

The Cycle of the Zodiac Signs

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Archetypes Rooted in Reality

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Contents

Introduction.....	9
1 The Zodiac Signs in Context.....	11
1.1 Objections to Astrology.....	11
1.2 The Four Branches of Astrology.....	21
1.3 The Practice of Natal Astrology.....	22
1.4 The Language of the Unconscious.....	36
1.5 The Tropical Zodiac.....	43
2 Analyzing the Archetypes.....	49
2.1 The Archetypes of the Zodiac Signs.....	49
2.2 Gender.....	54
2.3 Modality.....	56
2.4 Element.....	59
2.5 Planetary Ruler.....	65
2.6 The Archetypes of the Houses.....	78
2.7 The Archetypes of the Aspects.....	86
3 Linking the Zodiac to Reality.....	92
3.1 Seasons of the Sun.....	92
3.2 The Earth's Aura.....	94
3.3 Qualities of Cyclical Time.....	95
3.4 Sagittarius A*.....	98
3.5 The Archetype of Sagittarius A*.....	103
3.6 The Archetype of Pisces.....	113
3.7 The Archetype of Aries.....	115
3.8 The Archetype of the Twelfth House.....	117
4 Fate versus Free will.....	118
4.1 Historical Perspectives on Fate.....	119

4.2	Connectedness in Families	128
4.3	Fate and Confusion.....	131
4.4	Identical Siblings.....	135
4.5	Consciousness and Determinism.....	140
5	Divination versus Planetary Causation.....	146
5.1	Historical Perspectives on the Nature of Astrology	146
5.2	Divination	151
5.3	Planetary Causation.....	155
5.4	Synchronicity	158
5.5	Cosmic Sympathy	163
5.6	A Scientific Framework.....	167
6	Conclusions and Inspiration	181
6.1	Astrology and Free Will	182
6.2	Archetypes Rooted in Reality	184
6.3	The Nature of Astrology	188
6.4	The Collective Unconscious and Evolution.....	191
6.5	A Scientific Concept of the Soul.....	193
6.6	Consciousness and Connectedness.....	195
6.7	The Greater Soul.....	199
	Bibliography.....	201

The Way

A son went to his old father and asked:
“Father, before you go, will you give me your blessing?”
His father answered: “My blessing will consist of
guiding you on the beginning
of the way to wisdom.”

The next morning they departed,
left the narrow valley behind them
and climbed a mountain.
The day had almost passed noon
when they reached the top.
In all directions
until the horizon
the land bathed in light.

The Sun set
and with it went the dazzling beauty of the day:
night fell.
And when it became dark,
the stars were shining.

- Bert Hellinger

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Note to the Reader

Although this book requires no prior knowledge of astrology, if you have no serious *experience* with astrology, I would advise you to consult with a professional Western astrologer to interpret your birth chart before you read on. Alternatively, I recommend ordering an automatically created psychological analysis of your birth chart at astro.com.

Introduction

When I was little I used to have long conversations with my father about the big questions of life, such as: 'Where did the universe come from?' 'Where does it stop?' and 'What is behind its boundary?' In one of these discussions he asked me whether I thought the universe was something to be grateful for, which suggested that he himself was not so sure of this. I remember answering positively without hesitation, arguing that the existence of the universe is miraculous considering that there could have been nothing at all.

Somewhere during my Biology study in the 1990-ties I encountered astrology in a more serious way than the Sun-sign predictions in a magazine and it immediately spoke to me. From my first consult with a professional astrologer I learned that the prejudice against astrology that I had picked up from my environment was unjustified; the information was far too specific and accurate to be accidental. What remained however was the question how this could be. People around me, my father included, had told me that the stars were simply too far away to influence us and that bothered me. It prevented me from taking a deep dive.

In the fall of 2021 I subscribed in an impulse for a part time astrology course which would have prepared me for the Dutch national examination in four years, had I not dropped out after the first year. My goal was not so much to become a professional astrologer, but to find out how astrology works. I had questioned a friend who had just started her astrological practice about it, but she didn't have an explanation and what was worse; she did not care.

In retrospect, the real trigger for me to finally dive into the subject was probably what this same friend told me in the fall of 2019. She conveyed the message of many astrologers that we were to expect a world crisis the next year and that it would be about restrictions. Maybe it wasn't such a wild impulse then that after the peak of the Corona crisis I asked her how astrology worked and subsequently enrolled for the course.

Not surprisingly, it soon turned out that the working of astrology wasn't really part of the curriculum. So I set up my own investigation, starting with some of the study materials that were advised and extending from there.

