

INTRODUCTION TO ASTROLOGY
A Philosophical Primer

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PREFACE

I wrote this primer to satisfy a perceived lack in the astrological literature. Though many books describe the unique language of astrology — its ancient alphabet, nomenclature and grammar — and many more are devoted to techniques and interpretations, I have yet to discover an introductory volume which presents the “ontology” of astrology — what one might call the interior “space” that astrology, as an “object” — inhabits in our collective mind.

I began to study astrology in 1973, when I was 30 years old, at my first “Saturn Return.” When my father, a physician, heard of my interest he asked me, amazed: “Why are you wasting your good brain?” Like most other scientifically trained people, he assumed astrology was nonsense, a superstitious holdover from the past. This attitude towards astrology, still prevalent today, is no surprise: our materialistic culture would be undermined if it allowed astrology to emerge from its long-standing status as either utterly superficial (cf. newspaper syndicated Sun-sign astrology) or decidedly occult (and therefore strange, weird, scary).

I wrote this primer so that I could hand it to people when they ask the questions I had when I began to study astrology. These questions do not pertain so much to specific technical points but rather explore this subject we call “astrology” as a whole, and why anybody with any brains would want to study it.

INTRODUCTION

Astrology is *not* what it seems

When people hear that I'm an astrologer, they often draw back in alarm. "You believe in astrology?" they spit out, contemptuous. To these I answer with a question, "Do you believe in English?" That stops them. In order to understand my response, their brain must suddenly shift gears.

Astrology is not a belief system; astrology is a language. Like any language, astrology can be used to make true or false statements. Taken as a whole, however, languages are not "true" or "false." We use them — or abuse them; we learn them or leave them alone.

Others have the opposite reaction; they grab me, excited, wonder if I can predict their love life, when they'll get rich. I try to shake them off. What they want are answers. I prefer to deepen our questions.

Both critical and uncritical attitudes toward astrology are typical — and both are inappropriate. Were we to delve into the philosophical underpinnings of astrology, we might acknowledge and honor it as a universal symbolic language. Were we to learn this language, it might help us heal the divisions that threaten our inner lives, our relations with others, our communities, our world.

My dream is to see the astrological "ephemeris" (a book listing the daily positions and motions of the planets) become so familiar that whenever some (inner or outer, private or public) event occurs that mystifies or excites us we automatically "look up the planets" to identify the configuration operating in the heavens for that moment in time and place and compare it to the configuration in the heavens at the moment when we were born. Inevitably, we will discover correlations, synchronicities between the two configurations, some so exacting and uncanny that we can't help but suspect divine choreography at work.

Synchronicities blast open our usual interpretive frameworks; they invite us to explore symbolic ramifications and to link events and their configurations to others in the near and distant past. Ultimately, by investigating the larger, multidimensional context of events through the lens of astrology, we open our capacity to absorb and incorporate them within a much more expanded awareness.

Astrology is a universal language, perhaps even a divine language — the language the gods would speak had they need for words.

Astrology is both mathematical and mystical

As a discipline, astrology is formal, abstract and mathematical, the study of the interplay of Space and Time as viewed from planet Earth. Astrology describes and analyzes structures and processes within and among circles and cycles in this solar system and beyond.

Yet the underlying assumption of astrology is mystical: everything is related; all apparent dualities resolve into unity. *As above, so below*: what is above (in the heavens) mirrors what is below (on Earth). *As within, so without*: the original and changing patterns of our inner lives mirror those in the outer world.

Your astrological “birthchart” is an arrangement of points (planetary positions) around the circumference of a circle that shows the configurations in the heavens for your specific birth time and place. As such, it depicts the essential and unique *structure* of your life. The continuing cycles of the planets as they move in and out of crucial geometrical patterns with each other and your birth planet positions correlate with your life as an unfolding *process*.

The art of astrology consists of correlating your story — the types, timing, and flow of your personal experiences (process) — with the overall purpose and meaning (structure) of your life.

From a cosmic perspective, we are spacious, high-frequency, spiritual beings temporarily squeezed into dense, low-frequency, material bodies held by gravity on planet Earth as it rotates through a solar system embedded in a vast galactic spiral communicating with countless other galaxies in an ever-expanding self-aware universe.

Living on Earth, we humans tend to forget the larger picture.

Ignoring the starry sky above, we get caught below in specific, moment-by-moment sensations, feelings, ideas, and memories — but not entirely. Human nature is paradoxical, simultaneously driven by tumultuous surface passions of desire and by an unswerving, and usually hidden, inner directive for meaning and purpose.

