

## **“COUNSELS SECRET TO US”**

### **THE LIMITS OF ASTROLOGICAL PREDICTION**

1991

In an earlier essay I tried to talk a little about what must be the nature of the world in which we live and the scope of free will, if astrological prediction is possible.

That the future is predictable is of course an almost unquestioned fundamental assumption of astrology. Very few issues of any astrological magazine appear which do not contain at least one article which is concerned with the matter in some way. The most common of these involve the examination of some recent notable event in the life of a public person. The author will use various predictive techniques on the subject's birth chart, and by these be able to demonstrate a number of clear significators for the event. What has always worried me is that using the same techniques, the author or anyone else will be far less confident when trying to pin point significant yet-to-occur events in the life of that person.

Astrological prediction always seems to work better in retrospect than in prospect. Which - you must admit - is not good for prediction.

However the other aspect to this - as with the case of my “Lady in Tasmania” - is that there are a not insignificant number of occasions on which astrological prediction works with considerable accuracy, and in which the possibility of chance or coincidence is almost too remote to be considered. Why is it then that predictive techniques - all predictive techniques - seem to work on some occasions, but conspicuously not on others? Is there some wall, some barrier, that limits the astrologer's access to the future?

A chance introduction to the concept of Chaos Theory raised the concept of unpredictability even in a strictly defined mathematical process. With a little help from the *Articles of Religion* of the old Anglican *Book of Common Prayer*, the following essay came into being. It might be important, but I am not sure. You will need to think about it yourself.



#### Predictive Work

*When commissioned to do predictive work, the member will ensure that the client is aware of the distinction between the astrological event, which can be precisely calculated, and its interpretation which depends upon the judgement of the individual astrologer.*

*CODE OF ETHICS ; Federation of Australian*

*Astrologers*

In a previous essay I raised the issue of what sort of world we live in if it is possible for the astrologer to make predictions about some future course of events in a person's life, if these events concern things than an ordinary intelligent astrologer could not reasonably guess by knowing something of the circumstances and background of the individual involved.

A world in which the future is predictable is a world in which the future is predetermined, and this is a concept which generally does not sit easily with us. Most western people hold to the idea of human free will, with greater or lesser degrees of enthusiasm. We like to believe that we have the freedom to achieve the goals which we have set ourselves, and the idea that we have only the freedom to do what we are predestined to do is usually difficult for us to accept.

The argument has in fact raged throughout the history of Christianity. In the early centuries of the Church there stood on one hand the monk Pelagius who held that the human soul at birth was like a clean slate, and what was written upon it was the total responsibility of each person. On the other side stood Augustine who taught - in the words of the Anglican Prayer Book - "Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God whereby ..... he hath decreed .....to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen out of mankind." As Augustine is now Saint Augustine and Pelagius largely forgotten, obviously he won the argument, and the concept of a predestined universe also lies at the core of the western Christian tradition as much as it does in eastern religious thought.

However if one accepts the idea that the world is predestined in some way, one invariably then asks the question if whether what is predestined is also knowable. That is, are the events of our life predictable?

The Articles of the Anglican Prayer Book from which the above quotation came, rather suggests that they are not, because the full text goes like this: "Predestination to life is the everlasting purpose of God whereby he hath constantly decreed by his counsels secret to us to deliver from curse and damnation those whom he hath chosen in Christ our of mankind." That is, things are predestined and God knows what they are, but he is keeping it to himself.

Well, I guess that is one point of view.

The astrological point of view is however somewhat different, and rests I think upon some other suppositions.

The first of these is that the universe is indeed a universe, and that there is a natural relationship between all of its parts. The nature of these relationships is often very subtle, and the uncovering of them has really been the quest of all the sciences since the beginning of human thought. However if one understands some of these relationships then certain things are possible. For example, one may examine some particular circumstance at a distance (as it were) by examining the conditions of a different but related set of circumstances.

Things like palmistry, astrology, iridology are obvious examples, but so are such things as ultra-sonic scans, in which bodily functions or organs are examined at a

remove by examining the relationships that our squishy bits have to sound waves under certain conditions.

