

# The Birth of Psychological Astrology

By Glenn Perry, Ph.D.

It is difficult to appreciate just how far astrology has come over the last 30 years. It wasn't until the advent of humanistic psychology in the 1960's that astrologers began to think seriously about the chart in terms of growth and transformation. For those who began studying astrology only recently, it might seem that it was always this way. But it was not. Although Jung (1962) once said "astrology represents the summation of the psychological knowledge of antiquity" (p. 142), the fact is that there was very little in astrology prior to the 1960's that bore much relationship to what we would generally consider "psychological" today.

Ancient peoples initially perceived the planets as gods that ruled over the various processes of Nature, much as a king ruled over his subjects. The conceived relationship between celestial and terrestrial events was linear, dualistic, and hierarchical: a superior power had dominion over an inferior one. While later and deeper forms of astrological philosophy recognized that macrocosm and microcosm were actually interpenetrating and thus their relationship was not linear or dualistic, this view declined with the collapse of the Hellenistic culture in the 3rd century. A simpler model prevailed during the medieval period and persisted in one form or another right up to the 2nd half of this century. Human beings were perceived as fated recipients of cosmic forces that could be propitiated but not denied.

Such a gloomy determinism was reinforced by a value laden terminology that too often described the birthchart in ominous terms, e.g., malefic, evil aspect, debilitation, affliction, detriment, fall, destroyer of life, hell of the zodiac, and so on. Of course, there were "good" parts to astrology as well, such as benefics and exaltations, but these only served to underscore the determinism of the system. Planets were variously conceived as transmitters of mysterious rays or electromagnetic forces that impacted upon the individual at birth. Understandably, this induced individuals to focus their attention outwards to see what malice or affection the gods might have in store for them. The rigid determinism of traditional astrology did not allow for the possibility of change or growth in consciousness. Instead, people more likely consulted the stars as a means of avoiding a calamitous fate or of exploiting opportunities for manipulating circumstances to personal advantage.

The implication of traditional, event-oriented astrology was that the individual was a potential victim of an indifferent universe over which he had little or no control. Accordingly, astrologers were only too eager to give people what they wanted—predictions, advice, warnings, and simplistic solutions to what we now recognize to be complex, psychological problems. At best, traditional astrologers were well meaning individuals interested in the prediction of events and the description of character, and they did no harm. At worst, they were fear peddling parasites who exploited the insecurities and anxieties of the people who purchased their services, and they did great harm.

The vast majority of mundane predictions about illnesses, accidents, divorces, shipwrecks, earthquakes, scandals, inheritances, marriages, job promotions, and the like, were utterly useless except to create an addiction to the astrologer whose pronouncements appeared to offer some promise of control over the events in question. But no astrologer could predict with certainty exactly what the events would be, under precisely what circumstances they would take place, or how they would affect the person. Especially lacking in such predictions was the meaning and purpose that the event might have beyond its immediate effects. What relationship did it have to the

consciousness of the experiencer? What opportunities did it offer for self-insight and growth in awareness?

Likewise, the traditional astrologer's description of character was generally limited to superficial trait descriptions heavily laden with moral judgments and glib advice. At best, the astrologer confirmed what the individual already intuitively knew. At worst, the astrologer confused or upset the individual with interpretations that were shallow, insensitive, judgmental, overly negative, or just plain wrong. There was little if any attempt to address the deeper dimensions of the chart that hinted at unconscious beliefs and fundamental drives that underlay surface behavior. Character was seen as either static and unalterable, or easily modified by following the cosmically informed counsel of one's astrologer. Such assumptions appear naive from the perspective of modern, depth psychology. We now recognize that while changing one's inborn character can be extraordinarily difficult, it can be achieved through courage, persistence, and hard work.