Astrology is stellar ecology

Astro-logy, the study of the stars, asks us to behold the Earth as the center of our solar system — and beyond. Astrology is an ecology of the stars. It considers the one environment we all share, no matter who we are or where we live, the sky above us, turning slowly round once every 24 hours. We all see the same sky, we all live under the same universal and ever-changing planetary patterns.

Con-sider: to move with the stars.

Dis-aster: to turn away from the stars.

Astrology maps what we all have in common; it assumes unity.

Planetary patterns look slightly different depending upon the angles from which they are viewed. As each place on earth is unique and has its own particular beauty, so too each planetary pattern is unique, when viewed from a particular place on Earth.

Astrology respects diversity, it honors uniqueness.

Astrologers have belief systems

So far I have attempted to situate astrology in our collective psyche as a certain kind of ontological “object” by referring to it as a language, rather than as a belief system. However, just as with any focus of human attention, there is no “neutral” or “objective” understanding of astrology. Anyone who uses this language does so within his or her own world-view.

There are two belief-systems usually associated with the language of astrology. The first, and, unfortunately, still the most common, is the “fatalistic” framework. The second, I call “esoteric” or “metaphysical.” This is the framework that informs my understanding of astrology, since it integrates left-brained mathematics with right-brained mysticism.

Fatalism vs. Esotericism

The fatalistic belief system, unfortunately, still prevails, especially among those who have not studied the language. It is this belief system which embeds the view of astrology as either stupid or scary, either superstitious nonsense or “occult.” The esoteric or metaphysical belief system, on the other hand, though more rare, has been growing steadily since the late 1960s.

Fatalism denies free will

Fatalism denies free will. Instead, responsibility for one’s life is placed upon something external to the self. In this view, “the stars” (the planets) determine both who we are and what’s going to happen to us day by day.

I’ve noticed that, almost without exception, anyone who either (critically) “hates” astrology or (uncritically) “loves” astrology does so for the same reason. Associating it with fatalism, those who want to keep their free will hate astrology; those who want to deny their free will love it.

Fatalism is not confined to astrology. Indeed, we blame our genetic inheritance, our parents and early childhood conditioning, our jobs, our governments, the devil himself — so and so, or such and such, we complain, keeps us from developing our full potential.

Though rarely noticed, fatalism is endemic within our society, and astrology is one of the scapegoats for this unconscious belief that our lives are controlled by outside forces.

The association of the language of astrology with the fatalist belief system is the principal obstacle standing in the way of a renewed cultural acceptance of this most ancient and profound language.

Esotericism includes free will

Astrology can also be associated with another belief system, known by a number of different names, such as “esoteric” or “metaphysical.” We could even use the name “occult” here, if we understand that this word does not refer to anything manipulative; “occult” simply means “hidden,” that which is not immediately obvious. Whereas fatalism denies free will, esotericism gives it back to us — totally. Indeed, we are entirely responsible for ourselves — who we were in the past, who we are now, and who we choose to become in the future.

Within this alternative world view, each of us encompasses three principles: body, mind and soul. Body and mind are mortal, they live and die. The soul is immortal, it existed before you were born, and it will exist after you die.

The esoteric belief-system assumes reincarnation, the idea that the soul lives many lives, each of them a stepping stone, the lessons it contains advancing the soul’s evolution.

Free will, within this point of view, is a function of the soul. The soul chooses the life.

Your soul chooses both the moment and the place of birth, and therefore the specific physical and social environment into which you were born — including your body and mind, your parents, your brothers and sisters; your soul chooses the genetic stream, in other words, the flow of qualities of all kinds inherited from generation to generation. The soul also chooses your tendencies to health or disease, the lessons this life has to offer, and the talents to help you learn them.

Fatalism and Esotericism compared

Fatalism ignores the soul. It tends to see us as puppets in a play, mechanical, with no inward direction of our own, pulled by strings external to our beings for no apparent reason.

Esotericism, on the other hand, assumes that you as a soul are a spiritual being evolving towards perfection, through the process of freely choosing, and then learning, from the experiences of your many earth lives.

Within fatalism, the causes of human thoughts, words and deeds are assumed to be external. Within esotericism those causes are accepted as internal, a part of your own nature. Esotericism assumes that we create our own realities; it focuses on a specific inner potential that pushes for development throughout a given lifetime.