The second supposition - and the one which is of particular importance to astrologers - is that if the relationship is properly understood between two differing sets of circumstances (and that one can be sure of the way in which one of these sets of circumstances is going to change or develop in the future) then one may be able to make statements about the way that the other set of related circumstances will also develop. This of course is the basis of astrological prediction.

However these two suppositions also define the two great quests of astrology. Since the two related circumstances in this case are the human condition and the motion of the planets, the first quest has been that of determining planetary motion and position with greater and greater accuracy.

We tend to dismiss the heavenly structures proposed by Claudius Ptolemy - in which the Sun and planets revolve around a fixed earth in a series of small circular orbits which themselves rest upon larger circular orbits inside a crystalline sphere - as a rather primitive and unimaginative structure. This is especially so when we are reminded that in the 5th century BC Pythagoras expounded the concept of a Sun centred universe.

But we ought to remember that until Johannes Kepler in the 17th century (1,200 years later) rediscovered the Greek mathematical concept of the ellipse - and used it as a basis for predicting planetary orbits around the Sun - no mathematical system had even come near to the accuracy of Ptolemy's in predicting planetary position.

Now I think that probably even Ptolemy probably wasn't all that keen on the mechanics of his system, but just the same the maths were pretty good. By using his approach it was possible for a first rate astrologer to do some sums and to predict planetary positions with a degree of accuracy that most would find (for all practical purposes) to be entirely acceptable even today.

Now of course this first great astrological quest has been drawn to a conclusion, and our computers can provide us with future planetary positions with remarkable accuracy for any date we wish to choose. In practice this means that we know what the future conditions of one of our sets of circumstances will be with very great precision.

The other quest therefore is that one in which we seek to establish the nature of the relationships between these two sets of circumstances (that is, the planetary events and the human condition) with equal accuracy. Now if we are able to do this, then it would appear that we should then be able to open the door to the future and to see it with the same clarity, accuracy, and detail as we can any other event that now occurs before our eyes. That is the holy grail that seems to lie close to our grasp. A chalice which for so long has seemed to be oh so near, yet which for some curious reason (even after so many years of searching) still always remains just out of our reach.

I suppose what I really want to ask is this. Is this grail in fact attainable; or are there indeed in this oh so unspiritual world (as the old Payer Book would have it) “counsels secret to us.”

It is (I think) interesting to remind ourselves just how much this quest has determined the history of astrology itself. To a very large measure, its history is hung - as it were - on the names of those people who sought to take the process of advancing the relationship between our two sets of conditions one step further.

The astrology of the very ancient world was that of the omen aspects of planets, their associations with significant stars, and various lunar phenomena. The invention of the intellectual zodiac in about the 5th century BC gave an enormous impetus to the mathematical side of astrological practice. A horoscope could now be handled as a mathematical entity. The need for constant and tedious observation was greatly lessened, and the birth chart could yield to investigation in a manner - and with an accuracy - quite impossible prior to this

Sometime just before the Christian era a new concept was introduced by some adventurous thinkers. Petosiris of Egypt proposed in about 140 BC that it might be possible to have a supplementary division of the ecliptic - complementary to the twelve signs of the zodiac - but having as its reference point the degree of the Ascendant instead of the First Point of Aries. This secondary division (being “tied” to the terrestrial horizon) would offer particular information with regard to the mundane events of the life of the person represented in the horoscope.

This concept was eventually taken up and expounded with great ability by Claudius Ptolemy in the 2nd century AD in his great work *Tetrabiblos* - the “Four Books”. It is in the third of these that he describes in detail what we now term the Equal House System. By providing a whole new set of related circumstances, the concept of mundane houses offered a far more accurate tool for both delineation and prediction than an astrology based simply upon the zodiacal signs and planetary relationships.

A most significant step in the quest for predictive accuracy had been made.

The *Tetrabiblos* was translated into Arabic in the 8th century, at exactly the same time as notable advances in geometry and trigonometry were being made by Arabic mathematicians. *The Elements of Astrology* by Al Biruni of the 11th century describes all the techniques of Ptolemy, but as well adds to them the 28 lunar mansions and what we today call the “Arabic Parts”. These latter are essentially a series of mundane houses erected by dividing the ecliptic into 12 sectors and taking as their first point the degree of the Sun, Moon, or one of the Planets in turn.

