

Learning to Honor all of the Gods: The Discipline of Archetypal Astrology as an Aid to Jungian Practice

by Matthew Stelzner

Archetypal Astrology as a discipline represents a very sophisticated avenue into the unconscious, and as such, can be considered one of the most helpful tools available both to Jungians and to their clients. In this sense it can be considered akin to dreamwork as a kind of “royal road” towards individuation and a balanced life. Jung seems to have made very extensive use of it himself, and it has been reported that at a certain point he had an astrological chart drawn up for many of his clients¹. In the sense that Jung considered the Anima and Animus archetypes the ultimate mediators of the unconscious, astrology can be considered an Anima/Animus discipline, and the practitioner who devotes herself to this art is likely to be richly rewarded.

The ten main planetary bodies of astrology (yes, astrologers still see Pluto as a planet in full standing) can be considered a map of wholeness, and their configurations in the birth chart can give a good sense for where you have the potential to be in balance, and where you have the potential to be out of balance. The chart can both reveal the archetypal complexes that are most likely to be dominant, and also point towards where there is potential for frustrated or repressed energy.

As an Archetypal Astrologer, I work with a very simple system, focusing almost exclusively on the geometry of the natal chart (the geometrical angles between the planets, as seen from the earth on the day you were born), and on transits (geometrically comparing the positions of the planets today—or at some other point in your life—to where the planets were when you were born). The geometry of the natal chart seems to represent your “permanent homework assignments” for this lifetime: the archetypal energies that you are most likely to be challenged to integrate, as well as the archetypes that are more likely to be easily owned in a balanced way. And then the long-lasting outer-planet transits seem to represent powerful rites of passage, and initiations into other archetypal energies: the periods of your life when you are most likely to be actively moving towards wholeness.

Each individual planet represents a particular archetype, with the Sun related to the Solar Hero principle, the Moon the Great Mother archetype, Saturn as Senex, Uranus as the Rebel archetype, Pluto the Shadow, and so forth. And each of these, as all Jungians understand, is a universal principal. Each and every one of us has access to the wisdom of Neptune (and her tran-

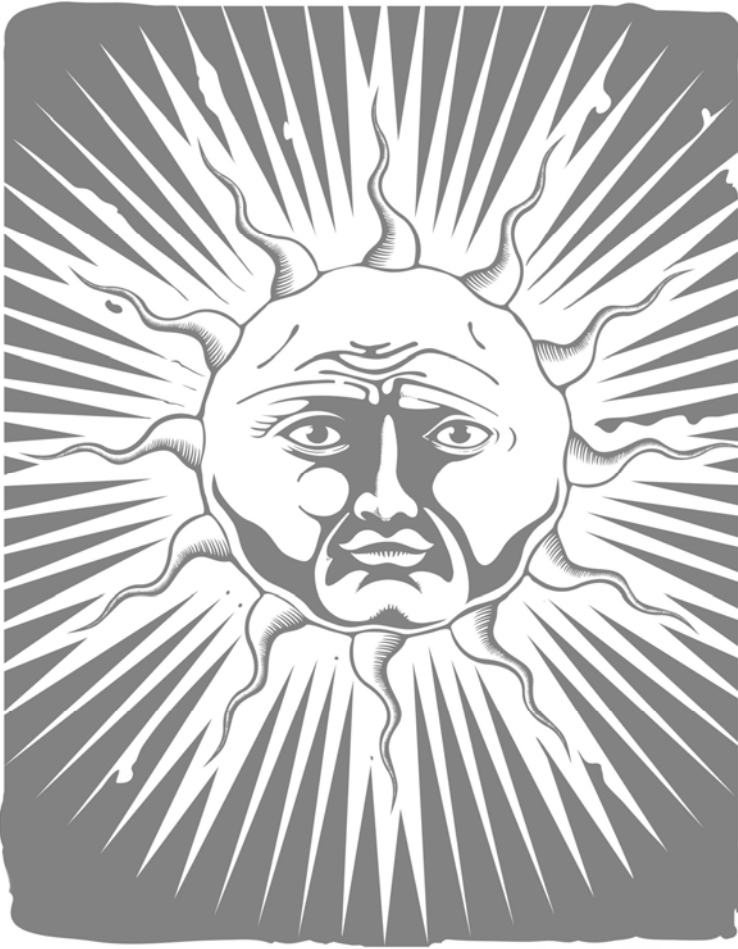
scendental knowledge), the wisdom of Mars (and his capacity for courage, confidence, and assertiveness), the gifts of Venus (capacity to appreciate and prioritize beauty, pleasure, and love), the gifts of Mercury (ability to communicate clearly and powerfully, capacity to practice “right speech,” ability to open to the love of learning), and the abundant treasures of Jupiter (capacity for hope, the ability to laugh, the impulse towards expanding your horizons).

The unique gift that astrology has to offer is as a precise tool for discerning which archetypes are most dominant or repressed, and when the greatest opportunities exist for integrating their highest potential (through transit analysis).