The birthchart as a destiny pattern

The astrological birthchart is a map of the planetary pattern in the heavens during one specific moment shown from a particular place on earth. This moment is also the destiny pattern of the person whose birth it is. In other words, the birthchart locates an individual in space and time and indicates the direction his or her life will take.

As above, so below.

“Whatever is born during a certain moment in time has the qualities of that moment, no matter where it is.” — C. G. Jung. This is known as the “law of synchronicity,” to distinguish it from the scientific “law of causality” — whereby one thing is said to cause or influence another. Within the esoteric perspective, astrology does not establish causal relations between heavenly and terrestrial phenomena. Rather, it notices that correlations between them do exist. The question why these correlations exist lies outside the province of astrology.

The universe is always changing, it does not repeat itself. Therefore, each pattern is unique, and each person born under a particular pattern is also unique, unrepeatable! You are the only person on earth to ever have your particular pattern. Each of us enters the earth plane as a seed, a tiny, concentrated unit of potentiality, destined to express itself, to develop itself fully according to its own unique laws, unfolding its own glorious individuality.

We are free — to become precisely ourselves, fulfilling our entire potential.

How successful a soul will be in following through with the birth destiny chosen depends both upon continued use of free will and upon the level of understanding the soul has gained through previous lives. How “old” the soul is, how many times it has already incarnated on Earth and how much it has actually learned from each incarnation, is not something an astrologer can understand by simply looking at the birthchart.

An old soul is capable of expressing his or her birthchart with more awareness than a young soul can. What a young soul might call “fate” — a sense of being tossed about by uncontrollable circumstances — an older soul will recognize as individual destiny. Older souls have experienced and suffered enough to understand that whatever is going on outside mirrors what’s happening inside.

As above, so below. As within, so without.

The “older soul” realizes: whatever are the circumstances we find ourselves in, we have attracted these to us as mirrors. That’s what they are for! To show us what’s going on inside us! Outer happenings symbolize inner events. To change our circumstances is, first, to change our minds. We create our own realities. No one else, and no thing else, not even “the stars,” is responsible for the way we live our lives.

In response to those fatalists who say that the planets “cause” us to behave in certain ways, I would say with Edgar Cayce, it is more likely we humans “cause” the planets to act in certain ways! We are much more powerful than we think. Thoughts act as lazer beams. They cut through space. They cross vast distances. They carve out the courses of the planets. And — what’s even more extraordinary — the courses of our lives. It is we who are responsible . . . responsive! Able, to respond.

Astrology is a symbolic language

It may seem as if what I am saying here is clear-cut and objective. That once one learns the language of astrology well enough, one can describe and predict with precision both who a person is, and how he or she is going to develop.

Nothing could be further from the truth. As a person’s life needs to be treated with reverence, appreciated for its mystery, so too astrology, as a language which attempts to map that life, is more akin to mystery than it is to anything scientific.

Astrology, viewed within the esoteric or metaphysical framework, is a symbolic language, not a literal one. Thus those who assume the clarity and objectivity of the literal language of science as a standard for thinking and speaking find it difficult to appreciate how to approach astrology.

In a literal language one looks up a word in the dictionary to discover what it means. Various definitions, when added together, are assumed to equal the current possible range of meaning for the word being defined.

Astrological “words,” on the other hand, are symbols. Each of them generates an immense, but indefinite, range of meaning. It’s as if the symbol were a sun, and its meanings the rays, radiating out from that central nucleus. This nucleus itself is mysterious. The essence of a symbol cannot be defined. Much like a dream, it remains mysterious.

No matter how definite our attempts to define our dreams, to make them make sense, there is always something left over, an irreducible core which eludes any of our attempts at understanding and which continues to yield a rich harvest of meaning. That which is symbolic in nature is larger, fuller than any of our attempts to limit it to literal definition.

Symbols fascinate us — and frustrate us. We want to understand. Somehow we know that if we did understand, it would change our lives. Yet because of the way we have been

trained in our schools, we tend to be scientific in our approach, thinking that all words should be literally defined. This approach is so fundamental to our western way of thinking that it is difficult for us to even realize we use it, much less to unlearn our need for limiting the meanings of things by defining them, containing them, capturing them.

Symbols are gifts of the spirit. They ask to be appreciated, not boxed in. And to do this, we must switch from left to right brain. We must relax, into our intuitive, receptive, symbolic selves.

Astrology and the philosophical attitude

Since astrology is a symbolic language, it can serve to aid us in exploring attitudes and values that are hard to understand, that lie beneath our conscious awareness, and that have to do with the meaning and direction of our lives. To meditate on the birthchart is to engender a compassion for the entire fabric of earthly existence, and to wonder how we fit into it. This deepens our concerns, makes us aware of our priorities, and helps us to detach from the constant distractions of our daily lives.

