

The Planets as Conscious Beings: A Theory of How Astrology Works

by David Hamblin

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In my article on “The Importance of Harmonics” (*Astrological Journal*, Jan/Feb 2020), I wrote: “In a later article I hope to delineate a particular theory about the nature of the relationship between heavenly and earthly events”. So here is the “later article”.

Ever since I first came into astrology in the 1960s, I have been concerned with the question “*How* and *why* does astrology work?” It certainly *seems* to work, but nobody knows how and why. We know that the movements of the Sun and Moon affect the tides through the process of gravitation, but nobody knows of a process which might cause a small and distant planet like Pluto to have a complex and subtle influence on earthly events and on the behaviour of human beings. As Kirk Little has written, “astrology is unable to explain itself to non-believers, or to provide a convincing explanation of how it works” ¹.

Because of this, some astrologers have proposed that astrology is essentially a process of *divination*, comparable to the Tarot or the I Ching. The founding father of the “astrology is divination” theory is Geoffrey Cornelius, whose book *The Moment of Astrology: Origins in Divination* ² was first published in 1994, and whose article *Is Astrology Divination – and Does it Matter?* ³ is perhaps the best short summary of the divination theory. But other astrologers have followed in Cornelius’s footsteps, and many of their writings are brought together on the Cosmocritic website ⁴. Kirk Little, who edits this website, has written: “Most contemporary astrologers reject the crude materialism of ‘scientific’ astrology ... We think divinatory astrology offers the most coherent, though not the only, model for horoscopic astrology” ¹.

According to the divination theory, the astrologer “casts” a chart, in the same way that one might cast a card from the Tarot pack or a hexagram from the I Ching. In Cornelius’s words, “What matters is the chart that actually presents itself or ‘comes up’” ³. This process is peculiar to the individual astrologer, and his or her findings are therefore *subjective* (existing in the mind of the observer, rather than in the thing being observed). This places astrology outside the realm of science, which deals only with *objective* facts. Moreover, according to the divination theory, the planets exist only as *metaphors* or *symbols*. The astrologer uses the symbolism of the planets to find answers to the questions that he or she is asking. There is thus a rejection of the view

that the planets, as physical objects in the sky, exert any influence over earthly events.

Now there is a branch of astrology which certainly *is* divination, and that is horary astrology. Horary astrology is the use of the planets for divination, just as *acultomancy* is the use of needles for divination. Wikipedia has an article on “Methods of Divination” which lists 338 different methods, and so shows that almost anything can be used for divination. But the existence of horary astrology does not prove that divination is the main purpose of astrology, just as the existence of acultomancy does not prove that divination is the main purpose of needles.

If we turn to other branches of astrology (natal, mundane), I find the “astrology is divination” theory unsatisfactory, and this is because, in my view, astrologers are dealing with *objective facts*.

Let us take the example of a birth chart for a person whose time and place of birth are known from the birth certificate. In this case, the astrologer is dealing with two objective facts, and is asserting that these two facts are connected or correlated with each other. First, he knows from the birth certificate that this person was born at a particular time and place, and, secondly, he knows from the Ephemeris that, at that same time and place, the planets occupied certain positions in the sky. These facts are *not* peculiar to the individual astrologer, and so are *not* subjective. There could be a hundred astrologers all studying the same birth, and they would all be looking at the same chart. Moreover, the facts would still be there even if no one was observing them.

Of course, in many cases the time of birth is not precisely known. But the astrologer will still be looking for any information which might help him to pinpoint the time of birth more precisely. If he does not have any such information, he will accept that his interpretation of the chart is to some extent tentative, as he is not in command of all the relevant *objective facts*.

We can also look at the type of astrology, now very prevalent, in which the astrologer is noting the positions of the planets and making deductions about the implications of these positions for humanity as a whole. For instance, many astrologers are now noting that Saturn has now moved into Aquarius, and are making deductions about the likely effects of this. These astrologers are not doing divination. They are noting the *objective fact* that Saturn is now in the area of sky that we call Aquarius.

