

The Predictive Impact of Cycles on Psychological Development

by Gary Caton

Following the psychological developmental cycle as described by psychologist Erik Erikson, Gary Caton correlates the predictable synchronicity of the naturally occurring planetary cycles, and the significance of this awareness for any counseling astrologer.

At its most fundamental level, to me, astrology has little to do with stars or signs, but rather what I call the *primal cycle*. All the basic cycles (day, month and year) are based upon primal alternations of light and dark. If I had to reduce the wisdom of astrology into one word or symbol, it would be the yin-yang. This ancient Taoist symbol not only perfectly illustrates in graphic form the most basic energies of astrology, but can also serve as a powerful predictive tool.

This symbol of eternal change reminds me of a quote from Dane Rudhyar, “*The Zodiac which is used in our astrology has very little, if anything at all, to do with distant stars as entities in themselves . . . The essential thing about the Zodiac is not the hieroglyphs drawn on celestial maps . . . it is the human experience of change.*”¹ This, to me, is the true purpose of astrology—understanding the human experience through the wisdom of cycles—Rudhyar’s “*aeonic consciousness.*”² As humans the need to anticipate the future is hard-wired into our very being. The prime directive of *Star Trek* is really not that far-fetched as evolution has turned us all into seekers.^{2a}

Daniel Quinn, the author of the book, *Ishmael*, reminds us that we became human by becoming hunters.³ Having evolved as hunters, humans have an ingrained need to track—to predict the future. In fact, a recent scientific study indicated humans are indeed veritable predicting machines. With only a single event to judge by, most people were able to predict

outcomes—apparently unconsciously using a variety of complex probability distributions.⁴ This need is so ingrained that we extended it from tracking game to tracking weather and seasons when we became agriculturalists. Enter the zodiac and the calendar and the need evolved into celestial omens for the king and kingdom. From there we used astrology to track war, and commerce, eventually extending to the individual where we would track one’s supposed *fate*. Modern psychological astrology has sought to unite inner experience with outer experience and thereby on some levels, replaced fate with personal empowerment.

Although astrology is our *tool*, our language, our system, our *service* is counseling and life guidance. This is why I feel strongly that astrologers should focus on gaining counseling skill. At the heart of psychological awareness is the understanding of where the client is developmentally. As astrologers we can couple this with transiting bodies and their cycles; we know that the needs, wants and awareness of a client near a second Jupiter return are often vastly different than when near a Saturn return or the Uranus opposition at mid-life. Thus, we can *predict* or anticipate information that tends to be conveyed in consultation, simply by paying attention to the emerging cycle of development that exists within the client.

Psychologist George Kelly theorized that a person’s psychological processes are channeled by the way that one anticipates events. He believed that we use mental constructs as templates to anticipate events and when we can’t predict or have an effect on the future, anxiety results. The answer is to adjust our templates to consider new information as a constant process.⁵ From an astrological context, we can liken Kelly’s mentally constructed templates to signs and planets and the constant process to transiting bodies and their cycles.

In both cases, psychologically and astrologically, problems arise when these templates become impermeable—unable to accept or consider new information. The danger is that chronic anxiety might lead to depression or even psychosis, that could developmentally paralyze the self. Often the information needed is a re-programming of negative beliefs held from being frustrated developmentally—beliefs that can be understood as personal scripts or narratives that are enacted again and again. All the world is indeed a stage, and the personal drama can be disabling or even destructive—particularly as a product of unconscious acceptance of roles forced by culture or authority figures. As astrologer-consultants, we can listen for negative scripts and ask the client to help identify from whence they came. Once identified, we can more readily see the chart signatures at work and offer alternative stories from archetypes for the client to explore and perhaps use to replace the outworn or maladapted story.

By understanding where the client could be developmentally, we can listen for the appropriate stories or scripts, as well as those that might represent deeper issues from a previous stage—*what was happening at this or that time and how did you feel about it?* In this way, we help to explore potentials that the client may have missed, ignored, or under-analyzed. Just as we need a theoretical orientation to deal with clients psychological processes, we need a framework to understand them developmentally. I tend to agree with models such as that put forth by Bruce Scofield,⁶ which tie human development to the planetary cycles—what I call the *Seasons of Becoming*.

I try to identify the client's *Season of Becoming* and emerging developmental needs behind the presenting problem for the client. Erik Erikson is the psychologist that I feel most closely correlates to this type of thinking. Erikson saw development occurring as a series of crises, with the outcome dependant upon whether the developmental needs were either mostly met or unmet.⁷ I find developmental difficulties and unmet needs can often be symbolized by hard angles, the semi-square, square, opposition, sesqui-quadrate and conjunction to personal planets (Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars) from social (Jupiter and Saturn) or outer planets (Uranus, Neptune and Pluto). This is because the social planets represent meta-narratives—or established *cultural* stories or scripts that are passed down by family, peers and authority figures. There is huge pressure to conform. If we are unwilling or unable to personalize these scripts, we experience a crisis.⁸ The invisible outer planets represent the collective unconscious—or newly emerging meta-narratives. When a person has an outer planet in hard angle to a personal planet, it usually means that they are a conduit for a new expression of an emerging meta-narrative, meaning that rejection will come from the status quo.