Since I couldn't find a book that answered my most pressing questions, I decided to write down my own thoughts of how it could work. I started with explaining what seemed to me as the most feeble part of the astrological framework; the zodiac signs. And I already had an idea.

The more I found out, the more intrigued I became. Not only by the working of astrology but also, unexpectedly, by what it told me about my life and the lives of others whose birth charts I studied. I had one experience that was particularly impressive. During an on-line class I studied the placement of Pluto conjunct Moon in my birth chart. This placement dominates my chart in terms of aspects with other planets. Suddenly I realized how six distinct manifestations of Pluto conjunct Moon in the fifth house were true for me and how they were related to other placements conform the indicated aspects. Staring at my chart, I could link these experiences one after the other – all the way from my childhood memories to that present moment – with this unconscious pattern in my mind. It felt like a gateway opening and left me in a state of ecstasy.

I hope that this book will turn out to make a valuable contribution to the awareness of our connectedness with the cosmos. It has certainly done so for me personally. I've known people who felt small and insignificant when contemplating the stars, presumably because they identified with being a separate individual. For me the effect is quite the contrary: When I'm feeling small in my everyday life, realizing I'm part of something so vast is rather elevating. Most of all, the stars remind me that life is something to be grateful for; since there could have been nothing.

1 The Zodiac Signs in Context

"...on the one hand, there is the 'intelligible' sign, and on the other, as it were, the visible 'formation' of it; and events, they say, are discovered not from the formation, but from the intelligible sign; though it cannot possibly be apprehended."

- Origen of Alexandria, third century CE

1.1 Objections to Astrology

The current zeitgeist seems not ideal for writing a contemplative book about astrology. The astrological practice has been discredited since the astronomical discoveries of the seventeenth century, especially among the educated circles of Western society. Scientists and especially astronomers underscore that the only correct attitude towards astrology is to ignore it for being nonsense. We often hear them sum up a list of issues they have with astrology, concluding that it's nothing more than a superstition.

It becomes clear from their arguments however, that they haven't looked into the subject, nor is it likely that they ever consulted a professional astrologer. This combination of not taking the effort of understanding something yet passionately dismissing it seems rather peculiar. I will not speculate here on what might be triggering this behavior, but I find it worrisome, considering that an attitude of open mindedness will be needed for scientific progress.

The twentieth century American astronomer Carl Sagan has inspired many alive today, including the next generation astronomers. He assembled the messages of the Pioneer plaque and the Voyager Golden Record; universal messages sent into space that might be understood by extraterrestrial intelligence. He published more than 600 scientific papers and articles, wrote popular science books and the science fiction novel *Contact*, the basis for a 1997 film of the same name. He narrated and co-wrote the award-winning 1980 television series *Cosmos: A Personal Voyage*. The most widely watched series in

the history of American public television. His book *Cosmos* was published to accompany the series. In this book he asserts:

Those afraid of the universe as it really is, those who pretend to nonexistent knowledge and envision a Cosmos centered on human beings will prefer the fleeting comforts of superstition. They avoid rather than confront the world. But those with the courage to explore the weave and structure of the Cosmos, even where it differs profoundly from their wishes and prejudices, will penetrate its deepest mysteries.

In the same book he talks of astrology as being an assault by mysticism and superstition on empirical science, stating that Sun-sign columns in newspapers and magazines are vague and inconsistent. This argument might give the informed reader the impression that he failed to study what astrology is really about. But in fact he *had* examined it. He knew that Sun-sign columns do not represent the professional practice and are often not written by an educated astrologer but rather by the newest recruit of a tabloid. It seems therefore that Sagan deliberately discredited astrology, presumably because he wasn't able to explain the working of it scientifically. And since he's remembered as an icon of our relationship with the cosmos, his preconception effects the public opinion until the present day.

In his book *The History of Western Astrology Vol. 2*, historian Nicholas Campion points out:

The attacks on astrology by evangelical Christians and fundamental sceptics have a minimal effect on popular opinion, but do have an impact in higher education. The hostility is often surprising in its intensity. The astronomers Philip Ianna and Roger Culver remarked how a colleague physically attacked them in anger that they were even considering writing a book attacking astrology, mirroring Freud's belief that astrology is so dangerous that one shouldn't even mention it. The anecdotal evidence I have collected

contains many instances of academics who are sympathetic to astrology being afraid to admit their interest, or of students being warned that academic careers will suffer if they admit to believe in it.