Again it was an attempt to introduce increasing refinement in order to enable the astrologer to deal more specifically with certain relationships. In this sense it bears comparison to the concept of mid-points introduced this century by Reinhold Ebertin: not in their actual nature, but in the sense of multiplying the number of sensitive areas on a chart from which one may extract information. It is again a working out of the supposition that the more detail you can learn about a particular circumstance the more accurately you will be able to predict its development. The logic of the concept seems to be beyond reproach.

But let us retrace our steps a moment.

The Arab writers had a great influence upon Europe both in astrology and in mathematics. In the 13th century Johannes Campanus was Chaplain to Pope Urban IV. Somewhat after the time of Ptolemy an astrologer named Porphyry suggested that as the Ascendant and the Mid-heaven were significant parts of the mundane chart, it would be logical to create houses by dividing the ecliptic into three equal divisions between each of the four great angles.

The suggestion did not find favour, as the effect was to create “unequal” houses in space, which destroys the symmetry of the zodiacal concept.

Campanus realised that the impasse had come about by the confusion of two spherical geometrical systems. The ecliptic was associated with the apparent annual motion of the Sun about the earth. The four angles on the other hand, were related to the daily motion of the earth about its axis.

He therefore divided the celestial sphere into four quadrants which were determined by the plane of the equator and the plane vertical to it which passes through the West and East points and the Zenith and Nadir. This great vertical plane is called the Prime Vertical. Campanus then divided this equally into twelve sectors, and using the mathematical tools now available to him was able to calculate where these sectors would intersect the ecliptic for various latitudes. By this means he produced the Campanus House System.

It was an attempt to use the most up-to-date mathematical tools to refine - and presumably therefore increase the accuracy of - astrological technique.

Two centuries later the professor of astronomy and mathematics at the University of Vienna - Johannes Muller - refined Campanus' work. He argued that if the houses were related in fact to the earth's daily motion, it would be more logical to base their division upon the plane of the Sun's daily motion - that is, the celestial equator - rather than the intellectual concept of the Prime Vertical.

He therefore developed a house system based upon the equal division of the celestial equator into twelve equal sector, and printed tables of houses giving the degree of intersection of these divisions with the ecliptic. Muller wrote under a rather grandiose pen-name, and his work is today published as the Regiomontanus House System.

Once again we see this search for increased accuracy at work.

Let us mention just one more name. In seeking to walk this same road in search of the holy grail of ultimate accuracy, in the 17th century the monk Placidus de Tito abandoned the concept of the houses being equal divisions of space entirely. Instead he used the time taken by the Ascendant degree to reach the Mid-heaven.

Thus if 25° Scorpio is the Ascendant at 11 hours 13 minutes, and is the Mid-heaven at 15 hours 31 minutes, the time taken is 4 hours 18 minutes. Thus 25° Scorpio will be

on the cusps of Houses XI and XII at 1 hour 26 minutes intervals (1/3rd of 4 hours 18 minutes).

This is a very widely used house system, but is conceptually quite different from anything which had gone before it. Its popularity however is due not to its intellectual, mathematical, or conceptual superiority but to quite another issue.

You will notice that our little example did not find the cusps of Houses XI and XII when 25° Scorpio was the Ascendant, but rather the times when 25° Scorpio was the degree of the cusp of House XI and House XII. Using just tables of the Ascendant and the Mid-heaven, we could do the same for every degree of the zodiac for every latitude, without ever having to do any more than divide, add, or subtract. It was an ideal house system for a person with no mathematical skills to be able to reproduce. This was the case in 1821 when R.C.Smith (or “Raphael”) first published them, and the Placidian Tables became widely and cheaply available.

The popularity of the Placidus system therefore lies not in any demonstrated superiority, but rather in the simplicity of its reproduction for an astrologer with a limited mathematical background 150 years ago. This does not necessarily give the system a theoretical advantage for the astrologer of today.

There have of course been other attempts to refine the astrological system through greater sophistication of the house divisions. These include the systems of Natural Graduation, the MC Houses, Morinus, Axial Rotation, Zenith, East Point, Alcabitus, and Birth Place.

The other direction has been to add to the number of celestial points which may be considered in the processes of delineation or prediction. Reinhold Ebertin introduced the concept of planetary mid-points, thus increasing the number of potentially sensitive areas enormously. Others have used harmonics, the asteroids, or the hypothetical outer planets.