Within this context, we may ask, what am I really supposed to accomplish before I die? What is the meaning and purpose of my life? These questions then become a dynamically pulsating center around which all lesser concerns revolve as constellations. A meditation upon the birthchart orients us towards a continuous and ever-deepening resonance with our life purpose, and encourages us to live fully, to live impeccably, to live our lives as if they mattered.

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF ASTROLOGY

Part I: STRUCTURE

Astrology compared to other symbolic languages

In my own attempts to make sense of an unusually hectic and peripatetic life, I have studied a number of psychological and esoteric languages, including Freudian, Jungian, Tarot, and numerology. I have sought to name, describe, and analyze the complexities of my inner world so that I might understand and amplify my own evolutionary thrust. While I value each of these languages, I now view them as a more or less enriching adjuncts to the ancient mother lode of astrology.

Astrology may be the most differentiated symbolic language ever invented to elucidate the complexity of human character and experience within a whole-systems orientation to the larger universe.

Compare the language of astrology with Freud's world-view, for example. Freud invented three terms to describe the human psyche: "id," "ego," and "superego." By contrast, the basic vocabulary of astrology includes ten "planets," twelve "signs," twelve "houses," and all their combinations — that's 10 x 12 x 12! — plus geometrical "aspects," aspect patterns, asteroids, new planets, comets, fixed stars and constellations, and so on. There are even astrological analyses of all 360 degrees in a circle.

In what follows I will attempt to present the basics of astrology in a way that demonstrates how I came to grips with it. By the way, though I discuss "signs" and "houses" in general, I leave it to the reader to consult cookbooks on astrology for specific delineations of the twelve signs and twelve houses.

Symbols and their context

In what follows, I will introduce certain astrological concepts as if they can be understood in isolation. Keep in mind, however, that like all of life, every symbol in the birthchart is colored by all its relationships! For example, if you are a Sagittarian, then your Sagittarian Sun sign is affected by the house in which it is located, the sign and house position of the Moon and the other planets, the Ascendant, aspects among all of these, current transits and progressions, and more. Each birthchart is unique, and so complex that it contains literally millions of points of possible reference. What an astrologer looks for depends not only on experience, tradition and training, but on his or her personal expectations, attitudes, and level of evolutionary development. Please be aware: an astrologer cannot "read" the chart of someone more psychologically or spiritually "advanced."

In other words, there is no such thing as a final, definitive interpretation of your birth chart. While the astrological birthchart is objective (any astrologer would set it up in

approximately the same way), the interpretation of the birthchart is not. The meaning found there is in part a function of who is looking at it.

Role of intuition in interpretation

There is much focus today on the role of intuition in learning. And yet there is a subtle difference between an idea that flashes through as intuition and one that floats up as fantasy. Only long experience and a sensitive attunement to one's inner life can yield the ability to distinguish between them.

Despite this caveat however, please be aware that the birthchart yields its meaning more easily and fully to intuition than to any system of technical analysis. (This is why computer programs "interpreting" birthcharts don't satisfy. They spew lists of ingredients but cannot intuit how those ingredients are likely to mix.) The intuition must be trained. As Einstein once said, "Luck comes to the prepared mind." Just as a concert pianist appears to play the most technical and complex pieces effortlessly, so too, the student of astrology must train for years to be able to focus the intuition precisely and then recognize the manner in which a birth pattern is being enacted.

The birthchart as a mandala symbol

The birthchart is both a detached, objective "map" of the heavens for a certain point in time and place and a sacred, circular "mandala" symbolizing wholeness. The birthchart is your blueprint for life, a mysterious set of instructions for the journey you must take to integrate the various parts of yourself.

Planets. The symbols inside the birthchart represent planetary energies. The birthchart has been compared to an electromagnetic force field, with each point (each planet) in the system in resonance with the whole.

Better yet, see the birthchart as a stage play, with the planets as actors, and the geometrical patterns that connect them your lifetime themes. As both author and director of this play, you must at some point allow the actors to all appear together on the stage.

Finally, one might compare the birthchart to a symphony orchestra; the planets are its instruments, and you are both composer and conductor. Each instrument must be practiced until it vibrates with its full and pure tone; they are then combined in duets, triplets, quartets, quintets, and so on. Hopefully, at some point in your journey, the voices of all your instruments will fuse into one glorious song, a hymn of praise to the marvelous and intricate complexity of your singular nature as a tiny speck of magnificence within an infinitely vast, radiant universe.