In an attempt to gain some respect from the scientific community, Western astrologers have made several attempts to prove the value of astrology scientifically by carrying out statistical experiments. In the majority of the cases no significant results were found. Given the symbolic astrological 'language', the complexity of the composite archetypes – as will be set out later in this book – and the numerous factors which add up to a unique picture, this is hardly surprising. But there have been some exceptions, such as the statistical research carried out by the French statistician Michel Gauquelin and his wife Françoise. Using isolated factors and large samples they showed for instance a statistically significant relationship between Mars' position at birth and eminent athletic performance (published in 1955) and between Saturn's position and the birth of physicians and scientists. The latter evidence has been ignored by the Saturnian scientists. The 'Mars effect' was eventually tested by the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP), who to their alarm discovered in the first batch of results that, instead of disproving it, they were on their way to verifying the Mars effect. The director of the institute, Paul Kurtz, asked for a preview of the second and third batches. Subsequently, for the three batches together, significant results were found that were the opposite of the Mars effect; a rather suspicious situation. Other members of the CSICOP later sent a letter of apology to the Gauquelins. It's clear that in spite of the modest proof that the Gauquelins have delivered, astrology is still dismissed as superstition. One could argue that the requirement for serious attention is that the entire astrological practice is demonstrated. Given the complexity of astrological information however, it was remarkable that any correlation at all was found, which should have made the discipline worthy of further consideration.

Because of the negative attitude towards astrology in academic circles, ranging from prejudiced distancing to hostility, it seems useless to

make any further attempts to prove astrology statistically. Apart from the risk that results will be ignored, it's doubtful whether more cases of statistical significance would make a contribution to our understanding of how astrology works. And without a grasp of how it functions, it seems unlikely that sceptics will come round to a positive point of view.

To end the present negative opinion about astrology, what seems more important than statistical evidence is a plausible theory for how it works. Several theories have been put forward in modern times, but none of them have been convincing so far. In my view this is linked to the still ongoing scientific research on how the universe works and unclarity about how scientific results should be interpreted. Progress in this area will likely increase the understanding of how astrology works as well. The point I'm trying to make with this book is that the opposite is also true: The chances that we'll penetrate the nature of the universe will likely increase when scientists include the available observational evidence about the nature of our minds. I'm not just referring here to the physical workings of a brain but also to our experience of reality.

What joins astronomers, astrologers and humanity in general is that we are eager for the mysteries of the universe to be discovered. Scientists are trying to find a new, unifying theory of the universe; The theory of everything. This theory should reconcile the theory of quantum mechanics (that accurately describes what happens on the smallest scale in the universe) with Einstein's celebrated theory of general relativity (that describes universal processes on the largest scale). But they're not likely to make much progress in understanding the universe in a biased atmosphere: Ignoring some of the features of our cosmos will not likely bring them closer to a theory of *everything*. If instead scientists would use the experiences of astrology to inspire their search for the workings of the universe, this might lead to new frontiers of discovery.

That's why I've chosen to stop ignoring the empty oratory of the opponents of astrology and make an attempt to end their self-perpetuating prejudice. I'll start with discussing their top five arguments for why astrology could never work:

1. Constellations are arbitrary selections of stars; they don't mean anything.

The British biologist Richard Dawkins, an admirer of Carl Sagan, argues in his book *Unweaving the Rainbow* that the pattern of a constellation means no more than a patch of damp on the bathroom ceiling, since a constellation is a miscellaneous set of stars, all at different distances from us. This is true but missing the point as far as modern Western astrology is concerned. In ancient times constellations were regarded as animated parts of the sky that were expressing the qualities of the experienced patterns of change. In today's practice however, as will be set out later in this chapter, the zodiac signs are regarded as archetypes in our psyche. They still carry the same names as the constellations that they used to be associated with, but they're no longer equated with them.

The American astrophysicist and popular science communicator Neil DeGrasse-Tyson, another admirer of Carl Sagan, agrees with Dawkins that arbitrary selected stars are meaningless and could not have an influence on us. On YouTube Tyson states that it's not only foolish but also self-centered to imagine that stars would care about our lives: Our existence on this negligible little planet is totally insignificant to them, and the sooner we learn this the better. It might help us to stop dominating others, feeling so important and in the center of things. His argument of self-centeredness has to do with the cosmological model in ancient times, when it was assumed that Earth is in the center of the cosmos. Since the discoveries of Galileo in the seventeenth century we know that this is not the case: the Sun is in the center of our solar system and our solar system is one of many. This does not render invalid however that the geocentric model is used in astrology. The astrological practice is about our relationship with the cosmos, and relationships are commonly experienced from the point of view of those involved; in this case humanity. Astrologers do not believe that we're in the center of things: Earth just happens to be the place from where we observe and experience the universe. And instead of making the 'preposterous' assumption that the universe would care about us, contemporary astrologers are well aware of the fact that it's the other way round: We care about the universe, in the cycles of which we partake.

