

Everlasting Concrescence

A Process-Relational Cosmology

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Substantial evidence has been put forward for the astrological perspective, demonstrating the multifaceted ways in which astrology works. Yet below the surface of this evidence lies another question: *why* does astrology work? What does the recognition of this highly precise, yet poetically subtle, correspondence between planetary movements and events on Earth indicate about the nature of the cosmos? The evidence for planetary correlations with human affairs can, in many ways, address the alienation from the rest of the cosmos felt by the human being in late modernity. Through the recognition of such symbolic patterns, we can feel the deep interconnection that has always been present between us and our world. We are our world. The cosmic web has not been cut, although part of our human journey has been to feel as though the threads of our existence have been severed.

In 1983 a conference was held at Claremont University, organized primarily by Catherine Keller and David Ray Griffin. The conference was called Archetypal Process, and sought to bring into dialogue the process philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and the archetypal psychology of Carl Gustav Jung and James Hillman. As Griffin observes, process philosophy and archetypal psychology are both postmodern movements, but postmodern in a different sense from the “relativistic, nihilistic, deconstructive postmodernism” that might better be called “*ultramodernism*, or *mostmodernism*.”¹ Process philosophy and archetypal psychology, in Griffin’s words, are examples of “a constructive, reconstructive, or revisionary postmodernism, in which many of the presuppositions of modernity are challenged and revised.”² They are postmodern movements that “both want to return soul and divinity to the world.”³ In his talk at the conference, James Hillman spoke of the need for a metaphysics that could support archetypal psychology. Hillman had abandoned Jung’s metaphysics in order to save his psychology. Yet this was not enough. Metaphysics is always operative, whether one acknowledges it or not. What Hillman sought was a metaphysics of praxis, a metaphysics that supported the practice of psychology, the practice of soul-making—an alchemical metaphysics. Whitehead can provide such a metaphysics, a cosmology in which soul can do its work.

Hillman focused particularly in his talk on the word *cosmology*: it both “refers to the astronomical order of the heavenly bodies, and it also has a metaphysical meaning, according to Whitehead’s *Process and Reality*.”⁴ As Whitehead says, cosmology is a scheme “of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”⁵ What if we do as Hillman

suggested, and “keep together the two meanings, astronomical and metaphysical?”⁶ Hillman elaborates on what it would mean to maintain the unity of the two meanings of the word cosmology:

Let us say that the astronomical bodies (the planets) offer metaphysical bodies (the Gods [or one might say the archetypes]) by means of whom every element of experience can be interpreted. What is beyond in both meanings are the heavenly bodies. These afford some nouns and adjectives, some processes and some realities. The planetary persons fill the void of the beyond with the myths of their bodies and the bodies of their myths. This cosmology is a psychological field—a *field* because metaphysics is placed in imaginal locations; *psychological* because the planets are persons with traits, with behaviors, and in relation with one another.⁷

Hillman is offering here a vision of an archetypal cosmology, an archetypally patterned, astronomically grounded cosmology. In other words, Hillman is making the radical proposal that astrology can be the foundation for a metaphysics of practice. Astrology is a continuously ongoing, universally visible form of synchronicity, what Jung describes as a meaningful coincidence between an inner event and an outer event. Archetypal astrology is an empirically based, yet mythopoetically informed, practice—tracking the ongoing archetypal interconnection between psyche and cosmos, microcosm and macrocosm. But what is the philosophical basis for such a metaphysics of practice? To return to the opening question of this essay: why does astrology work? In dialogue with this question, Whitehead’s process philosophy can, perhaps, offer a metaphysical foundation.

Before moving forward, I wish to say a word on the nature of archetypes. Perhaps this can best be conveyed by Jung himself, the great diviner of the archetypal patterning of the human psyche:

A kind of fluid interpenetration belongs to the very nature of all archetypes. They can only be roughly circumscribed at best. Their living meaning comes out more from their presentation as a whole than from a single formulation. Every attempt to focus them more sharply is immediately punished by the intangible core of meaning losing its luminosity. No archetype can be reduced to a simple formula. It is a vessel which we can never empty, and never fill. It has a potential existence only, and when it takes shape in matter it is no longer what it was. It persists throughout the ages and requires interpreting ever anew. The archetypes are the imperishable elements of the unconscious, but they change their shape continually.⁸

As this passage from Jung illustrates, it is the very nature of the archetypes not to be fully definable and describable, without misrepresenting and dulling their divine luminosity. Thus, I want to acknowledge the impossibility of capturing archetypal presence in a single metaphysical system that explains in totality how they operate in the world.