The structure of the birthchart mandala

Cross and square. The internal structure of the birthchart mandala is that of the cross or square within the circle. Each of us, in effect, at birth, is hung on a cross, and must learn how to square the circle, to fit the square peg of our personality into the round hole of our immortal spirit. This cross is represented by the coordinate axes of the chart, horizontal and vertical.

The horizontal line or axis on the chart represents the actual horizon at the moment of birth. When you were born, any planets above that line were above the earth and planets below that line were below. “Above,” symbolizes day, light, publicity, objectivity — you in relation to the outer world. “Below” represents night, darkness, privacy, subjectivity — you in relation to your interior world.

The vertical line or axis is known as the “meridian.” Planets located left of this line represent energies through which you work out your destiny independently of others. In this half of the chart you create your own circumstances. Planets located to the right of the meridian represent energies through which you work out your destiny in concert with others. In this half of the chart you respond to circumstances already created.

Remember, the birthchart is a symbolic picture of who you are. And the energies of the universe flow through you. The circumference of the chart represents the boundary system of the self, which holds the ten planetary energies. These energies interact with the world outside you through their relation to the two “outlets” of the birthchart. These outlets are called the “Ascendant” and the “Midheaven.”

Ascendant. The Ascendant outlet, located at the left end of the horizontal line is “personal.”

Midheaven. The Midheaven outlet, located at the top end of the vertical line, is “impersonal.”

Think of these two outlets as nozzles on a garden hose, used to spray water in different ways. The settings of these “nozzles” are determined by the specific astrological “signs” they are in.

The horizontal axis: Ascendant/Descendant

The Ascendant, or “rising sign,” represents the point of the eastern sky that was “rising” at the moment of birth and symbolizes both your personality and how you personally interact with your environment. Your personality is the part of yourself you show to the world — your persona, coming from the Greek word meaning “mask”; it also represents your face, your body, and the way you express your inner life through it. The Ascendant is not your real self, but your self-image, what you show to others. The “environment,” also represented by the Ascendant, includes all those circumstances and situations in which you find yourself day by day.

Descendant. At the other end of the horizontal line is the “Descendant.” Whereas at the Ascendant you dynamically project your personality into the world, at the Descendant the world is magnetically attracted to you. The Descendant signifies partnership. Planets found there often seem to describe qualities of your partners, whether personal or professional. It may also signify your opponents — partners of another kind.

The horizontal line is the symbol for the theme of the self in relation to the other in our lives. As we project ourselves into the world, so do we attract others who reflect our projections.

The vertical axis: Midheaven/Immun Coeli

At right angles to the horizontal line is the vertical line, the two ends of which are called the Midheaven (at the top) and the Immun Coeli (at the bottom).

Midheaven. The Midheaven, or Zenith, at the topmost point of the chart, is the impersonal outlet through which your inner energies interact with the outside world. Whereas the Ascendant describes your personality’s interchange with the immediate environment, the Midheaven outlet indicates what you are here for, the purpose, or intent of the incarnation. It is the most public position in the chart, and signifies your eventual achievement or lack of it, noting recognition and notoriety, honor and dishonor.

The Midheaven usually signifies your career, the role you play in society. For one who has begun to “individuate” however, the Midheaven describes the calling, that which you must do to fully become what you are meant to be, what the universe needs of this particular entity.

Immun Coeli. Directly opposite the Midheaven is the Immun Coeli (or Nadir), the bottom most point of the chart. As the Midheaven represents what you are reaching for, so the Immun Coeli represents the foundation upon which you stand. Your home and family. These are the very roots of your self.

This is where you put your feet on the ground. The Immun Coeli symbolizes the most private part of your self, that which constitutes the ground of your being.

The vertical line then, stands for the private in relation to the public theme in our lives. As we plant our feet on the ground, so can we reach for the stars.

Planets, signs, houses

Three main categories of astrological symbols are shown in the birthchart: planets, signs and houses.

Planets. The astrological symbols for the “planets” stand for specific spiritual energies or principles. Astrology identifies ten different planetary energies operating within you, the eight known planets — Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto — plus the Sun and Moon.

Signs. The same planet operates differently depending on the “sign” of the zodiac it occupies. Think of the planet as a “verb” and the sign it is in as an “adverb,” modifying it, so that it functions in a certain manner. (For example, the verb for Mars might be expressed as “to act.” If Mars is placed in the sign of Cancer, it would indicate action expressed “emotionally.”)