It seems to me that the belief that the positions of the planets do have some causative effect on earthly events is the central belief that sustains astrology. The planets are not just symbols or metaphors; they are real objects that are an important part of our cosmic environment. To call oneself an astrologer if

one does not believe in this would be like calling oneself a Christian if one does not believe that Jesus was the Son of God. Thus, the statement “astrology is divination” is not an explanation of how astrology works. Rather, it is a statement that astrology does *not* work in the way that most astrologers believe that it does.

So, astrology deals with objective facts, and therefore is within the realm of science. We do need to use science to find a process which might explain how it works. We have quoted Kirk Little as saying that “most astrologers reject the crude materialism of ‘scientific’ astrology”, but (and this is my central point) *science does not have to be crudely materialistic*. Increasingly, scientists are studying, not only the behaviour of physical matter, but also the behaviour of *consciousness*.

One of these scientists is Rupert Sheldrake, who was born at 18.00 BDST on 28 June 1942 in Newark-upon-Trent, England (RR: A). In 1988 he published his book *The Presence of the Past* ⁵, in which he developed the concept of morphic resonance, which has been defined as “the idea of mysterious telepathy-like interconnections between organisms and of collective memories within species”. Then in 1999 he published *Dogs that Know When their Owners are Coming Home* ⁶, in which he shows how dogs (and many other animals) have knowledge which must have been obtained, not through the five senses, but from some other unexplained source.

And then, in 2013, Sheldrake published *The Science Delusion* (published in the USA as *Science Set Free*) ⁷, in which he challenges the “materialist worldview” which is held by most scientists, which holds that everything is mechanical and that matter is unconscious. He concludes (p.127):

“Maybe all organisms, physical and biological, have experiences and feelings, including atoms, molecules, crystals, cells, tissues, organs, plants, animals, societies of organisms, ecosystems, planets, solar systems and galaxies”.

This view is called *panpsychism*, which holds that everything has consciousness. Panpsychism is not new; it goes back to Plato (5th century BCE), who said in the *Timaeus*: “The world is indeed a living being, with a soul and intelligence ... a single visible living entity containing all other living entities, which by their nature are all related” ⁸. But, until recently, panpsychism has been ignored or ridiculed by scientists.

(In parentheses, we can note that panpsychism says only that all *things* – i.e. all material things – have consciousness, and so it does not address the question of whether there are also *incorporeal* consciousnesses: that is, conscious beings that have no physical form. Personally I think that such beings may well exist, but this is entirely speculative.)

A particularly clear and convincing account of panpsychism is given by Marilyn Monk in an article entitled *A Hierarchy of Consciousness from Atom to Cosmos* ⁹. Monk proposes that, at every level from atom to cosmos, organisms are conscious. By this she means that they are aware of their environments and are able to adapt to them. They may not all be *self-conscious* (that is, they may not *know* that they are conscious), but they are conscious none the less. At each level, the organisms are *in service to* the organisms at the next level up in the hierarchy, even though they may not be aware of this.

Let us now look at the implications of this for astrology. If we accept Monk's proposal, it follows that we, along with all the Earth's other creatures, are in service to the Earth. (There may be intermediate levels, such as ecosystems, and perhaps cities and nations, but let us, for the sake of simplicity, assume that we are directly in service to the Earth.)

And it follows that the Earth is herself a living conscious being. We can, if we wish, call her Gaia, and we instinctively feel that she is female because she gave us birth (though in reality, of course, she is genderless). Since Gaia is at a higher level of consciousness than ourselves, we can assume that she is *self-conscious*: she knows who she is. She contains within herself the sum total of the "consciousnesses" of all the creatures on her surface, as well as of the oceans, the rocks, the lava, and the burning gases that form her interior. She is thus a "super-conscious" being, with a level of consciousness that is beyond our comprehension.

And it follows also that Gaia is herself in service to the organism at the next level in the hierarchy, which is the consciousness of the entire solar system. And we can assume that, just as we humans are constantly communicating with one another, so Gaia is constantly communicating with the other organisms at her own level in the hierarchy, which are the other planets.