Just as Jungians understand that no one archetype exists on its own, that they exist in dialogue and communion with each other, so too as an archetypal astrologer I examine the relationships between the planets as represented by the geometrical angles they form with each other. To take just one example of this, let us consider someone who is born with the planet Mercury in an angular relationship to the planet Pluto. This would suggest a dynamic, and (depending on the nature of the angle) perhaps stressful relationship between the principle of communication (Mercury), and the principle that represents the shadow as well as intensity and empowerment (Pluto). With the Mercury-Pluto dyad there is both the dysfunctional potential for dark, obsessive (Pluto) thoughts (Mercury), as well as the noble potential for powerful communication abilities and deep, penetrating (Pluto) ideas (Mercury).

We see the Mercury-Pluto archetype at work in the chart of former congressman Anthony Weiner, who was born with these two planets next to each other (in what astrologers call a conjunction). We can see in this case how these two planets combining in Weiner’s chart could be archetypally related to the recent scandal that he has been involved with. Pluto is said to rule the underworld and the shadow, the taboo, the shameful, the whole area of our animal sexuality, and it is also known as the “Destroyer Archetype.” And Mercury is said to rule the whole area of communication (from telephones to tweets). Thus the Mercury-Pluto combination is associated with the power of words/communication to be destructive, and in this case it was Weiner’s unconscious use of communications technology (Twitter) that destroyed his career.

Another more positive example of someone who is born



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with the Mercury-Pluto combination prominent in her chart is Dr. Ruth Westheimer, who is born with a 90 degree square aspect between these two planets. Here is another person who is also famous for communicating openly and proudly about the male member, but with a very different moral vector. Westheimer is famous for promoting what she calls “sexual literacy.” She is a sex educator and a sex researcher, and all of this is related to the Mercury-Pluto archetype. She is a powerful (Pluto) communicator and teacher (Mercury) of helpful encouraging information (Mercury) about human sexuality (Pluto).

A third example that gives an entirely different understanding and insight into the Mercury-Pluto archetype is the recent Oscar-winning film *The King's Speech*. If we look at the chart for King George VI, who the film is about, we find that he was born with Mercury in a 180 degree opposition to Pluto, and the film beautifully conveys a typical journey that a Mercury-Pluto person might go on. I often call the Mercury-Pluto combination the “Finding Your Voice” archetype, and I cannot think of a more vivid example than this film. Colin Firth plays the king, and throughout the film we see him engaged in what appears to be a life and death struggle (Pluto is the energy associated with the struggle to survive; it is connected to the Darwinian idea of “survival of the fittest”) with a crippling stammer. His being born into the royal family is a particularly cruel fate, because duty often demands that he give public speeches. As it becomes clear that he must take on the responsibility of becoming king his burden becomes exponentially more difficult. He engages the services of a speech therapist, and the drama of the film plays out as the therapist struggles to assist

the king in overcoming his stammer.

Mercury-Pluto at the positive end of the spectrum is the “Powerful Communicator” archetype, and you often see it in great public speakers (like Winston Churchill, who was also born with the opposition). At its best, Pluto brings empowerment and a capacity to tap into forces of nature, and with Mercury, it can empower the voice. Thus we see King George’s journey from the shadow side of the archetype at the beginning of the film to the most positive form of the archetype at the end.

Not everyone is born with the Mercury-Pluto combination prominent in their chart, but it is a universal archetype, and therefore we all ultimately have access to both its gifts and challenges. Everyone gets transits of Mercury to Pluto several times a year, and most people will get at least one long transit of Pluto to their natal Mercury in the course of an average lifetime. And thus we all are initiated at some point into both the painful shadow potentials of this archetype, as well as the noble gifts of its positive integration.

And this is true for all of the astrological archetypes. We are not born with all of them prominently placed in our birth charts, but we will, in the average lifetime, get every combination by transit at least once. And these are the times when we are visited by these gods, challenged by them to overcome their shadow potentials, but also called towards integration of their highest wisdom. With each transit we have the opportunity to move towards wholeness, and consciously own the gifts of that energy for the rest of our lives.

But this is true even when we have neither the natal configuration, nor the transit. Through the disciplined practice of archetypal astrology we all have the ability to learn the positive potentials, as well as the pitfalls, of all of the archetypes (through studying the lives and charts of both our friends, lovers and family members, as well as the lives and charts of famous figures: artists, musicians, filmmakers). Through this discipline we can start to discern how all of the archetypal energies are at work in our lives, and we can start to grasp the wisdom they all contain, and how that wisdom can be applied to our own lives. At this point we can begin to practice a form of magic, where we can invoke the aid of all the gods and goddesses (in mutually enhancing dialogue with each other) as we engage in any of life’s challenges and joys.

The Jungian concept of the archetypal possession state is illuminated by the practice of astrology. Through a mindful engagement with your own chart and transits, and through a deep understanding of the full spectrum of possibilities that exist for each archetypal combination (from the shadow end of the spectrum to the wisdom end), it becomes possible to discern with greater precision and clarity at what times one is over-dominated (possessed) by a particular archetype, and when, therefore, one needs to consciously evoke the balancing aid and wisdom of the other archetypes. Jungians are clearly already deeply engaged in this alchemical process, both with themselves and with their clients, but with the aid of an archetypal astrology this process can be both accelerated and deepened.

Note 1: Richard Tarnas discusses this point in his book *Cosmos and Psyche* (Viking Press, 2006). See p. 62, and the note on p. 500.