Zodiac. The “zodiac” traces the invisible circular band in the heavens around the Earth through which the Sun, Moon and planets move. The 360° zodiac is segmented into twelve 30° signs — Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, Pisces. The zodiac encompasses the totality of human experience, and can be viewed as a developmental process, from the seed (Aries), its soil (Taurus), the first stirrings of life above ground (Gemini), water and other nutrients (Cancer), individual plant identity (Leo) . . . all the way through to compost (Pisces) where individuals dissolve back into unity. Likewise, there is within each individual sign its own developmental process, tending towards increasing awareness and refinement. For example, the raw impulsive rashness of Aries evolves through experience into courageous, pioneering leadership.

Houses. “Houses” are the wedge-shaped spaces inside the circle, numbered one to twelve counterclockwise starting with the Ascendant as cusp of the first house. In general, the sequence of the signs resonates with the meanings in the sequence of the houses, so that the natural sign to govern a house reflects its place in the sequence. Aries, for example, is the natural governor of the first house and Leo of the fifth house. Houses are areas of experience within which the planets operate, and are established through the daily revolution of the Earth. Houses torque the pure energies of the planets into the messy, confusing, nitty-gritty business of life on Earth and govern daily affairs, circumstances and situations. The more planets in any one house, the more the affairs of that house are emphasized.

Remember, planets are symbols inside the circle. Signs are symbols outside the circle. Houses are the wedged-shaped spaces.

Elements and qualities (modes)

Each astrological sign belongs to one of four “elements” and one of three “qualities” (or “nodes”). The four elements are fire, earth, air, and water. The three qualities are cardinal, fixed, and mutable.

Think of the natural meanings of the four elements and you will understand their astrological meanings. “Fire” is fiery, forceful, exuberant, inspirational; “earth” is down-

to-earth, practical, grounded; “air” circulates, communicates, is mental, detached, and often long-winded; and “water” is emotional, resonant, sensitive, full of feeling.

Of the qualities, “cardinal” is active, enterprising, and initiating; “fixed” is stable, resistant to change, and stubborn; and “mutable” is changeable, adaptable, and mercurial.

Planetary rulers

Each sign is said to “rule” at least one planet. A planet in its “ruler” is thought to be particularly powerful because the meaning of the planet is highly compatible with the meaning of the sign; thus the planet can act naturally, with no interference. The “ruler” of the sign on the Ascendant is often deemed to rule the whole chart.

Planetary aspects

I began my study of astrology in 1973. Working alone, I devoured the literature, pouring over what seemed to be an endless stream of unrelated details. Then one day, feeling thoroughly confused and overwhelmed, I walked into a book store in San Francisco and saw, tacked to the wall, a birthchart with what are called the astrological “aspects” drawn in as colored lines, linking planets to one another. I stopped, and stood staring at this picture, transfixed.

I wish I could share with you what that few minutes meant to me. It was a real revelation. Aspects, I realized intuitively, were the keys to a deeper, more wholistic understanding of astrology. They show how a person’s energies operate as an integrated system.

To understand the system, first, be aware that the center of the chart represents Earth — with you on it. From the point of view of this center, taken as a third point from which any two planets are viewed, aspects depict the geometrical relations of those planets.

Planets relate either harmoniously or inharmoniously, depending on three things: first, the natures of the planets involved (Mars and Saturn usually don’t like each other, whereas Venus and the Moon usually do); secondly, on the type of aspect involved (that is, each aspect, depending on the degree of its angle, has its own symbolic interpretation); and third, on one’s level of awareness. The more we recognize the nature of an energy within ourselves, the more we can work with it to evolve the way it expresses, both by itself and in relation to other energies.

Each aspect has an “orb allowance,” that is, a range of variation from exactness, of up to ten degrees, again depending on the type of aspect and the planets involved. The more exact the aspect, the more compelling its influence.

Stressful aspects

Certain aspects are especially significant, because stressful, thus dynamic. These are the “conjunction” (0°), the “square” (90°) and the “opposition” (180°).

Conjunction. The “conjunction,” 0°, is the most powerful aspect and the only one easily visible in the night sky: two planets joined together by an aspect of more or less zero degrees. Conjunctions link energies so closely that they tend towards fusion; this makes it difficult to experience them separately. In addition, energies in conjunction tend to magnify one another, as if in an echo chamber. This aspect provides focus, concentration and intensity in a particular area. The conjunction can also be too intense, in which case it becomes overwhelming, frustrating or confusing, again depending upon the energies involved. Four or more energies conjunct constitute a “stellium,” in which case the sign and house involved receive extreme emphasis in the life.