In his introduction to the book that emerged from the Archetypal Process conference, Griffin draws a parallel between Jung’s concept of archetypes and Whitehead’s concept of eternal objects, each being part of an explanation of formal causation. For Whitehead, an eternal object is “any entity whose conceptual recognition does not involve a necessary reference to any definite actual

entities of the temporal world.”⁹ An eternal object is a potentiality relevant to some actual occasion, a possibility not yet defined by actuality. Eternal objects are like Platonic Forms in that they are real apart from any of their particular expressions, but unlike Plato’s Forms, their reality is “deficient in actuality,” according to Whitehead.¹⁰ Because of this deficiency, eternal objects long to enter into actuality, to ingress into actual occasions. All the ways in which we describe this world—the adjectives—these are the eternal objects: the colors, shapes, feelings, smells, tastes, qualities. We come to understand archetypes through such qualities, but archetypes are the unifying fields or gravitational attractors that draw together a complex array of eternal objects into singular, though always fluid, form.

The philosopher and archetypal cosmologist Grant Maxwell has also written about the relation between Whitehead’s eternal objects and Jung’s archetypes. He posits that planetary archetypes and eternal objects are both examples of formal causation, a mode of causality forbidden by modern materialism. He also suggests they should not be directly equated, with which I agree. I would speculate that planetary archetypes include both the potentiality of Whitehead’s eternal objects and the incarnate experience of actual occasions. Archetypes are not just eternal objects or potentials, because they seem to have more agency and autonomy than Whitehead grants to eternal objects. Archetypes are complex personalities, “persons” even to use Hillman’s language, yet there is a metaphorical unity to their complexity. “All ways of speaking of archetypes,” Hillman writes, “are translations from one metaphor to another.”¹¹

To explore metaphor more deeply, we can make a slight turn toward Owen Barfield, the anthroposophically informed philosopher who wrote such works as *Saving the Appearances* and *Poetic Diction*. Barfield posits an understanding of the evolution of consciousness in which the physical and psychical, material and spiritual, bodily and ensouled qualities of all entities in the world were once unified in the experience of ancient human consciousness.¹² Only over the slow course of history have these concepts been separated from each other—subjective from objective—so that even now my language describing this concept inherently reflects this split. I must speak of object *and* subject, body *and* spirit. Barfield uses the following example to illustrate this split in our language: when we translate the Latin word *spiritus* into English, *spiritus* can mean “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit” depending on the context.¹³ Yet for the ancient speakers of the word *spiritus* it meant all three of these words, and perhaps more, all at once—they were a unified whole in which the physical is utterly indistinguishable from its psychical, ensouled presence.

Yet these words are inherently related to one another at their source. They are examples of “true metaphor” in Barfield’s understanding.¹⁴ The way certain eternal objects complexify and ingress as archetypal beings is an example of such “true metaphor.” As Hillman says: “All ways of speaking of archetypes are translations from one metaphor to another.”¹⁵ The infinite array of eternal objects that express the qualities of Saturn, or Venus, or Neptune, or any of the other planetary archetypes, are metaphorically related to one another, a relation that was much more apparent to ancient consciousness than to modern consciousness. This is how the ancients knew what names to give the planets, which physical planets belonged to which gods, because the meaning of the celestial bodies was directly apparent to them. The world has changed because we have changed in our participation with it. Yet it still continues to change. The music of the spheres may have been silent for many in late modernity, yet now, at this pivotal moment, we are beginning to relearn the score.

For Whitehead the source of all things is creativity. Creativity is primary. Creativity is the realm of pure potential, of chaos. Griffin has referred to Whitehead's philosophy as "process theology," "especially when the chief focus is on God and other questions of 'ultimate concern' (Paul Tillich), such as ultimate origin, order, value, and meaning."¹⁶ In Whitehead's scheme, God is not the ultimate, creativity is. God is that which orders the chaos of pure potentiality into the hierarchy of eternal objects—and, I would posit, into the archetypes. God takes chaos and turns it into cosmos, but God is born of that chaos. God is the first concrescence, an everlasting concrescence, the first experiential achievement of chaos becoming cosmos.

An image I find compelling to illustrate this—chaos becoming cosmos—is that of a prism refracting white light into an iridescent rainbow. The white light is that realm of pure potentiality, chaotic creativity. In Whitehead's scheme the prism itself is God, that which refracts the indefinite into the definite, that differentiates pure light into the colors of the rainbow. Each color is an archetype—red clearly different from blue, yellow distinct from purple. But within the band of light that is each color an infinity of shades is at play. Every shade of green could be seen as every possible eternal object that could ingress as an expression of Venus, or every shade of blue the endless possibilities of Neptune. They are still the same light as the white light, but the prism—which could be identified with God—has ordered them into colors.

What makes a rainbow so spectacular? Why do we stop to take note of them? Because we can *see* them. A rainbow makes light itself visible. The rainbow is a symbol of divine possibility entering into the world, yearning for our participation in its beauty.