It was the Swiss psychoanalyst, Carl Jung, who first recognized the vast potential of astrology as a tool for exploring the depths of the human psyche. In various writings throughout his life, Jung made reference to his profound respect for astrology. He asserted that astrology had a great deal to contribute to psychology and admitted to having employed it with some frequency in his analytic work with clients. In cases of difficult psychological diagnosis, Jung would draw up a horoscope in order to have a further point of view from an entirely different angle. "I must say," said Jung, "that I very often found that the astrological data elucidated certain points which I otherwise would have been unable to understand" (1948).

Jung (1976) regarded the signs and planets of astrology as symbols of archetypal processes that originated in the collective unconscious. The archetypes of the collective unconscious were the universal organizing principles underlying and motivating all psychological life, both individual and collective. Whereas mythology placed its emphasis upon the cultural manifestations of archetypes at various times and places in history, astrology utilized archetypes as a language for understanding the basic psychological drives of human beings. As Jung put it, "Astrology, like the collective unconscious with which psychology is concerned, consists of symbolic configurations: the planets are the gods, symbols of the power of the unconscious." The gods of mythology represented the living forces of the universe that patterned all things. Like Plato's Forms, an archetype was both subjective and objective; it was evident both in the innate ideas of human consciousness as well as in the fundamental processes of nature; it informed not only human experience but also planetary motions.

It was precisely this dual nature of the archetype that enabled the chart to bridge inner character with the outer events that reflected that character. "There are many instances of striking analogies between astrological constellations and psychological events or between the horoscope and the characterological disposition," wrote Jung (1976). Archetypes, he concluded, were psychoid; i.e., they shape matter as well as mind. An astrological configuration defined both the innate disposition of the individual and the particular kinds of outer conditions which the individual was likely to experience. In a 1954 interview, Jung stated "One can expect with considerable assurance, that a given well-defined psychological situation will be accompanied by an analogous astrological configuration."

Jung recognized that the unique and unparalleled ability of astrology to disclose correlations between planetary motions and human experience also made it an accurate way of timing life crises: "I have observed many cases where a well-defined psychological phase or an analogous event has been accompanied by a transit—particularly the afflictions of Saturn and Uranus" (1954).

Jung's observance of correlations between psychological phenomena and astrological data contributed to the formulation of his theory of synchronicity. He defined synchronicity as "the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychic state with one or more external events which appear as meaningful parallels to the momentary subjective state" (1955, p. 36). Accordingly, Jung did not hesitate to take the synchronistic phenomena that underlay astrology seriously. Astrology, he thought, worked precisely because of synchronicity, i.e., the psychic structure of the person about to be born was "meaningfully paralleled" in the positions of the planets at that time.

When looking for a way to test the hypothesis of synchronicity, Jung set up an astrological experiment that correlated planetary configurations, or cross aspects, between the charts of marital partners. He hypothesized that certain cross aspects would appear with greater frequency between the charts of marital partners than between charts of people who had no relationship. "The meaningful coincidence we are looking for is immediately apparent in astrology," said Jung, "since the astrological data...correspond to individual traits of character; and from the remotest times the various planets, houses, zodiacal signs, and aspects have all had meanings that serve as a basis for a character study" (1955, p. 43-4).

Although Jung never developed any systematic theory of astrology, it appears that his own theory of analytical psychology was heavily influenced by it. There are so many parallels that one is almost forced to conclude that at least some of his major concepts were borrowed directly from astrology. In addition to his explicit endorsement of planets as archetypes, and his theory of synchronicity as a means for explaining astrological coincidences, Jung's notion of two attitude types—extrovert and introvert—is readily recognizable by astrologers as the bi-polar division of the zodiac into two polarities—positive/masculine (extrovert) and negative/feminine (introvert) signs. Likewise, his four function types—intuition, sensation, thinking, and feeling—are roughly paralleled in astrology by the four elements—fire, earth, air, and water.