2. Celestial bodies and especially the stars are too far away to have any significant influence on us.

In 1975 the American journal the *Humanist* published a statement by 186 leading scientists titled *Objections to Astrology* emphasizing this argument:

[In ancient times] they had no conception of the vast distances from the Earth to the planets and stars. Now that these distances have been calculated, we can see how infinitely small are the gravitational and other effects produced by the distant planets and the far more distant stars. It is simply a mistake to imagine that the forces exerted by stars and planets at the moment of birth can in any way shape our futures.

Several decades before this statement the theory of quantum mechanics was developed, which proved to predict reality very accurately. Results from experiments made it evident that distance – defined as the space between objects that separates them – is an elusive concept. To state that large distances between celestial bodies is ‘strong evidence’ against the validity of astrology was not only already outdated in 1975: It’s an untruth that has been repeated until the present day. I will return to the topic of quantum physics in chapter five.

In the concerning article another argument was formulated against astrology that didn’t so much address the validity of it, but rather asserted that astrology would be an unethical practice:

Why do people believe in astrology? In these uncertain times many long for the comfort of having guidance in making their decisions. They would like to believe in a destiny predetermined by astral forces beyond their control. However, we must all face the world, and we must realize that our futures lie in ourselves, and not in the stars.

The same argument against astrology was used by the Christian theologian Saint Augustine in the fourth century and has been

repeated many times. With this argument, the writers seem to be ignoring their own convictions: It's unclear what the difference would be between the deterministic scientific paradigm since the laws of Newton and a predetermined destiny from an astrological point of view. But it's a fundamental concern that has led to discussion since ancient times, which makes it essential to address this topic seriously nonetheless.

In the current practice almost all astrologers believe in free will: They encourage their clients to become conscious of their inner issues and work on their personal development, assuming that in that way they can improve their future lives.

It's true that in ancient times astrology was primarily used to predict outer events, in line with the Stoic doctrine of that time. A few modern astrologers focus their practice on the Hellenistic tradition (they therefore call themselves traditional astrologers) and find that the traditional techniques accurately predict the future. They therefore believe that the future is predetermined, and considering the current scientific paradigm, they could be quite right to do so. In that case we might wonder if they are capable of giving their clients ethical advice. The other question that pops up when assuming a predetermined universe is if the astrologers who believe in free will are giving their advice in vain. I will discuss these issues in chapter four.

3. The fact that twins have different lives proves that astrology is nonsense.

This assertion too has been part of the critique against astrology since antiquity. Sagan repeated it in his book *Cosmos*. The argument addresses natal astrology, in which a birth chart – cast for the moment of birth – has something to say about the native's character and experiences in life. In Hellenistic times, it was already recognized that the birth chart does not contain all information about the native; there are other factors that have to be taken into account. Imagine for instance a hamster being born right next to a human baby at exactly the same time. We wouldn't expect the hamster and the human being to have the same experiences in life as they grow up. So to start with, a different genetic make up (or formulated less technically; a different

family background) leads to different manifestations of the birth chart, especially where it concerns different species.

The point is of course that twins tend to have genes that are very similar. While there are twins who stem from two distinct egg cells, there are also cases in which one egg cell has split, which causes their genetic material to be identical. We speak of identical twins. There are several reasons why identical twins could still have different lives. The first is that twins are usually not born at exactly the same time. Even a time difference as little as five minutes can lead to significant differences in their birth charts.

For those who believe in free will it's easy to see how conscious choices could lead to different lives, but let's assume for a moment that we live in a totally predetermined universe and that the identical twins were born at exactly the same time. Then they still wouldn't necessarily have the same lives, because of a feature of astrology that people are often not familiar with: The information provided by the birth chart is symbolic, not factual. This entails that the archetypes represented by the celestial bodies, zodiac signs and houses can manifest in various ways that are each symbolic of the underlying archetype. Since the birth chart is archetypally predictive, astrologers will ask feedback from their clients in order to specify the concrete outcome of it. The symbolic information is in my view the main factor that makes it hard to demonstrate the validity of astrology statistically. I will elaborate on the archetypal character of astrological information later in this chapter and in chapter five. In chapter four the subject of identical siblings will be further discussed.

4. In ancient times people believed that the planets were gods. Today we know that gods do not exist.

The nineteenth century British philosopher Bertrand Russell said:

Therefore, in regard to the Olympic gods, speaking to a purely philosophical audience, I would say that I am an Agnostic. But speaking popularly, I think that all of us would say in regard to those gods that we were Atheists.

