

Empathy and Zodiac:

A Critical Review & Recommendations

William Morris, PhD © February 11, 2018

This paper is a response to Glenn Perry's presentation called *The Two-Zodiac Problem Toward an Empathic Understanding* at the IVC India Conference in Kolkata, India, on February 2, 2018.

I will work through the document demonstrating problems inherent in various phases of Glenn Perry's thesis. Before continuing, however, I commend the author for the hard work he has conducted on the historical bases of the development of zodiacal systems and a very well-constructed, readable paper.

My general point of view affects what I believe to be true, and I, therefore, feel ethically and morally compelled to communicate my biases, which are inclusive, collaborative and participatory. They are in good part, siderealist, using the Lahiri ayanamsha. I use tropical for the benefit of the client and more importantly to employ 0 Point Aries in my deliberations. My truer bias is towards non-culturally and belief bound perspectives and therefore, judgments that are not dependent upon a zodiacal frame of reference as I present in part in my forthcoming book, *Cycles in Medical Astrology* [1].

The co-operative inquiry is a radical tool for wide-ranging inquiry that can be both informative about and transformative of any aspect of the human condition. All participants engage if possible. Further, the full range of human sensibilities - a transparent body-mind with an open and unbound awareness - is the instrument of inquiry [2].

Core problems of this paper are a lack of participation, and that it contains personal opinions as fact, which controverts evidence and critical thought values. Further, the author supports his opinion by dualisms and reductions. In this paper, I will make an argument for a transdisciplinary point of view which moves beyond such dualistic reductionism.

Perry claims that "Pisces is direct perception, or knowing by empathic connection with the thing known." And that, "Unless we can place ourselves in the mind-set of early humans ... our treatment of the problem is apt to be short-sighted, and that, we must utilize the gifts of Pisces: imagination, and empathy." To have empathy is to show an

understanding of others problems in a sympathetic manner. Contrarily, empathy in this paper is used as a heuristic for exploring a historical set of events. I appreciate this particular technical use of empathy in research. It is, however, idiosyncratic use of the term empathy, which the general population views as a component of emotional intelligence, and by which I was confused upon first encountering the paper.

As Dr. Perry says, “Mutual tolerance for both zodiacs may be a feel-good, politically correct position, but it is also an intellectually lazy one.” This claim can be true on occasion. From another point of view, the capacity to entertain both zodiacs may, in fact, require a higher level of intellectual discipline than dualisms and reductions require.

Dr. Perry opens his case with a biblical quote which embeds a presumed higher spiritual and moral authority.¹ Thus, bringing the ‘halo effect’ onto the topic, increasing influence, and reducing critical thought.

Then, that Elephant in the Room analogy, which was used to suggest that the practitioner gives no serious thought to the problem of the sidereal-tropical conundrum. Apparently, Dr. Perry is the only astrologer to give the problem such deep and rigorous thought, leading to his question, “can two zodiacs co-exist without contradiction—or, is one zodiac correct and the other wrong?” Either of these dualisms presents a reductive logic that divests of complexity.

Perry goes on to say that, “As we all know, astrology originated with the zodiac.” Perry controverts his position later in the paper when he cites Mesopotamian lore. But, is this true about the Zodiac? On what basis? I do not see it this way. Most likely, paleo-astronomy applied the Sun, seasons and lunar cycles. Note the Venus of Lussell with the 13 moon markings on her crescent.

Perry does rhetorically ask permission to make the zodiacal conundrum a Solomonic problem, due to “contradictory ways of defining the zodiac.” The question is: when and under what circumstances is a particular abstraction of the zodiac useful? His argument that “the two zodiacs is fundamental and irreconcilable,” is a frank expression of Aristotelian dualism from which humanity has evolved.

According to Perry, “The situation is not unlike the story from the Hebrew Bible in which two women living in the same house both claim to be mother of a child. It fell

¹ “And God said, “Let there be lights in the expanse of the sky to separate the day from the night, and let them serve as signs to mark seasons and days and years...” And it was so. ~Genesis 1:14-15

upon King Solomon to make a judgment as to who was the true mother." This is a false equivalence as there are two children in the argument, with astrology as the mother and two zodiacal systems as children [3]. This analogy has nothing to do with astrology other than the assertion of the author. At this point, we do not see evidence, but rather, hyperbole in an attempt to generate an emotional response to an argument.

Perry plunges the audience into materialistic dualisms from which philosophy and logics have evolved. Consider his statement that "Aristotle's law of non-contradiction states that contradictory statements cannot both be true in the same sense at the same time." This is presented as a rationale why "Two zodiacs that assign the same meanings to different dates and different meanings to the same dates are inherently contradictory."