But here we can note an important fact. So far as we know, Gaia is the only planet in the solar system that has given birth to biological life. (There *may* be some primitive underwater living creatures on one of the moons of Jupiter or Saturn, but this is unproven.) And this must mean that Gaia's consciousness is far more sophisticated and developed than that of any of the other planets, including the Sun itself.

My suggestion, therefore, is that, whereas in a physical sense the solar system is heliocentric (because the Sun's physical mass, warmth and light is far greater than that of all the other planets put together), in a "consciousness" sense it is geocentric (because the light of Gaia's consciousness is greater than that of all the other planets put together). Physically the planets revolve round the Sun, but *consciously* they revolve round the Earth. And this means that they are aware of their positions in the earthly sky.

We can deduce from this that Gaia is communicating with the other planets far more strongly than they are communicating with her. She is casting the light of her consciousness upon them, just as the Sun is casting its physical light. We can almost say that Gaia is their teacher. They are learning from her all the time. And what are they learning about? I suggest that, to a large extent, they are learning about astrology. Gaia has within her consciousness the whole of human wisdom, but it seems likely that she is particularly interested in astrology, because astrology is concerned with her relationships with her fellow planets.

So maybe Venus believes that she is beautiful because Gaia is telling her that she is beautiful. And, when Venus moves into Gemini, she starts to behave in a Geminian way because Gaia is telling her that these are the qualities of this particular area of sky. Venus, like the other planets, is Gaia's pupil and is reflecting back to Gaia the information that Gaia has given to her.

And maybe the whole of astrology can be explained in this way. Gaia, as this super-intelligent and super-sensitive being, is acutely aware, from moment to moment, of her ever-changing relationship to the other planets, which are her companions in the solar system to which she is in service. At each moment, as she turns on her axis and revolves around the Sun, she is aware of the patterns which the planets form in her sky, of the particular sections of sky which they occupy, and of their angular relationship to each other and to herself. She is aware of how each planet exerts its own particular kind of force, and she knows that they exercise this force, not through physical mechanisms, but through some kind of telepathic communication ("morphic resonance" as Sheldrake would call it). She is aware also of how these forces are felt differently at different points on her surface, so that (for instance) the influence of a planet is felt more strongly if it is close to the horizon, where darkness turns into light and back into darkness again. She knows also how, when a particular creature is born upon her surface, the pattern of the planets at that time and place is imprinted on that creature and stays with it throughout its life. She has been intuitively aware of these things for millions of years, but now, with the help of the human beings who are the most intelligent creatures to whom she has ever given birth, she has developed a language which enables her to know them more rationally and systematically. She communicates this telepathically to the other planets, and they respond accordingly.

Thus it seems that astrology is, to some extent, man-made. We invented the system of twelve signs and twelve houses, we have passed it on to Gaia, and Gaia has passed it on to the other planets. And so it has become true. The planets really do behave in accordance with this system, because Gaia has taught them to do so.

However, my studies of harmonics ¹⁰ have convinced me that, in one respect, the planets are telling us something that we have *not* been telling them, and that is about *the quality of numbers*. The study of harmonics shows that each prime number has its own quality: the quality of Five is different from the quality of Seven, and so on. So *quantities* have *qualities*. This is an extremely important discovery.

It is not, in fact, an entirely new discovery, although it has always been ignored by scientists. We have always known that One was a very special number which had its own quality (which is why there is a word, Oneness, which means the quality of being One). And, when we come to Two and Three, we instinctively know that the quality of a meeting of two people is different from the quality of a meeting of three people; and, in astrology, we know that the Two-based aspects (the opposition, square and semi-square) have a quality which is different from that of the Three-based aspects (the trine). But, when it comes to the numbers beyond Three – although there are many popular superstitions, such as that Seven has magical properties, and that Thirteen is unlucky – there is an absence of evidence-based knowledge about their qualities ¹¹.