Whilst it would be hard to prove the existence of the divine, it's impossible to prove that gods do not exist. Due to the present scientific paradigm however, almost everybody has stopped believing in the Greek and Roman gods that were worshipped in the Hellenistic period, and this includes astrologers.

Modern Western astrologers regard the planetary gods from ancient times as archetypes in our psyche. And conceived in this way at least, their existence appears to be quite genuine. If this argument against astrology is an attempt to promote the superiority of the laws of physics over religion, which is just an assumption, scientists needn't worry: Natural laws are perfectly compatible with concepts of the divine in our minds.

Apart from the supposed conception of planets as living gods in modern astrology, there's more confusion about the planetary archetypes. Dawkins states:

Astrologers too, think that each planet exudes its own, qualitatively distinct 'energy', which affects human life and has affinities with some human emotion: love in the case of Venus, aggression for Mars, intelligence for Mercury. These planetary qualities are based on – what else – the characters of the Roman gods after whom the planets are named.

The idea that planets affect us through emitting their particular 'energies' is an idea of the astronomer and astrologer Claudius Ptolemy, dating back around 2000 years. This is not how modern astrologers would describe what is happening, although they struggle to find a plausible theory. I will discuss the different views on the working of astrology, including my own, in chapter five.

As for Dawkins' remark that the characters of the Roman gods would have inspired the planetary qualities: Planetary archetypes are in my view clearly not derived from the characters of mythological deities as is usually assumed, quite the contrary. I will discuss this point of view in chapter two.

5. The beginning of the Aries constellation doesn't even coincide with the Spring equinox anymore.

And here the critics actually have a point. As mentioned above in the first objection, in Western astrology the zodiac signs are no longer equated with their constellations. One reason for this is that constellations are indeed comprised of arbitrary selections of stars. Another reason is that the placement of the Sun in the corresponding constellations does no longer align in time with the archetypal zodiac signs used in the practice. This divergence is caused by the so-called precession of the equinoxes. It was already observed in Hellenistic times and has been growing ever since. As a result, it has become unclear why the zodiac signs would, in terms of the Sun being positioned in a certain sign, manifest through the year the way they do. It appears that the framework underpinning astrology has become untenable.

Hence this book, in which I'll try to elucidate in chapter two and three why the symbolic zodiac signs should manifest in our psyche at their specific times (when regarding the zodiac as a cycle in time) and directions in space (when regarding the zodiac as a circle in space). In chapter four I'll address the ongoing debate about free will against the background of different historical perspectives and the current scientific determinism.

In chapter five I'll discuss the possible working of astrology as a whole and our relationship with the cosmos in general by building on the survey in the previous chapters, comparing different theories and combining them with personal thoughts and human experience. Ideally, my survey would inspire further research for which I'll make some suggestions in chapter six.

For those who have despised astrology until this moment, just weren't curious enough or never had the time to explore it, I'll first give a concise introduction to the astrological practice, the astrological language and the issue of the precession of the equinoxes.

1.2 The Four Branches of Astrology

Astrology has been practiced since ancient times in various cultures around the world. In general it can be defined as:

The study of the correlation between the movements of celestial bodies and earthly events.

Modern Western astrology has its roots in Hellenistic astrology. Historians tend to say that the Hellenistic period started with the death of Alexander the Great in 323 BCE and ended with the death of Cleopatra VII and the Roman conquest of Egypt in 30 BCE. It is characterized by the spread of Greek philosophy, science and language across the ancient world. During this time, the city of Alexandria in Egypt flourished as a financial, cultural and intellectual center. Alexandria was also the place where the tradition of Hellenistic astrology was founded around the late second or early first century BCE. Hellenistic astrology merged and further developed the older Mesopotamian and Egyptian astrology traditions and was practiced until the seventh century CE. In his book *Hellenistic Astrology*, the American astrologer Chris Brennan describes the four branches in the Hellenistic astrology practice:

- Universal astrology, currently known as mundane astrology, was the original type of practice in the Mesopotamian tradition. It was adopted and further developed by the Hellenistic astrologers within the framework they created from blending the Mesopotamian and Egyptian practices. In this branch the correlation between the heavens and larger earthly phenomena like countries and cities, the weather and natural disasters were analyzed.
- The most important branch was natal astrology, which was also founded in the Mesopotamian tradition and further developed in the Hellenistic period. Natal astrology involved creating a birth chart indicating where the celestial bodies were at the moment of birth of an individual. The first surviving birth charts date from the first century BCE. These charts were used to determine the nature and course of the