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Signs and Causes, Action and Freedom

Astrology is a failed science in the simple but inescapable sense that in the USA and in Europe, it is no longer taken seriously by scientists. Whether it is a *failure* and whether it is a *science* – now these are other questions.

The earliest astrologers were Babylonian court officials or scribes, and some of what they wrote suggests the modern world seen through a desert haze. There are causes and there are effects. Things happen as part of a regular pattern. The night sky is a great forward looking panorama.

But there is another note, a darker kind of music, in their runes or ruins. The night sky is the place where the gods reveal their will. The shadow on the moon, an eclipse, or a planet that rises and then abruptly reverses its direction – these are not so much causes chasing their effects as signs, inscriptions in a universal code. The world of material objects exists only to express this perpetual drama, the everlasting theater in which intelligence and intention give rise to change.

So, you see, the distinction was there from the first, a doubled impulse. The stars are causes *and* they are signs.

But if the stars are causes of human action, how do they achieve their effects across the vastness of space? And if they are signs revealing the future, how does intelligence impose its will upon matter?

These questions endure, an ever-present intellectual torment. The physical sciences have conquered time. They have penetrated the veil of the future. And they have domesticated, but not explained, action at a distance. But their conquest lies along an extraordinarily narrow dimension, and it is genuine only when material objects in ceaseless motion are under investigation.

In our ordinary lives we face the world that human beings have always faced, one in spirit with the astrologers. We plan, plot, scheme, and by a process we can barely describe, let alone explain, we, too, inscribe our will on matter. There is, perhaps, nothing god-like in this, but the mystery is the same.

The veil behind which we shelter and which hides the future from our eyes remains where it has always been, rent in part by the sciences, and rent in part by our desires. But rent in part and only partly rent.

The astrologers carried out a four-thousand-year-old conversation. They chattered, and, like us, they plotted and they schemed. Some were charlatans, others, men of great sensitivity and intelligence. They are now a part of the perpetual inventory of things carried in memory, but their questions, and their aspirations – these remain.

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