I would however like to look at one more attempt in a little more detail, as I feel that it is quite revealing in several ways.

In 1972 Wendel Polich, Nelson Page, and Alexander Marr published in Buenos Aires their *Tables of the Right Ascension of the Ecliptic and a Manual of Primary Directions*. It may be helpful to say that “Right Ascension” is measuring the degrees of the zodiac on the ecliptic (our normal measure) by projecting them onto the celestial equator and using a 360° measurement from the East point. Thus (for example) 8° 25’ Virgo is 160° 03’ Right Ascension. So you will appreciate the point of including tables of Right Ascension with the Manual.

However the major intention of the Manual is to introduce the authors’ system of prediction; which is the use of primary directions based on their own new house division system.

Primary Directions is that system when predictions are made on the basis of the motion of a planet in right ascension, rather than on the ecliptic (which are its secondary directions). Primary directions may either be interpreted on the actual

daily motion of the planet equating to one year in real time, or  $1^\circ$  motion in right ascension equating to the year.

The Topocentric House system (as the authors' name their development) is a variant of the Placidian one. The difference is a bit technical, and introduces some trigonometry into the house cusp calculations. To be brief and not very accurate, if one should try to draw a three dimensional picture of the Placidian houses, the house cusps would converge and meet at the north and south poles. In the Topocentric system they would converge on the north and south poles of the plane of the horizon of the observer. Hence the name, "Topo" (place) Centred.

While special tables are necessary to use the system, in practical terms the variations from Placidus are usually quite small.

However the point of the exercise is that the authors claim remarkable accuracy for predictions made from a chart erected using the Topocentric House system in conjunction with Primary Directions.

May I quote from my own translation, as I do not think that the work is available in English:

It is marvellous to verify experimentally how (primary directions) are manifested not only in the destiny of the native himself, but also in persons associated with him through natural ties..... When an impersonal event of much importance occurs to one of the parents (for example, an accident), in the directional matter of one of the houses of the native there will be discovered a Primary Direction which is indicative of a painful encounter within an orb of 3 minutes of arc.

But a little later:

In order that the Primary Direction may be able to indicate with accuracy the actual date of the event, it is an indispensable condition that a natal map which has been exactly rectified should be prepared. This is for many an insuperable hindrance. Never the less this obstacle can be quickly removed, because with the Topocentric System of House Division every astrologer is able to rectify any natal map by means of 2 or 3 events occurring suddenly within the limit of one day (without great individual importance) but being noted with a precision of four seconds of time. (For example, the instant of a payment, an accidental breakage of some article, a fall, a mistake, a coughing attack, hiccoughs, an injection, etc.).

The authors then go on to provide examples of their predictive methods using both forward and converse directions, taking as their subject Queen Elizabeth II.

In one example there is an Uranus/Mars opposition in  $20^\circ 51'$  Leo, on the 9th of September 1952. Using converse primary directions the date of the 6th of February 1952 is obtained, which is the date of the death of her King-Father.

Other examples using primary directions involve the birth of Prince Charles, Princess Anne, and Prince Andrew; all with similar accuracy. One may note that the calculations are quite demanding, and the writers have devised several formats to

assist in these, in order that astrologers may arrive at the desired end result. Apart from Primary Directions involving cusps and planets, it is also necessary to use solar returns, arabic parts, and sometimes the fixed stars. However if one may - through these processes - obtain a precise prediction of future events, I assume that few would begrudge the effort.

Yet there are several things that cause me to hesitate. The authors claim to have calculated 70 other events in the Queen's life with precision by their method, yet give examples of none of these. They say they have given five worked out examples of specific predicted events, but in the end only one - the death of the Queen's father - is shown in full detail.

Lastly, to obtain their results they have found it necessary to rectify the birth time by almost half an hour. It is difficult to accept that - if the rectified birth time is supposed to represent the physical birth time - that such a gross error could have been made in recording the birth time of the heiress to the English throne.

I think that this is a revealing example, because it seems to illustrate the law of diminishing returns. That is another way of saying that the application of more and more complex procedures to the astrological chart will not necessarily provide anything like an equivalent increase in accuracy. In fact one almost feels that the reverse might be true. We can become so dedicated to our techniques that when they fail to provide an appropriate answer, instead of stepping back and examining just what we are doing, we simply plunge into even greater complexity.

