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Astrology and Wisdom

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Astrology and Wisdom

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Introduction

In more recent times the pursuit of wisdom as the prime objective of mainstream astrology has been abandoned. The majority of Western astrologers have given way to the pursuit of psychological analysis and introspection. This has taken astrology in the wrong direction and must be corrected.

The predominance of the consideration of idiosyncrasies of character, coupled with the belief that anyone who study's astrology can be a competent astrologer turns on its head the basic and ancient understandings of the Art of astrology. These understandings need to be re-established. For, astrology without doubt provides one of the missing links between the natural world which empirical science has made its province, and the spiritual world.

In a sister paper *The Occult Sciences*¹ I discussed the need for those exploring the natural world to refer to the spiritual. This is because it is becoming increasingly obvious that we cannot understand the natural world around us without reference to the spiritual.

Leading from this, this paper concentrates on the need for the modern day astrologer to realign him/herself back toward the prime object of astrological endeavour – the pursuit of wisdom and in doing so to bring astrological thinking and mainstream practice back on the right path.

¹ See www.new-library.com/zoller/features

The Pursuit of Wisdom

When in 12th century Europe Dominicus Gundassalinus, an Archdeacon of the city of Segovia (modern day Spain), translated the Islamic philosopher Alfarabi's little book *On the Rise of the Sciences* and incorporated its ideas into his own *De ortu scientiarum* (On the Birth of the Sciences) he was transferring to the Western Mind new ideas and a new learning that is still with us today. You see, our Archdeacon friend was one of many 12th century Christians who was then discovering the New Learning i.e. the wealth of scientific and philosophical lore cultivated in Moslem Spain, but up to then, unknown in the Christian West.²

Alfarabi was a Sufi. He like other great scholars such as Algazali,³ (a defender of Islamic orthodoxy) held the view that astrology was part of the natural sciences. But while the other natural sciences could be taught logically and apprehended rationally, astrology in common with alchemy and talismanic magic could not.

These three sciences had a special status. They were regarded as "non-disciplinary," i.e. they required special spiritual virtues and powers on the part of the student who wished to be learned in them and on the part of the operator for their effective and proper

² For more on the 12th century transmission of Arabic Science to the Christian West, see Charles Homer Haskins, *The Renaissance of the Twelfth Century*, Cambridge (Mass., USA), Harvard University Press, 1927. See also, Edward Grant, *The Foundations of Modern Science in the Middle Ages: their religious, institutional and intellectual contexts*, Cambridge (England), Cambridge University Press, 1996.

See also Zoller [*Arabic Astrology* , *Jewish Astrology* , *The Occult Sciences* and *Hermetic Tradition* link to articles]

³ *Algazel's Metaphysics*, Latin text edited by Muckle, St Michael's College, Toronto, Canada, 1933, p.4.

practice.⁴ Alfarabi says that these virtues and powers are like the virtue of interpreting employed in other divining arts (e.g. augury).

The ancient as well as the medieval philosophers made it clear that such interpretive virtue was not common. Not everyone has it in equal measure. It is a higher knowledge than the ordinary, worldly knowledge (or science), it is the fruit of *gnosis* or wisdom; and wisdom, the subject of this paper is a gift of the divine.

Seyyed Hosein Nasr⁵ tells us:

"In the Islamic World, the highest form of knowledge has never been any single science, or *scientia*, which remains at the discursive level, but the 'wisdom of the saints,' or *sapientia*, which ultimately means *gnosis*."⁶ All knowledge resides in its fullness in Allah because He is its source “.

Wisdom is not a word you hear much these days. Technology, which is the study of the means of doing things, has become the be all and end all of our mainstream culture. Wisdom, which has to do with Being, is largely ignored. It used to be valued more

⁴ Dominicus Gundissalinus *De divisione philosophiae* ed. Bauer, in *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters herausgegeben von Dr Clemens Baeumker*, Band IV, Heft 2-3, München 1903, p. 120: "Unde Alfarabius dicit, quod astronomia [sc. astrologia] est scientia de significacione stellarum, quid scilicet stelle significant de eo, quod futurum est, et de pluribus presentibus et de pluribus preteritis. Nec nominantur inter scientias disciplinales, sed inter virtutes et potencias, quibus potest homo iudicare de futuris, sicut est virtus interpretandi visiones et sicut est virtus augurandi in avibus et sterutacionibus et aliis huiusmodi."

⁵ Dr. Seyyed Hosein Nasr, formerly at George Washington University and Temple University, was an internationally recognized Iranian born scholar and authority on Islamic Studies. His early education was received in Tehran. He later studied at M.I.T. and Harvard.

⁶ *Science and Civilization in Islam*, The Islamic Texts Society, Cambridge, 1987 p. 337.

highly. We need only look at sacred texts such as the Bible to see this. In Proverbs 4:7 we read, "Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."