In addition to these more obvious analogues, there are additional correlations that have been explored by astrologers. These include ego/Sun, persona/Ascendant, shadow/Pluto, anima/Venus, animus/Mars, and collective unconscious/Neptune. Difficult astrological configurations, especially those involving hard aspects from the outer planets to Mercury, Venus, Mars, Moon, or Sun, have been observed by astrologers to represent trouble spots in the personality similar to what Jung described as psychic complexes, i.e., unconscious, emotionally charged memories, images, and thoughts clustered around a central core.

In the 1930's, Dane Rudhyar began to reformulate modern astrology in terms of Jung's analytical psychology. He especially focused on Jung's idea that the psyche was a dynamic compound of opposing forces in equilibrium, and that the psyche was intrinsically motivated to evolve in the direction of psychic wholeness, a process Jung called individuation. Jung believed that the process of personality transformation was innate, or teleologically motivated. Personality was not merely the product of external forces, but strove purposefully towards a final goal of self-realization. As the individual learned from self-created experience, the archetypal structuring of the psyche became increasingly differentiated, integrated, and whole. Rudhyar (1936) recognized that these ideas were readily adaptable to astrology. The chart, too, was a dynamic compound of opposing forces (signs) in equilibrium. And the various parts of astrology with their myriad aspects and interrelations were symbolic of archetypal forces struggling to transform themselves into an integrated whole. Rudhyar realized that the process of individuation was implicit in *every horoscope*.

By the 1960's Rudhyar's project of reformulating astrology received new impetus from the humanistic movement in psychology. Humanistic psychology, as embodied in the

writings of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, Rollo May, and others, had arisen in response to the bleak pessimism inherent in the Freudian psychoanalytic view and the robot conception of human potential implied in behaviorism. Both psychoanalysis and behaviorism were deterministic in that they conceived of personality as the effect of causes external to the person himself—i.e., genetics, parents, environmental conditions, and so on. Humanistic psychologists countered this trend by developing models which could account for the apparent purposiveness and growth-seeking behavior of human beings.

Rather than portray the individual as caught in an interminable struggle between instinctual drives and the inhibiting influence of society (psychoanalysis), or fragment the person into a multitude of conditioned behaviors as seen from an external vantage point (behaviorism), humanists perceived the individual as a unified organism made up of autonomous drives and functions which could be differentiated from one another and integrated into a functional whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Humanistic psychologists challenged Freudian theory by postulating that instinctual drives were not dangerous forces erupting out of a primitive id, but healthy impulses that should be valued and trusted. The individual was perceived as a creative, self-actualizing, and self-determining organism capable of making responsible decisions and growing progressively toward an ideal state. Unlike behaviorists who ignored the internal world of consciousness, humanists emphasized the primacy of the subjective element. Whereas behaviorists contended that behavior was solely conditioned by external causes, humanists focused on the relevance of intentionality as an internal cause of behavior. While behaviorists were concerned with how behavior could be manipulated and controlled, humanists emphasized the capacity for personal freedom and choice. In sum, it was not the outer environment that was of central importance to the humanistic psychologist, but the person's inner world of perceptions, values, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, expectations, needs, feelings, and sensations.

Rudhyar was the first to recognize how astrology and humanistic psychology complemented one another. The chart, in effect, could be utilized as a tool for mapping the complex inner world that humanists were starting to explore. Just as humanistic psychology was a response to the determinism inherent in psychoanalysis and behaviorism, humanistic astrology was a response to the determinism inherent in traditional, event-oriented astrology. Borrowing from Carl Roger's (1951) *Client-Centered Therapy*, Rudhyar (1972) developed *Person-Centered Astrology*. Rudhyar was less concerned with whether astrology works than on how it could be utilized to assist the process of self-actualization. The real question was, given that astrology works what is its proper use?