If we acknowledge that quantities have qualities, this has implications far beyond astrology. Another book which argues for panpsychism is *Galileo's Error* by Philip Goff ¹². Goff sees Galileo as the founding father of modern science, and he says that Galileo's error was to insist that science should confine itself to the study of the *quantitative*, i.e. to things that can be expressed mathematically, since these belong to physical matter; and that science should ignore the *qualitative*, since qualities belong to consciousness, which is outside the realm of science. But if quantities have qualities, then maybe the whole distinction between quantity and quality is a false one. Maybe everything has both quantity and quality.

So, with regard to harmonics, my assumption is that Gaia is fully aware of the qualities of numbers, not because she has learnt this from Man, but because of her innate understanding of the nature of the cosmos. And she has passed this knowledge too to the other planets.

It is now a difficult time for Gaia. She is having to cope with the rapid expansion of the human population, which is upsetting the delicate balance of her ecosystems and wreaking havoc with her climate patterns. She is trying to cope with this as best she can. We need to love her and take care of her, at the same time as loving and taking care of ourselves and of all of Gaia's other creatures. Love is the only medicine that can heal the world.

So, in summary, my suggestion is that the planets are conscious beings, and that astrology is the result of their conscious interactions. This is, of course, speculative, and will always remain so, since it is impossible for us to probe

the mind of Gaia or to listen in to her conversations with the other planets. But it does at least offer a possible answer to the otherwise unanswerable question: “How does astrology work?”

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I would like, finally, to come back to the question of divination.

It has been rightly said that “the stars impel, they do not compel”. Our behaviour is the result, not only of our birth charts, but also of our genes, our family histories, and a host of other factors. And also we have free will. So this means that the chart itself does not provide all the answers to our questions, and that there is plenty of room for *intuition* in the interpretation of charts. Strictly speaking, intuition is not the same as divination, but, like divination, it is subjective; and many astrologers may feel that their intuitions are divinely inspired.

So my belief is that, although astrology itself is not divination, a healthy dose of divination – or, at least, of intuition – is helpful in the interpretation of charts.

Notes and References

¹ Kirk Little, *A Reader's Guide to Cosmocritic*, www.cosmocritic.com.

² Geoffrey Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology: Origins in Divination* (2nd edition), The Wessex Astrologer, 2003. (First edition published in 1994.)

³ Geoffrey Cornelius, *Is Astrology Divination – and Does it Matter?*, www.cosmocritic.com.

⁴ www.cosmocritic.com.

⁵ Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past: Morphic Resonance and the Habits of Nature*, Icon Books, 2001 (first published in 1988).

⁶ Rupert Sheldrake, *Dogs that Know When their Owners are Coming Home: The Unexplained Powers of Animals*, Hutchinson, 1999.

⁷ Rupert Sheldrake, *The Science Delusion*, Hodder & Stoughton, 2013. (Published in the USA as *Science Set Free*).

⁸ Plato, *Timaeus*, quoted in Wikipedia.

⁹ Marilyn Monk, *A Hierarchy of Consciousness from Atom to Cosmos*, www.heartfulnessmagazine.com/a-hierarchy-of-consciousness.

¹⁰ David Hamblin, *Harmonic Charts*, Aquarian Press, 1983; *The Spirit of Numbers, a New Exploration of Harmonic Astrology*, The Wessex Astrologer, 2011; *Harmonic Astrology in Practice*, The Wessex Astrologer, 2019; “The importance of harmonics”, *Astrological Journal*, Jan/Feb 2020.

¹¹ I am aware that numerologists have speculated about the qualities of numbers, but, so far as I am aware, numerology has not come up with any evidence-based conclusions. A possible exception is Sir Thomas Browne, who in his 1658 work *The Garden of Cyrus* showed that the number Five is prominent throughout the arts, in design, and in botany (a finding that tallies well with my own findings about the nature of Fiveness).

¹² Philip Goff, *Galileo’s Error: Foundations for a New Science of Consciousness*, Random House, 2019.