At birth, the human personality is lunar—reflective and dependant. The infant is unaware of anything but its own needs and inability to satisfy them. The Moon symbolizes needs, dependency and emotional security. We experience 13 lunar returns before any other planet makes a return. Thus the first year is symbolized by the Moon. Similarly, Erikson saw the first year as critical to developing a sense of either basic “*Trust versus Mistrust*.”⁹ Hard angles to the Moon from social and/or outer planets can signify difficulty. Although trust is such a fundamental that when damaged may take a long time to mend, just knowing that trust is an underlying factor may be all that the client needs so as to free up developmental energy.

At one year, a developmental barrage begins to take place. The personality becomes self-aware as an individual identity. Attempts at communication and locomotion begin. One begins to relate to others in greeting-farewell and play begins to form. Not surprisingly, this correlates to the return of the Sun, Mercury, and Venus to their natal positions. The Sun symbolizes the autonomous self. Mercury rules language and locomotion. Venus symbolizes the need to relate. Similarly, Erikson saw the period between the first and second years as crucial to forming a sense of “*Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt*.”¹⁰ Hard angles to the Sun, Mercury, or Venus from social and/or outer planets and/or *retrogression* (by the planet or a planet to which it is in angle) can signify developmental difficulty. Self-esteem, like trust, is fundamental and will take time to address more positively; however, again, simple awareness that self-esteem is the underlying factor can free up developmental energy.

At two years, Mars—the ancient God of War returns. No wonder this is called the terrible two's! The personality is consumed with self-reliance, the right to say *no!* Mars symbolizes energy, action, and assertiveness. Similarly, Erikson saw this stage as a time to develop a sense of “*Initiative versus Guilt*.”¹¹ Hard angles to Mars from social or outer planets or *retrogression* can correlate to difficulty. Feelings of guilt are often behind the failure to take initiative.

The next planetary return does not occur until Jupiter completes a 12-year cycle. Does this mean that the astrologer must assume no development takes place between two and 12? Hardly! The recent promotion of Ceres to dwarf planet status has a lot to say in terms of development. Ceres returns at five years, the age we enter school and the beginning of formal socialization. However, unlike junior high where we change classes and adopt personalized schedules, the elementary school environment is more like the family unit. Thus Ceres, the *Great Mother*, has to do with *intra*-group socialization, whereas Jupiter has to do with *inter*-group socialization.

We must remember that each cycle can be divided quarterly. For example, Jupiter's 12-year cycle takes place in four, three-year quarters, with the return (new) and opposition (full) phases taking on special importance. So the period between three and six years of age correlate to the *waxing* phase toward the *full* phase and functioning of the Jupiter principle. Whereas Mars represents only a call to action, Jupiter as the expansion principle represents the achievement of that action's goal. Larger than all other planetary bodies combined, radiating its own energy, and having many moons, Jupiter symbolizes all kinds of systems: languages, schools, knowledge, theories, etc. These years can be seen as the beginning of socialization. Similarly, the early school years were seen by Erikson as necessary to experience feelings of success and competence. In contrast, if these experiences are limited either by authority figures or circumstance, the resulting failures can lead to feelings of inadequacy. Erikson called this "*Industry versus Inferiority*."¹² Ceres or Jupiter in hard angle from social or outer planets or retrograde can correlate difficulty. Typically, the resulting negative scripts are a form of *I can't*—which may harden into *I won't*. The task is to help build confidence by identifying strengths and successes to help the client answer the hero's call to adventure.¹³

Jupiter's return roughly coincides with the onset of puberty, expansion as the physical body develops secondary sexual characteristics and hormones run wild. Although this necessitates an expanded world-view, including the opposite sex and a desire for intimacy, the process unfolds in fits and starts because of the overlapping of contrary developmental principles; it is often not until the second Jupiter return at 24 that we are truly able to develop lasting intimacy.

Saturn, makes a return around 29 years and its quarterly cycles occur roughly every seven years. The symbolic opposite of Jupiter, Saturn is the contraction principle and makes concrete Jupiter's expansions. Saturn's rings remind that one victory does not make a war; real success depends on repeated, sustained efforts. Also, they symbolize limits and authority figures who impose restrictions on over-expanded energies. Between age seven and 14 correlates to the waxing phase toward the full phase of the Saturnian principle. About age 14, children enter high school and are assumed capability of the self-discipline required to become a community member (albeit supervised). In the teen years, Erikson saw the struggle between "*Identity versus Role confusion*."¹⁴ Young people seek to find identity through groups, trying different jobs and friends, etc. If previous stages have been maneuvered successfully, chances are that they will settle into a role that they feel comfortable with. If not, the resulting role confusion can be disruptive during the opening square of Uranus at 21 with the restless and

often reckless energies that may be unleashed. Worse, it could threaten the eventual development of genuine intimacy in early adulthood. Hard angles to Jupiter or Saturn from outer planets and/or retrogression may spell difficulty. Typically, the negative scripts present questions such as *What is my purpose in life?* The objective is to help the client give themselves permission to pursue their true passion or *follow their bliss*.¹⁵

Erikson saw early adulthood as "*Intimacy versus Isolation*."¹⁶ A failure to develop intimacy may retard emotional growth and personal satisfaction as it is the basic struggle for all through the second Jupiter and first Saturn returns at 24 and 29. Thus we can define these cycles as Seasons of Becoming—becoming a fully functioning human being. Typically, negative scripts address: *When will I meet my soul mate?* The focus here is to help the client identify barriers to intimacy and new means of opening their lives to others.