In 1969 Rudhyar founded the International Committee for Humanistic Astrology and declared that astrology was, or should be, primarily a technique for understanding human nature. He decried the implicit determinism of predictive astrology and focused instead on astrology's potential as a symbolic language. Instead of seeing planets as transmitters of physical influence, Rudhyar saw them as symbolic of human functions. As a psychological language and diagnostic tool, astrology could serve as a guide to the integration and transformation of personality. Rudhyar's approach was "person-centered" in the sense that every birthchart was unique; a horoscope represented the individual's total potential in which no planet was "good" or "bad" but rather each element was part of an organic whole. Events were not interpreted as isolated occurrences with fortunate or unfortunate effects, but as purposeful, phase-specific manifestations of developmental cycles. An event derived its meaning from the stage it represented in a given planetary cycle and contributed to an ongoing process of growth that lead inexorably toward self-realization.

In the 1970's, the humanistic banner was taken up by such astrologers as Ziporah Dobyns, Richard Idemon, Stephen Arroyo, Robert Hand, and others. Humanistic astrologers asserted that there is no absolute separation between human and divine; rather, people and planets are woven into the same seamless web of being. Every individual is a focus and channel for the numinous energies that permeate the entire cosmos. Consciousness, not matter, is the primary reality of the Universe. As the human psyche is both reflective of and embedded within the Universal Psyche, it partakes of the creative power of this parent Consciousness. The psyche is bound and animated by the laws and formative principles of the One Being of which all lesser beings are parts. While the universal laws of Absolute Being cannot be violated, the individual is free and self-determining within the boundaries of these laws.

Rudhyar held that each person was born in response to a need of the Universe at a particular time and place. The birth chart, in effect, represents the solution to this need; i.e., it reveals the purpose of the life and the key to one's destiny. Put another way, the horoscope is like a "seed-plan" that shows a person's unique path of development. Just as a seed packet depicts a picture of the plant that the enclosed seeds may eventually become, so the horoscope symbolizes the kind of adult that the individual may become. In this view, nothing occurs in a human life except for a purpose, and this purpose is the purpose of the whole acting through the individual. This whole is often referred to as the core Self, the indwelling divinity that is rooted in a living, purposive universe. The question then becomes not what is going to happen, but what is its meaning? Astrology, said Rudhyar, can be utilized as a kind of karma yoga in which everything that happens is related to who the person is and what he or she may become. Thus the humanistic astrologer should not be concerned with events per se, but only with the response or meaning that the client gives to them. "It is not the predictable events which are important, but the attitude of the individual person towards his own growth and self-fulfillment" (1972, p. 54).

The advantage of the birth-chart is that it depicts the individual as a whole and thus provides a means for understanding how internal conflicts result in personality fragmentation and the exteriorization of conflict. Individuals split off and deny certain parts of themselves when the needs that underlay the expression of these parts meet with pain and frustration. Various functions get repressed and projected, and thus the individual is reduced to only part of what he or she potentially is. Unintegrated functions are typically experienced in the outer world in the guise of people and situations the individual attracts. What the individual experiences as a problematic situation or relationship can be seen in the chart as an aspect of his or her own psyche. In this way, the horoscope indicates what functions have been denied and projected, and through what circumstances (houses) they will likely be encountered.

While the birthchart provides insight into the client's internal conflicts, it is transits and progressions that tell us when these conflicts will be targeted for healing. These planetary movements indicate the nature, meaning, and duration of various developmental periods, each of which presents its own challenges and opportunities. While transits may correlate with outer events that seem to impinge upon the individual, astrology suggests that these events are the synchronous external manifestation of inner changes. In other words, environment and psyche are reflections of one another. The outer events serve as the trigger or stimulus to promote inner psychological growth. Seen in this way, transits reveal those parts of a person's nature which are ready to be consciously integrated, explored or transformed.