Let me give you a very simple personal example.

Years ago - when I lived in the country - I began doing for fun a twelve month rainfall prediction for the area in which we lived. This was simply prepared by taking the entrance of the Sun into each of the signs, seeing what planetary aspects had been formed, and interpreting the chart according to astrological weather tradition.

For a few years I achieved quite acceptable results. A few farmers actually did plant their seed on a couple of occasions on the strength of these predictions, and things came out quite well for them in the end. Something of a local demand grew up, and the work became known as the Gospel According to St Ralph.

So I decided that I could do better, and began doing lunar charts as well, superimposing these on the ingress charts. My predictions were certain more detailed, but alas generally less accurate. We left the district soon after this, but if I had continued the exercise I think that I would have reverted back to my first and simpler form.

Which brings me back to our original problem. Is there some sort of limit to the accuracy of prediction? Can one go on and on refining astrological technique and developing new tools, being confident that each one brings us a step closer to that time when we can name the day and the hour and the minute of any particular future event? Or do we find ourselves in a situation in which we may do a hundred more complicated calculations than the earlier astrologers were ever able to contemplate, but our predictions in the end are likely to be not one wit more accurate?



Are there in nature - in the words of the old Anglican Prayer Books - “counsels secret to us?”

I now want to skirt around an area concerning which - although I have some sort of mathematical background - is still one which I must confess is a great mystery to me. This is what I understand Chaos Theory in mathematics to be saying.

I think it goes something like this.

Once we held to the idea that if you knew enough about something, you could in the end describe it and its actions with total accuracy. Thus for example, we know the mechanics of wave motion and the mathematics necessary to describe the movement of each molecule of water. Therefore it should theoretically be possible mathematically to describe every wave that breaks on the shore, because the movement of each molecule of water is strictly governed by mathematical equations. More than this, one should be able to predict the shape of each wave, because we are fully aware of all the forces which create it and are able to express these in mathematical terms.

To draw an astrological analogy, if I am fully aware of the motion of the planets and know precisely the relationship of these to human nature, I ought to be able to be able totally to describe the actions of the person under consideration.

But we find in fact that the world is not like this. No matter how much you may know about the mathematics of wave motion, you can never predict how any one wave will actually behave. There is even in some of the most simple mathematical formulae an inherent “either/or” factor. The formulae for wave motion (for example) may say in effect “if this happens, then this happens, and then this other happens”, but it may also say, “but if that happens, then that happens, and then that other happens”.

Nature, while behaving in a strictly mathematical manner, has often built into the very foundations of its mathematics some totally unpredictable options. It always behaves according to its laws, but its laws have counsels secret to us.

This means in effect that while we can describe the general vistas of nature, there are parts that will always remain unpredictable because there is at the heart of the natural world a chaos factor. Let me use two rather strange and curious diagrams to help me illustrate this in a way that may be helpful.