Transdisciplinary philosopher of science and sociologist, Edgar Morin discusses the "consistent attempt to reduce complexity through maladaptive simplicity [that] is characteristic of the closed-mindedness of the authoritarian personality" [4, 5]. In this view practices such as the zodiacal frame of reference are subject to an "intolerance for ambiguity [that] manifests in the rejection of the unstructured..." [6 pp28].

Contrary to the assertions made by Glenn Perry regarding the primacy of a tropical zodiac, we can expand upon the current and dominant paradigm of Aristotelian-Newtonian-Cartesian views. Tools for such expansion are complexity and transdisciplinarity.

Transdisciplinary thought provides a mode of organizing knowledge that involves inquiry, the admitted involvement of the researcher in the process of inquiry, and an awareness of the degree to which the researcher constructs knowledge.

Roots of western thought rest in good part with Aristotelian logic which has three postulates.

1. the axiom of identity: A is A.
2. the axiom of non-contradiction: that which is not A cannot be A.
3. the axiom of the non-included middle, there exists no third term, T which is at the same time A and non-A.

Aristotelian logic has limits. Consider the transdisciplinary view that provides for a third term, T which includes both A and not A.

Theoretical physicist, Basarab Nicolescu², a thought leader in the transdisciplinary movement provides three axioms of the transdisciplinary method; they are as follows:

- The ontological axiom states that there are different levels of Reality of the Object and, correspondingly, different levels of Reality of the Subject.
- The logical axiom: The passage from one level of Reality to another is insured by the logic of the included middle (T).
- The epistemological axiom: The structure of the totality of levels of Reality is complex: every level is what it is because all the levels exist at the same time [7].

Reductionism is part of the gold standard for quantitative research, the randomized, double-blinded, placebo-controlled trial, where environmental complexities are limited with the intent of control that simplifies and clarifies the inquiry [8]. Physicist, Vandana Shiva who blew open the Monsanto biopiracy in India, has some thought on the objective, positivist bias:

Dominant scientific knowledge thus breeds a monoculture of the mind by making space for local alternatives to disappear, very much like monocultures of introduced plant varieties leading to the displacement and destruction of local diversity ... By elevating itself above society and other knowledge systems from the domain of reliable and systematic knowledge, the dominant system creates its exclusive monopoly" [9 pp12].

The practice of using the objective as an arbiter of truth propositions is the product of colonization with scientism as its tool [10]. Thus, a new perspective must emerge transcending reductive dualisms, that embrace paradox from a third place. This work allows the practitioner to meet better the needs of building a new body of evidence that is inclusive.

Perry does not think that "personal, subjective experiences can tell us which zodiac is correct." Neither can metaphor and hyperbole or historical reconstructivism, which forms the primary basis of Perry's argument. While it may be true that the subjective won't serve the inquiry, he presupposes that a single point of view is correct.

² Nicolescu is president and founder of the International Center for Transdisciplinary Research and Studies (CIRET) and co-founder of the Study Group on Transdisciplinarity at UNESCO.

The idea that “there are too many ways an astrological archetype can be represented in a chart” is more of an argument for ethical relativism and relevancy of various points of view on zodiacal systems rather than against it.

While the proposed inquiry is important, Perry is not the sole arbiter of what that question is for the field. “The entire two-zodiac controversy hinges on a single question... could the constellations have come into being without being anchored to the equinoctial and solstitial points?” Such a question can be built through collaborative inquiry.

Perry goes on to say:

By all accounts, Hellenistic astrology was transmitted to India in the 1st and 2nd century AD and quite possibly earlier. It seems that all academic scholars who have specialized in the origins of astrology—Otto Neugebauer, Bartel van der Waerden, and David Pingree among them—agree on this point: India inherited most of its astrology from the Greeks. I am aware this is a controversial statement, especially here, and I cannot personally attest to its truth. I am simply unaware of any evidence to the contrary. (Perry)

It is peculiar for an author to enter an argument to which he cannot attest. While factually correct, this is not a statement designed to further the argument, but rather, it seems as inflammatory non-sequitur. Perry’s tone continues, “Yet, the sidereal zodiac hangs on, a vestigial organ once relevant to our Babylonian ancestors but no longer in accord with our current understanding of the cosmos.” There is little to no evidence that a sidereal zodiac is vestigial given the number of practitioners who use sidereal based methods.

In Summary

Perry’s paper provided an interesting historical account of the zodiacal systems. And, while I agree with him that rigorous self-examination is necessary, the paper has, in general, demonstrated a low tolerance for complexity and ambiguity which are essential features of critical thought and professional judgment.

Pragmatism provides a counter to the totalizing solutions the Perry supports. This form of pragmatism is rooted in the thinking of Dewey, Peirce, James, Holmes and others. The pragmatists critically attack absolutism and its quest for certainty, seeking an open universe in which chance and contingency are irreducible.

A further question must arise at this point: what constitutes good evidence and how? My proposal for review and discussion is a transdisciplinary point of view that can embrace complexity at a reasonable level.

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