The moment a child takes her first breath can be seen as the first concrescence of that child independently of the mother's body. The child herself is a society of actual occasions, each of which is also concrescing in this moment, making up the experience of the newborn. This moment, the first inhalation, is when the birth chart of an individual is set. The archetypal energies expressed throughout the rest of an individual's life reflect the planetary configurations, the archetypal relationships, or eternal potentialities, of this particular moment. At the time of birth all of the actual occasions that have ever been, that have perished into objective immortality to use Whitehead's term, become one—are prehended by the actual occasion that is the newborn child in that moment—before also perishing. Every archetypal expression that has ever manifested is gifted to the child. Yet the past actual occasions that are most felt by the concrescing actual occasion are those that are immediately prior. Thus the positions of the planets and their correlated archetypal energies, which are being enacted everywhere upon the Earth, are what is most immediately inherited by the child in her first moment of independence. As the child continues to live and grow, her subjectivity—the crest of her concrescing wave—continues to inherit the archetypally ordered actual occasions, as can be seen in the unfolding of astrological transits. Yet the birth chart is still effective, and can still be seen in the progression of the individual's life. How can this be so? How can a past actual occasion, from the moment of birth, be more archetypally influential than other past actual occasions?

Let us return to the image of God as an eternally concrescing actual occasion, never perishing but continuously feeling the procession of the cosmic community of finite actual occasions. Perhaps in this understanding of God we can glimpse what may be happening in relation to the actual occasion when the individual's birth chart is set. The actual occasion which concresced with the

child's first intake of air can also be seen as an everlasting concrescence, one that continues from that moment of independence onward. Each preceding concrescence takes place within the *gestalt* set by that first concrescence—which is how transits to the birth chart could be experienced by the individual. The birth chart is like the prism of that individual's life, refracting the archetypal potential into the archetypal particulars of this person. That moment when the birth chart is set concresces onward, even beyond the bodily death of the individual. One can see transits to the birth chart still being operative long after the person carrying that chart has died: for instance, when a renaissance of interest in someone's work occurs after their death.¹⁷

Like the dipolar nature of Whitehead's God, the archetypes too seem to have a primordial pole and a consequent pole. The primordial pole orders the realm of eternal objects so that they can ingress as relevant possibilities into the actual occasions of the cosmic community, while the consequent pole feels the experiences of this world community and continuously adjusts the ordering of the eternal objects. So too, I believe, it is with the archetypes. For as they ingress into living manifestation, we participate in their becoming, we co-creatively engage their archetypal qualities through our own lives. The archetypes also have a consequent nature, one that feels what we feel, and that forever reshapes the potentialities for the future ingression of the archetypes, in our own lives and in the lives of future generations. Our participation is enacting an evolution in the archetypes themselves.

We are being called upon to participate. By consciously engaging with the archetypes as we co-creatively manifest them, we are reshaping the potentialities with which they will manifest in the future. No future is yet set. But the past occasions that will inform it are here now. A rainbow makes white light visible. May we look forward with eyes open.

Notes

¹ David Ray Griffin, "Introduction," in *Archetypal Process: Self and Divine in Whitehead, Jung, and Hillman*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 6.

² Griffin, "Introduction," 6-7.

³ David Ray Griffin, "Preface," in *Archetypal Process: Self and Divine in Whitehead, Jung, and Hillman*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), vii.

⁴ James Hillman, "Back to Beyond: On Cosmology," in *Archetypal Process: Self and Divine in Whitehead, Jung, and Hillman*, ed. David Ray Griffin (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1989), 220.

⁵ Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality* (New York: The Free Press, 1985), 3.

⁶ Hillman, "Back to Beyond: On Cosmology," 220.

⁷ Hillman, "Back to Beyond: On Cosmology," 220.

⁸ Carl Gustav Jung, "The Psychology of the Child Archetype," in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, 2nd ed., vol. 9, part 1, *Collected Works of Carl Gustav Jung*, trans. R.F.C. Hull, ed. H. Read, M. Fordham, G. Adler, and W. McGuire, Bollingen Series XX (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 179.

⁹ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 44.

¹⁰ Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, 34.

¹¹ James Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1992), xix.

¹² Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction: A Study in Meaning* (Oxford, UK: Barfield Press, 2010), 71.

¹³ Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 73.

¹⁴ Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, 84.

¹⁵ Hillman, *Re-Visioning Psychology*, xix.

¹⁶ Griffin, "Introduction," 3.

¹⁷ As an example, at the time when this paper was presented at the conference on the philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead, Neptune in the sky was exactly crossing Whitehead's natal Mercury-Uranus square, bringing a revisioning and reimagining of world view, which relates to Neptune-Uranus, to Whitehead's ingenious philosophical system, which relates to Mercury-Uranus.

Birth Data and Sources

Alfred North Whitehead. February 15, 1861. Ramsgate, Kent, England. Source: Alfred North Whitehead, "Autobiographical Notes," in *The Philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead*, ed. Paul Arthur Schilpp (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1951), 3.

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