The third Jupiter return at 36 often finds the individual again growing. There may be new family members – children or even grandchildren, and influence in affairs of the world. People, especially children, may respect and seek one's opinion. Erikson saw this stage as "*Generativity versus Stagnation*."¹⁷ We develop a concern for the next generation and find our lives enriched by our interactions. If we ignore or redirect these inner promptings, we may stagnate and suffer boredom or depression. This is where the individual responsibility to search for meaning is most crucial. If we do not find it, the resulting bad faith and angst can be disruptive at mid-life. Hard angles to Jupiter from Saturn or outer planets and/or retrogression can signify difficulties. Typically, the negative scripts are represented by *I hate my job-partner-life*. The resolving goal is to help the client identify gifts they have accrued or wish to, that can be passed on to others.

This is followed by the mid-life transits, the single most profound barrage in the course of any human lifetime: Pluto square Pluto; Neptune square Neptune; Saturn opposite Saturn and Uranus opposite Uranus—all descend in a matter of five to seven years. In a word, the point of the whole process is individuation.

For the Pluto-in-Virgo generation, Pluto square Pluto starts the process by having us examine where we have buried parts of ourselves to please others. Where we have swallowed whole the values of others, we fester psychologically, just as if a foreign object were introduced into our bodies. At roughly 42 years, Uranus opposes its natal place in full phase. Uranus is associated with freedom from the known. In individuals that have developed a sense of generativity, this may result in works where the *extraordinaire* is passed on. This liberating urge can be destructive in those who experience mid-life crisis as a *second adolescence* or

perhaps positive when resulting in a second career more in tune with inner promptings. The last stage of mid-life development is around the Chiron return at 51.

The second Saturn return of 58-60 coincides with the fifth Jupiter return. Life is winding down and approaching retirement years to reap the rewards of accumulated savings and time for reflection. Our life course is pretty well determined, and if we are lucky, we can be content. Erikson saw this stage as one of “*Integrity versus Despair*.”¹⁸ If we successfully completed most of the stages and can look back satisfied, we will have a sense of integrity. If we missed the mark too widely, we may experience despair. Typically, the negative scripts are regrets or feeling restless despite material comfort. The goal here is to help the client identify the developmental cycle that bothers and how it can be changed.

After approximately seven Jupiter cycles, and three Saturn cycles, if we have continued physical vitality with psychological integrity—we live to see our final cycle—the Uranus return at 84 years. Uranus represents true enlightenment and self-actualization—the sense that the whole of one’s life is more than the sum of its parts—and that it has all been worth it. An obvious twinkle is in the eyes of those who achieve this state and we would do well to seek *their* counsel. ♋

Endnotes:

- ¹ Rudhyar, Dane. *The Pulse of Life: New Dynamics in Astrology*. St. Paul MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1963, pp. 21-22.
- ² Rudhyar, Dane. *Culture, Crisis and Creativity*. 1977. Wheaton IL: Quest Books, 1977.
- ³ Quinn, Daniel. *Tales of Adam*. Steerforth Press, 2005, p. 16.
----- *Ishmael*. Bantam Books, 1992.
- ⁴ “Bayes Rules” *The Economist*, Jan 7-13, 2006.
- ⁵ Kelly, George. *The Psychology of Personal Constructs*. NY: Norton, 1965.
- ⁶ Scofield, Bruce. “Planetary Circuits: An Astro-Biological Model of Human Development,” *The Mountain Astrologer*, Issue #101, Feb-Mar, 2002.
- ⁷ Erikson, Erik. *Childhood and Society*. (2nd ed.) New York NY: Norton, 1963.
----- *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York NY: Norton, 1968.
- ⁸ Quinn, Daniel. *Beyond Civilization*. New York NY: Three Rivers Press, 1999; Quinn speaks of these as *memes*, the cultural equivalent of a gene and the way a culture replicates itself. A collection of memes is a meta-narrative and what Quinn calls “*how things came to be this way*” or “*Mother Culture*”—basically a creation myth.
- ⁹ Erikson, *Childhood and Society; Identity: Youth and Crisis*.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid*.
- ¹¹ *Ibid*
- ¹² *Ibid*
- ¹³ Campbell, Joseph. *Hero with a Thousand Faces*. NY: MJF Books, 1949.
- ¹⁴ Erikson, *Childhood and Society* and *Identity: Youth and Crisis*.
- ¹⁵ Campbell, Joseph. *The Power of Myth*. Doubleday, 1988.
- ¹⁶ Erikson, *Childhood and Society; Identity: Youth and Crisis*
- ¹⁷ *Ibid*
- ¹⁸ *Ibid*.

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