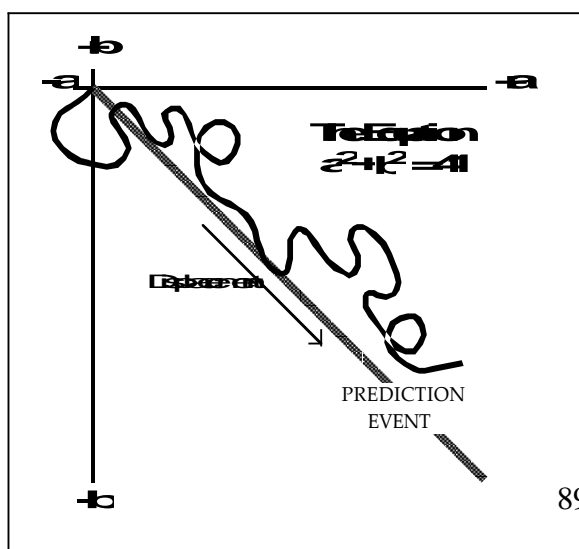


DIAGRAM ONE

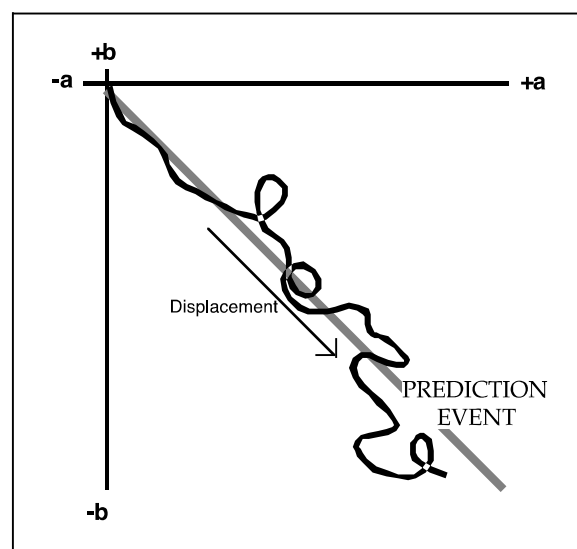


DIAGRAM TWO

What I have tried to do is to demonstrate - or perhaps better, to give an analogy - of chaos theory as I understand it.

I have begun with a simple algebraic equation,  $a^2 + b^2 = 41$ . Now the thing about that equation is that it is perfectly good maths, and perhaps it could be used in a set of equations to describe what happens to our wave breaking on the shore. The only problem is that it has four possible solutions, all of which are correct.

If “a” is 4, and “b” is 5, then  $a^2$  is 16, and  $b^2$  is 25, which gives the answer 41. However if “a” is -4,  $a^2$  is still 16; and if “b” is -5,  $b^2$  is still 25. So “a” can be + or - 4, and “b” can be + or - 5. Thus there are four ways to work out the equation, all of which give the answer 41.

$$(+4)^2 + (+5)^2 = 41$$

$$(+4)^2 + (-5)^2 = 41$$

$$(-4)^2 + (+5)^2 = 41$$

$$(-4)^2 + (-5)^2 = 41$$

Now what I did was this. I made two discs, one I called “a” and the other I called “b”. I then placed a plus and a minus sign on the opposite sides of each of them. Next I simply played “two up” and wrote down my results. For example, the first throw in Diagram One would have been “-a” and “-b”. So I went down four tiny units and then left five tiny units, and placed a dot at that point.

From that point I displaced myself diagonally down towards the right bottom corner a set amount, repeated the process and placed another dot. I did this quite a number of times and then drew a curved line through all of the points which I had established in this way. The result was the funny curve in Diagram One.

I then repeated the process a second time and obtained Diagram Two.

Now mathematically this was simply a game of chance, and the average of all the results should follow the diagonal line which I have labelled the “Prediction Event”. One therefore strongly suspects that had I continued the operations which resulted in Diagram One a little longer, there would have been a sudden drop down to the Prediction Event line.

I would just like to make a few comments.

The first is the obvious one, that while we have performed the same mathematical operation in the same way a number of times in both examples, we have attained totally different results. And no matter how many times we repeated the process, each time the result would be different from all others. Nature - as it were - has taken its own secret counsel each time the equation was applied, and there is simply no way that the result can be predicted with any degree of certainty.

However the second one is that even while this may be so, chaos nature still remains within fairly obvious limits. One can still have a pretty good idea of what is actually happening, and even (to a degree) a sense of where things must go next.

The third is that if one likes to think of our simple equations astrologically, what we have is the inter action of symbols, each containing two possible interpretations; which is not too bad a picture of what we often have to work with. This being the case, what we are looking at can be viewed in one sense as an icon of our predictive astrological work.

Let us imagine two astrologers faced with the same request to make predictions from a given chart. Both apply their techniques equally to the material in front of him or her. Astrologer Number One in his or her work has crossed the Prediction Event line twice, and has thereby achieved two good accurate predictions. Astrologer Number Two on the other hand has crossed the Prediction Event line six times, yet is not in any way a better astrologer. Both simply reached the limits that nature allowed, and there is no technique ever which will allow either of them to perform better.

The fourth point is that if you take the results of our little experiments (that is, you start with the finished squiggle and work backwards) it is quite possible to isolate any bit of the curve and determine in that particular instance what the values of “a” and “b” actually were for that “event”. In other words, we can isolate the factors which produced that part of the curve.