Still later this is reinforced by Proverbs 16:15, "How much better is it to get wisdom than gold! and to get understanding rather to be chosen than silver!" Indeed, two entire books of the Old Testament *Apocrypha* are devoted to wisdom: *The Book of the Wisdom of Solomon* and *Ecclesiasticus*.⁷ Both these books are found in the Latin Vulgate and were included in the original edition of the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible, after the Prophets, but were removed from later editions of the KJV.

What is the nature of this Wisdom?

*The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles*⁸ is a satisfactory beginning place. It defines wisdom as:

"1. The capacity for judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgement in the choice of means and ends; sometimes less strictly, sound as sense especially in practical affairs: opposed to *folly*. b. as one of the manifestations of the divine nature in Jesus Christ... also occasionally used of God...2, Knowledge (esp. of a high or abstruse kind), learning, erudition, philosophy, science. 3. Wise discourse or teaching."

Wisdom in Plato is the virtue which purges the soul from error (*Phaedo* 79.7); which converts her from darkness to light and enables her to behold true being (*Republic* 7.518); it is a gift of God of whom it is the peculiar attribute and prerogative (*Phaedr.* 278.D; *Republic* 7. 519 A; *Theatetus* 176).

⁷ Not to be confused with *Ecclesiastes*, another book in the Bible.

⁸ *The Oxford Universal Dictionary on Historical Principles*, revised and edited by C.T.Onions, 3rd ed. Oxford: 1955.

What does the Wise Man know?

Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, Book I.2:

"First, we assume that the wise man knows all so far as is possible, though he does not know anything in particular. Next, that he is wise who understands difficult matters.... Next, we assume that he who is more accurate and more able to teach the reasons *why* is the wiser in his particular science. Also, sciences that are cherished on their own account and in the interest of knowledge are esteemed closer to wisdom than those desired on account of their by-products. Finally, the more controlling science is closer to wisdom than the subservient; the wise man is a ruler".

In asserting that "the wise man knows all so far as is possible, though he does not know anything in particular" Aristotle acknowledges that science (knowledge) is of universals.

Likewise Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) in his *Critique of Pure Reason* asserts, "We do not and cannot know the Thing-in-Itself". This fundamental understanding underpins the reason why all effort to attain knowledge of the Self (which is an universal) that is based upon the study of one's psychological idiosyncrasies (that which makes one unique) are inevitable doomed to failure. And so it is that those who limit astrology to a form of psychological analysis promote the causes and the consequences of this failure.

Hermes Trismegistus describes Wisdom in both the *Corpus Hermeticum*⁹ and especially in *Libellus I* of the where Mind instructs Hermes regarding Cosmogogenesis and Anthropogenesis, gives us a description of Hermetic Meditation and describes the Ascension of the Soul to the Ogdoad; *Libellus IV (The Basin)* raises the question of the Hermetic Rebirth; *Libellus X (The Key)*, elaborates on the Hermetic Meditation and Rebirth and *Libellus XIII* discusses Rebirth at length, calling Wisdom "conceived in silence" the "womb" of the Rebirth. The "Will of God" is represented as the begetter of the Rebirth and a "man of God

⁹ See The Hermetic Tradition and Hermeticism as Science – www.new-library.com/zoller/features

working in subordination to God's Will" is said to be the "ministrant." A man who is thus reborn is a god and a Son of God. He *is the All* and *is in all* for he is incorporeal and partakes of the intelligible substances. He is wholly composed of the Powers of God.

These ten powers of God chase out the twelve irrational torments of matter. The above text also examines the creation of the incorruptible body, which again sheds more light on the distinctions we are exploring.

It is worth looking further at what others have had to say on the subject.

Etienne Gilson, in his *The Spirit of the Middle Ages*, quotes Thomas Aquinas "That to be wise is to know yourself and to know God". He constantly points to *Exodus* 3: "I AM THAT I AM," as the key reality underlying both. We are an actuality - it is not the concept of being which is important, but the actuality of being. In God, *to be* and *to exist* are united. All created things receive their being from God - that is their actual being - as matter (body) and form (soul).

Robert Fludd, the 17th century Rosicrucian, tells us¹⁰

"As for man, there is such a supereminent (sic) and wonderful treasure hidden in him that wise men have esteemed that the perfect wisdom of this world consisteth in knowledge of a man's Self, namely to find out that secret mystery which doth lurk within him. For man is said to be the centre of every creature and for that cause he is called *Microcosmos, centrum et miraculum mundi*, containing in himself the properties of all creatures, as well celestial as terrestrial."