Opposition. The “opposition” is the second most powerful aspect. Two or more planets oppose one another when they are more or less 180° apart. Oppositions link energies through polarity and indicate apparently contradictory urges that tend to work in various unconscious ways. We can express first one, then the other, like a see-saw. Or, we can use each of these energies to cancel the other, leading to repression of both. Or, we can identify with one of the energies at the expense of the other, which gets repressed.

Always, what is repressed eventually surfaces, usually first appearing as if it belongs to some person or situation in the outer world. We then experience this energy as some person or situation coming at us that we are strongly drawn to or just as strongly repelled. Eventually, we learn to recognize such “projection” as a mirror we have attracted to show us a part of our inner life that has been rejected or neglected. Oppositions resolve as we acknowledge, recognize, and then learn how to simultaneously express two apparently contradictory sides of our own nature. Ultimately, oppositions stretch us, expand our horizons, enlarge perspective; we begin to realize that every coin has two sides and that any single truth is only one point — of view.

Square. The “square,” also a very powerful aspect, relates two planets that are more or less 90° apart. Planets square one another act at cross-purposes. They generate friction by rubbing each other the wrong way. Squares are enormously productive. However, again, our original tendency is to either see-saw between them or to accept one end of the square and repress, and then, eventually, project the other end outside ourselves. Squares present challenges so strong that they force change. Something inside has to move, to adjust, to temper, or refine its action.

The opposition and the square are both known as “difficult” aspects. Likewise the conjunction, when it links two or more planets with incompatible natures. Most people blame others when something difficult in themselves gets activated. Others who aim to understand the workings of their inner life welcome difficult aspects as opportunities to practice self-awareness.

Difficult aspects promote consciousness expansion. They demand that we become acutely aware of how we use them. Until we learn to use them constructively, we tend to run up against the same types of difficulties over and over again. These aspects provide tension in our lives, inner turmoil, anxiety, frustration, conflict. They force us to change, to develop ourselves, to evolve to our full potential. The more tension, the more potential. The more difficult the chart, the greater its developmental, evolutionary capacity.

The difficult aspects which are exact or closest to exactness are keys to the major life lessons of the individual, the “engine,” if you will, that powers the dynamic of the chart.

Harmonious aspects

Trines and sextiles. “Trines,” 120°, and “sextiles,” 60°, indicate ease and synthesis, two or more energies that naturally harmonize and integrate. Trines and sextiles display our talents, what we discover we know how to do with almost no effort. They support us during times of crisis provided by difficult aspects, and indeed, are often discovered only in crisis, otherwise lying latent and unused.

LEARNING THE LANGUAGE OF ASTROLOGY

Part 2: PROCESS

The nature of astrological prediction

It is important to remember that astrology cannot be used to predict particular events with certainty. Exactly what is going to take place at any particular time depends upon circumstances you have attracted into your life from past thoughts and actions, upon current use of your free will as determined by your current level of awareness — and, of course, upon the creative energy of the universe as it spews endless new variations on any theme we can identify.

In my own case, I make a game of listing all the ways in which I *think* a coming aspect might manifest based on memory of how the same or similar aspect manifested before. Then I laugh and throw the list away, telling myself, “Well, now I know what *won't* happen!” — and wait to witness yet another startling new expressive variation of this energy emerge from the Void.

Karma

Karma is the ethical law of cause and effect. Karma manifests as a residue of congealed energy from the past — either past lives, or past times in this life — which seeks discharge. Until there is conscious awareness of this energy, we tend to exhibit it symptomatically — attracting, and then reacting to, the same or similar types of situations and circumstances over and over again.

Karmic repetition can occur at any level, from small daily self-destructive habits such as cigarette smoking, to large negative lifetime patterns. Think of the woman who marries — and divorces — three alcoholics in a row; or of the man who continually sabotages his own career by not believing in his own worth. Repetitions are like logjams in a river, damming it up, inhibiting flow.

As we become aware of our patterns, we begin to attract new circumstances. Changed circumstances renew our spirits, prompting us to choose to break the habits of the past and go on to develop our full potential. As Nietzsche put it, “to learn is to change.” From pacing round and round in a small, closed space, we break out of each circle to soar into a spiral, dynamically expanding our perspective through ever new experiences, activating our evolutionary thrust.