To re-engage a split-off part usually results in crisis since it means that the old order has to die in order for a new, more inclusive order to emerge. The humanistic astrologer, says Rudhyar (1975),

welcomes crises as signs of growth. He attempts to help the client or patient to reorient himself toward the causes of the crisis, to reassesses his goals as well as his motives, to accept what is, but in a new and holistic manner...which eventually should lead to harmony, inner peace, wisdom and compassion. (p. 56-7)

The value of astrology, then, is not its power to predict what the gods have in store for humans, but its ability to reveal the god-like powers that reside in the depths of every human being. Accordingly, the focus in humanistic astrology is inward, not outward, and interpretations are made in terms of personal growth and fulfillment. Simply put, the goal is to help the client realize the potentials that are symbolized by the horoscope. For example, Saturn opposed Venus in the natal chart indicates not simply "misfortune in love," but the potential to love deeply, enduringly, and responsibly along with the patience and determination to overcome obstacles. While realization of this potential may require a certain amount of hardship and suffering, to predict only hardship and suffering with no understanding of the potential gains involved is shortsighted at best and damaging at worst. Dobyns (1973) put it this way:

Telling people they are fated to experience specific negative events can be highly destructive. The view taken here is that character is destiny, and that by changing our character (our habitual attitudes, beliefs, and actions) we can change our destiny. With self-knowledge, we can integrate conflicts, overcome weaknesses, further develop talents, and move toward balance. As humanistic psychology puts it, we can achieve self-actualization and self-transcendence. (p. 2)

In many ways, humanistic astrology represents a genuine advancement in the theory of humanistic psychology. Both Jungian and humanistic psychologies have been criticized for their lack of precision in describing the inner nature of the human being. References to archetypes, faculties, functions, impulses and the like tend to be vague and speculative, with no concrete referents for outlining in a systematic manner the structure of the psyche. Humanistic psychology is more a set of attitudes toward the person than a precise and useful theory of personality and human growth. Astrology, on the other hand, provides objective predictable correlates for the structure and dynamics of the psyche while also indicating the directions that growth might occur. The person with Saturn opposed Venus, for example, may shift over time from a negative, fearful attitude toward relationships, e.g., "I will resist being controlled by my domineering partner," to one of responsible and loyal commitment. Such a shift would reflect a more mature, realistic attitude toward relationship, e.g., "a good marriage requires patience, humility, and hard work," while still being consistent with the astrological meaning of Saturn opposed Venus.

Astrotherapy is the application of astrological concepts to clinical practice. Astrology is both a theory of personality and a diagnostic tool. It presents a complex, multidimensional model of human behavior that depicts the psyche as a hierarchical structure comprised of archetypal needs, cognitive structures, emergent thoughts and behaviors, and corresponding events. It is also a powerful and flexible assessment device that allows the practitioner to discern clues to the formative experiences of childhood, gain insight into the meaning of current events, and target periods of future growth. Unlike traditional, event-oriented astrology, astrotherapy is not concerned with superficial trait descriptions or the prediction of future events. Rather, astrology is used to foster empathy for the client's internal world and thereby enhances the therapist's ability to effectively treat psychological problems, modify or remove existing symptoms, and promote positive personality growth and fulfillment.

## References

Dobyns, Z. (1973). *The astrologer's casebook*. Los Angeles: TIA Publications.

- Jung, C. (1948). Letter to Professor B.V. Raman. *American Astrology*, June, 1948.
- Jung, C. (1954). Interview with Andre Barbault. *Astrologie Moderne*, May 26, 1954.
- Jung, C. (1955). Synchronicity: An acausal connecting principle. In C. Jung & W. Pauli, *The Interpretation of nature and psyche* (pp. 1-146). New York: Pantheon.
- Jung, C. (1962). Commentary. In R. Wilhelm (Trans. & Ed.), *The secret of the golden flower*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, & World.
- Jung, C. (1976). *C.G. Jung: Letters (Volume II)*. Edited by G. Adler and A. Jaffe (R.F.C. Hull, trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.
- Rudhyar, D. (1936). *The Astrology of Personality*. Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company.
- Rudhyar, D. (1972). *Person Centered Astrology*. Lakemont, GA: CSA Press.
- Rudhyar, D. (1975). *From humanistic to transpersonal astrology*. Palo Alto, CA: The Seed Center.