrology/astronomy, mathematics and medicine which Europe had submerged during the Dark Ages. Baghdad and Damascus became great centres of learning and Arab astrologers ushered in a new and exciting time for astrology. Arab astrologers discovered many new stars and assigned the stars astrological meanings in relation to the constellation they were in. Many of these stars have retained their Arabic names. Arabian astrologers also introduced new concepts into astrology such as electional astrology, a method of ascertaining favourable times for undertaking new ventures. Arab astrologers moved away from the idea of categorical events and instead spoke of favourable or unfavourable indications. The Arabian astrologers used astrology in medicine and linked the curative properties of herbs with associated planets and signs. For example, Mars is thought of as hot and dry and therefore would rule plants which are hot or pungent, such as chilies, mustard or tobacco. The Famous English herbalist Culpepper later adopted this method for his work with the healing properties of herbs. Astrology was re-introduced into Europe along with the revival of classical learning. Whitfield (2001) writes that this move saw the formation of the first universities in which a new synthesis between philosophy and science was the result.

Man makes efforts once again to connect to Self, Nature and the Cosmos through the synthesis of philosophy and science. Earlier Man's reaction against Greek intellectualism and individualism at the expense of the emotions and connection to a higher realm had coincided with the decline of astrology and the growth of Christianity and its promise of Universal Love and Brotherhood. Perhaps the emphasis in Christianity had shifted once again too far in one direction, this time at the expense of the mind (science).

During the Renaissance court astrologers worked at making astrology scientific by incorporating discoveries made at the time about the nature of the universe into horoscopes. The efforts at a scientific approach to astrology made astrology acceptable as a legitimate

The Decline of Astrology

from of study to many great thinkers such Kepler, Galilei and Brahe. This emphasis on working to make astrology scientific represents once again the emerging split between science and philosophy. While it may not be correct to say that the scientific revolution caused the decline of astrology at the end of the 17th Century AD, (Whitfield, 2001), the two did however occur simultaneously. Efforts to make astrology scientific and cut off from philosophy and religion appear to be a reflection of Man's continuing disconnection from Nature. The more that Man focuses on his intellectual and analytical abilities the greater his disconnection to Nature and the Cosmos. This period in time therefore appears to be a reflection, or a 're-cycle' of the zeitgeist of Ancient Greece. During Ancient Greek times Man used his intellect to separate himself from collectivities and physiological astrology (Nature and the Cosmos). Thus it is interesting that the revival of Classical Greek learning has once again yielded a similar result. That is, great intellectual learning and advances followed by great psychological chaos, the backlash of which the spiritual movement attempted to be the equalising force. Rudhyar (1991) says;

Astrology must be reborn and must perform again for our modern world, made chaotic by an unbridled and false individualism and by the sudden opening of psychological dams, the task of practical integration which has always been its own. p.27

A Holistic View of Astrology

In the early 20th century astrology began its come back with such prominent figures as Dane Rudhyar and Carl Jung, amongst others as they applied the system of astrology to psychology (cf Parker & Parker, 1983). Modern astrology through the works of Rudhyar, Jung, Greene and others began to be examined from a psychological and holistic perspective. Thus, astrology can only be viewed and studied as a system. While it can be useful initially to break up astrology into its components for learning purposes, it is always essential to remember that astrology is not its components, but all its components, working together in a holistic system. To reiterate Rudhyar's (1991) earlier point, in analysis we have a collection of elements which can only become operative when they become "holized", that is, whole. The way one part or component works in isolation is quite different to how the same component works when placed into contact with other components. This has been a common problem for research carried out in the past. Research carried out in the past on individual components of astrology cannot be applied to astrology as if the components represent the whole system of astrology. Researchers in the past have sought to prove or disprove the validity of astrology by analysing one component of astrology and treating the component as if it were the whole system (see Dahlstrom, Hopkins, Dahlstrom, Jackson, & Cumella, 1996; van Rooij, 1994; Jackson & Fiebert, 1980; Silverman & Whitmar, 1974; Pellegrini, 1973). Barton (1994) writes for instance about Sun-sign astrology as a modern phenomenon that has been abstracted from its context. This is an important point as it illustrates the idea of a component of astrology being abstracted from its context and used in such a way as if the component were the whole system.

The Decline of Astrology

Recent studies into astrology continue to investigate astrological components as if the component were the system. For instance, Penn (2007) examined whether there was an association between astrological moon signs (as opposed to the Sun-signs which had been studied in the past with the three aspects of Eysenck's personality theory (extroversion, introversion and psychoticism). The research hypotheses, was that the different moon signs would score differently on the three scales as measured by the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire-Revised (EPQ-R). The problem with this and other such research is that a component of a system is taken to be the system and analysed in isolation from the whole system which in reality is more than an individual system but is one system within numerous other systems.

The system of astrology is just that, a system. One planet, aspect or placement cannot be analysed in an individuals' chart out of context of its relationship to other planets, aspects and placements. In astrological analysis of charts, any Moon sign is modified by its placement in the horoscope. The Moon sign will be modified according to which house it is found in as well as the planets which contact it and the nature of the contacts. For instance an Aries Moon on its own is considered outgoing, fiery, courageous and at times quick to anger. However Moon in Aries has no operative meaning until it is applied to an event, person or object (Rudhyar, 1991). Also, no astrological placement can exist in isolation. If we take this same Aries Moon and place it in square aspect to Saturn, then we find that the above characteristics become blocked and reserved. Place this same Aries Moon in aspect to fun-loving, generous and expansive Jupiter and the result is likely to be an energy which is sparkly, generous and at times could be inclined to go too far in their emotional expression. While there are numerous connections and interrelationships that can be examined in this example however, they really are too voluminous and some are also highly technical. From this example it becomes clear why astrology needs to be examined from a systems perspective.

The results of Penn's (2007) study mentioned above naturally found what would be expected of the system of astrology, that is, no overall significance among the variables. A problem for astrology is that some researchers feel that it must be proven scientifically, applying rigorous empirical methods before it can be accepted as a valid science or art (Gilbert, 2009). Gilbert suggests that they miss the important point, that is, the development of a psychology that deals with the whole person, one that is multifaceted. Individual horoscopes can be seen as individual systems within systems within other systems. The individual horoscope is one system which is unique to that individual regardless of how many individuals are born at the same time. We can say that it is unique because no two individuals can exist in the same time space continuum. This unique individual system is part of another system (say the family) and this will have an impact on how the individual system functions and manifests. These two systems in turn are part of a larger system (call it the local community or environment) in which they live and so on. We find systems within systems all the way to the Cosmos, which is reflected in the individual chart. We have now come full circle, back to the individual chart which is a reflection of the Cosmos at any given moment. Hence, ancient astrologers' adage: 'As Above, So Below'. This idea of systems within systems, or cycles within cycles dates back at least to Ptolemy.

The Decline of Astrology

Gilbert (2009) sees the astrological birth chart as a means through which the Cosmos communicates its archetypal energies and rhythms and how these work within individuals. For this reason, some counselors, psychologists and psychiatrists have begun to use astrology as a tool for understanding the inner dynamics of their clients. The further that Man disconnects himself from Self, Nature and the Cosmos as represented by a decline or dismissal of astrology the more chaotic his world becomes. Astrology is a way of connecting Man back to Self, Nature and the Cosmos in a holistic and ordered way through the symbolism inherent in astrology and its connection with time and cycles. To conclude where the paper began the words of Rudhyar (1991);

Astrology becomes a study of the universal mystery of periodical dynamic transformations, which is seen to be the very essence of Life itself. p.10

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