¹⁰ *Historia Microcosmi*, lib iii, cap 9 Oppenheim, 1619

John Pordage (1608-1698), the English theosophist, tells us that Wisdom is achieved by an inner alchemy,¹¹ the successful attainment of which is that:

"The soul {which has attained Wisdom} is now an enduring seraphimic Angel, and may make itself into a physician, theologian, astrologer, into a holy Magus; it may also make what it will; it may do and have what it will; because all qualities have only one will in unity and harmony. And the same one will is God's own unmistaking (sic) will: and now is the holy man in his nature become one with God."

Pordage brings us back to astrology. Astrology is a part of Wisdom. In *The Wisdom of Solomon*, chapter seven, verses 17-19, Solomon says:

"For He, {God} hath given me certain knowledge of the things which are, namely to know how the world was made, and the operation of the elements: the beginning, ending and midst of the times: the alterations and turning of the Sun, and the change of the seasons: the circuits of years, and the position of stars."

Wisdom is at the very foundation of the world. We see her everywhere in Nature. Again, returning to a sacred text, in *Proverbs* chapter 9, verses 23-30, Wisdom herself says:

"I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were (sic) no depth, I was brought forth: when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled: before the hills, I was brought forth: while as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there. When he set a compass on the face of the depth. When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep. When he

¹¹ *Wisdom's Book*, by Arthur Versluis, St Paul, Minnesota, USA, Paragon House, p. 76.

gave to the sea his decree that the waters should not pass his commandment. When he appointed the foundations of the earth. I was by him, as one brought up with him: and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him."

For the astrologer these words and the fundamental understanding they are passing to each one of us become the more poignant as we read in tandem that it is the heavenly constellations and stars that convey the creative Word. Again referring to a sacred text that lies at the root of our civilisation, Psalm 19 verses 1-6 tells us:

"The heavens declare the glory of God: and the firmament showeth forth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech and night unto night showeth knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world: In them he hath set a tabernacle for the Sun ... His going forth is from the end of heaven, and his circuit unto the ends of it: and there is nothing hidden from its heat."

That is, the starry sky is like a tent against which the Sun's path (the ecliptic) is tracked. The Sun's (and the other planets') transit through the signs of the Zodiac give rise to a twelve-fold articulation of the universal I AM, thereby specifying ("making species") the forms of things. Thus the Ideas of things come forth as images, icons or forms which are subsequently clothed in matter by Nature. Due to the incapability of matter to perfectly and enduringly sustain celestial form, the things of the material world eventually relinquish their integrating forms, which return to their celestial source and ultimately their supercelestial origin in the Word, this progression and return being typified by a wheel.¹²

Perhaps it is because of this universal wheel-like progression and return that Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), the Teutonic Philosopher, tells us that we cannot understand the natural world without reference to the spiritual world. This understanding reiterates our central theme: the need to unite the two into a whole. Both as

¹² cf The **Book of Ezekiel** in the Old Testament.

astrologers and laymen alike, when we address this spiritual world it is not the details of prediction that we note (important as these may be for the practice of Judicial Astrology). Rather it is the principles, laws and beings of the supercelestial realm we attend to; in short to the Wisdom behind the celestial phenomena. And this must always remain our aim.

It is in the *being* aspect of this spiritual inquiry that we come in contact with modes of existence which defy definition and quantification; which are apprehended only as qualities or living intelligent beings, yet such beings are unified both with their source and with all other beings. "Through this study {of astrology}, indeed, we know and understand creatures beyond passion, unalterable and immutable, in another essence since they are supercelestial bodies." says Guido Bonatti the 13th century Italian astrologer in his *Liber astronomiae, Tractate One*¹³. Following Avicbron, we may approach this realm through meditation, introspection, and the certain knowledge that "That which is above is like that which is below".

Conclusion

Astrology without Wisdom is doomed to mere fortune telling or to narcissistic psychological obsession with one's idiosyncrasies. The way to Wisdom lies in the direction of the universal, not the particular. Wisdom is "The capacity for judging rightly in matters relating to life and conduct; soundness of judgement in the choice of means and ends" (vide supra).

This comes from Self Knowledge. If we know the principle from which we spring, we can know all things. Thus, Wisdom grants us the virtue of interpretation necessary for the perfect practice of astrology, as Pordage tells us.¹⁴ If we know our Self, we recognize it in others and act in a loving and compassionate manner to all.

¹³ See Bonatti at www.new-library.com/zoller/books

¹⁴ But cf gifts of the spirit in 1 **Corinthians** 12:8-10.

Wisdom provides the link to our Spiritual Source, so longed for by so many spiritually alienated Westerners and points to the Path of Return, known as Redemption in the Christian Tradition. Apart from Reason, there is in us a faculty whereby we may apprehend universals, *arches*, the transcendent root principles of things. And it is by this transcendental faculty that we may raise ourselves out of a constellational prison.

Wisdom, not psychology, enables us to do this. This is why it is essential that every astrologer seeks wisdom and urges his or her client to do the same.