There seems to me to be here some sort of parallel with our ability rather easily to find the promittors which astrologically describe some event which has already occurred, but yet have far less success in using the same techniques to predict events in the future. It is a similar situation as that of being able to describe mathematically why a wave took a certain shape once it has been formed, but not being able to predict its exact shape before the event. This is not because our tools are inadequate, but because we are faced with one of those limits of nature - like the speed of light - beyond which one cannot go in the natural world as we know it.

That is, developing an astrological technique which will allow us to describe a series of known events by manipulating a birth chart in various ways, in no way offers any guarantee that effective results will be obtained by using that same technique on another birth chart to predict a series of yet unknown events with any degree of accuracy.

Indeed, if the techniques of prediction are essentially mathematical, then the likelihood of chaos theory eventually occurring at some place in the process is overwhelmingly possible. When this occurs, the limits of predictive accuracy have been attained. If one wishes to lift the veil of the future further, then it will be necessary to become involved in processes which by pass the mathematical ones.

Now a little while ago I suggested that our simple equation could be compared to an astrological process in which we have an inter action of two symbols, each carrying the possibility of two interpretations. You may well object - and quite rightly - that in our use of astrological symbols we are not often confronted by two equally valid alternatives. That perhaps raises the most important issue of all.

It seems to me that often it matters not too much if an astrologer uses the Equal Houses system, or the Placidian Houses, or mid-points, or some other system in which he or she feels at home. Good astrologers usually get good results, and bad

astrologers usually get bad results. And I think that this is because the kind of road taken by Polich and Nelson Page in their Topocentric Primary Directions, is really a mirage. You will not become a better astrologer - or make more accurate predictions - just because you have done ten times more calculation than your neighbour in order to achieve your results. That is simply not the way that nature works.

That is, we cannot improve the accuracy of our predictions by endlessly refining our techniques or changing our house system, because it is likely that the limits of astrological accuracy in prediction have already been reached. And may indeed have been reached a very long time ago. The good astrologer is one who is able to accept this, and then to do the best that is possible within these limits which nature has imposed. Limits that come not from a lack of knowledge or refinements in technique, but from the very way that the world is put together.

A good sailor (for example) does not need a computer to tell him how the waves are going to form in a certain situation. He has learned his trade, and is able to sense and feel what nature is about. He may not be able to forecast what each individual wave will be like, but he can give you a pretty good idea of what sort of trip you are likely to experience.

I think therefore that the best astrologers are those who have a good conceptual understanding of the basic tools of their trade and what they are actually doing when they use certain astrological processes, and who have the ability to perceive the way that the currents of life are running in the person with whom they are dealing. I also believe that the best astrologer will have a clear understanding of the limitations of his or her art, and not be deceived by the enticements - and perhaps the false hopes - of ever more complicated calculations. Nature has her own counsels, and I am yet to be convinced that she has entrusted them all even to the most sophisticated of astrological software programs.

In the final analysis, it may well be that the gleaming ultimate holy grail of totally accurate prediction is really an illusion, and we can only regret the enormous waste of astrological effort which has occurred because we have tried to discover an Eldorado which is simply not there.

Astrological prediction - and the practice of astrology in general - is not so much a tool by which we can discover the future, but one by which we can discover ourselves now. It is about making sure that whatever the future holds, we will be able to understand what it is about, and why, and what this means for us. In the final analysis I do not mind a great deal if nature does have some counsels secret to me, providing I understand enough about myself and what my life means to be able to accept even an unknown future with the confidence that in it I will remain a whole person.

I personally have little doubt that the future is "there" in some way, and that it is indeed probably possible to find it. However I think that the task of finding it in crystal clear detail may properly lie with others following different and more intuitional or mystical paths, rather than in the hands of the astrologer.

Just the same: if we can't resist the temptation to do our transits, our primary directions, our progressions, our solar and lunar returns, our converse directions and

progressed angles - and when after one marvellously accurate prediction we get the next hopelessly wrong - I hope that at least we will not lose our sense of humour.

I hope that we will be able to acknowledge our mortality with good grace, and that we will be able to smile and raise out hats to those counsels of nature which are now (and I suspect ever will be) “secret to us”.