Dharma

If karma is the residue left over, the path of least resistance, leading us to think and feel and do the same things over and over again, then dharma is the future calling us, the

uncarved path we are meant to pursue, were we to allow ourselves to fully express our inherent nature. Karma is present circumstances reflecting past action; dharma is future circumstances reflecting present action. Sometimes this action is purely mental and spiritual, a new attitude or resolve, a mental image of what we are to become.

Whereas astrology cannot predict particular events with certainty, what it can do is help us understand the nature and timing of the activated energies, plus elucidate various ways these energies typically express — again, depending on the interaction of karma, free will, and playful new curve balls from the universe!

Progressions and transits

Planets in the birthchart exist as “tendencies,” time-release capsules, their energies released by the triggering effects of “progressions” and “transits.”

Secondary Progressions. Secondary progressions are based on the idea that each day of life symbolically equals one year. The first day after birth equals the first year, the second day the second year, and so on. The positions of the planets on the 30th day of life then, say something about what the 30th year of life will be like, and indicate long term trends.

Transits. Transits track the actual movements of the planets in relation to both each other and the original positions of the planets at birth. The most important transits are the longer-cycled ones (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto). These move so slowly that they stay long enough in one place to make a significant impact.

The most important transits made by either progressions or natal planets are the ones that create difficult aspects, 0°, 90° and 180°. Sometimes these aspects coincide with the awakening of long repressed energies rising to the surface. In this case we are forced to confront a previously unacknowledged part of ourselves. Other times, these aspects coincide with times when a more or less long standing situation in either the inner or outer world becomes so acutely uncomfortable that something, finally, must be done to change it.

Transits of Saturn last up to one year. Those of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto remain several years or more. Usually the most difficult period is when the aspect begins. This is when we are most likely to experience its “negative” effects. The key to this period of time is acceptance. A recognition that whatever is happening is necessary and meaningful.

Difficult times in our lives spur development. Without them we wouldn’t stop and look at what we are doing, wouldn’t recognize the need for change. That one of these transits can last for several years symbolizes the depth and difficulty of the lesson involved. By the time the aspect finally moves off exactness we have grown used to it, and have expanded our awareness and altered our lives accordingly.

Difficult progressions and transits indicate times of crisis. The word “crisis,” in Chinese, enjoys two meanings: one, “to decide,” and the other, “dangerous opportunity.”

A difficult progression or transit signifies a dangerous opportunity to decide to increase our understanding of ourselves. Such a decision sets in motion a search to discover the inner cause of an outer event. Difficult progressions and transits provide timing for the gradual revelation of our inner natures.

So far I’ve focused on some of the basic components of the astrological language, both its structure (planetary symbols, relations, and patterns) and process (how patterns unfold through time). Now I would like to step more deeply into this notion of “process,” and to do so I will first consider two different perspectives on the nature of Time.

Perspectives on the nature of Time

Our lives are governed by two kinds of time, linear and cyclical. Linear time is a cultural overlay that tends to ignore or obliterate cyclical time.

What we call “time’s arrow” of linear time heads in a straight line forwards, from the past into the future. This kind of uni-directional time is an illusion, a human invention, the product of civilization.

“Cyclical” time, on the other hand, is the time nature uses, as reflected in the precession of the equinoxes, the cycles of the seasons, the alteration of day and night, the female monthly menstrual flow, the nine-month cycle of human pregnancy, and so on.

Each of our lives is its own cycle, from birth to death, from dust to dust.

Linear time is conceived as absolute. There is only one time, and we all set our clocks to that same standard “correct” time. Cyclical time, on the other hand, is manifold. As there are many cycles, so too there are many times, each of them with a beginning, a middle, and an end which, in turn, becomes a new beginning. In cyclical time things return to their origins, over and over again. “To every thing there is a season. And a time to every purpose under the heavens.”

Time Cycles: an esoteric, evolutionary perspective

Each time we experience the fullness of a particular cycle for the very first time a door appears. The door is unlocked, but it is up to us to open it.

Each time we find ourselves within the seemingly miraculous fullness of a cycle’s first closure and dare to open the door, lo and behold! — like the Fool in the Tarot we step blindly into a new dimension: the space of a cycle larger than the one we have just completed. And each time we do this, we are presented with the opportunity to shift our

perspective and transform. We “break the circle” of the old, repeating cycle and activate our latent capacity to eventually encompass a more expanded world.

Think of yourself as the center of the universe. If the universe is expanding in all directions, then every point in it is central, and you *do* stand in the center of the universe. Living on Earth, you are surrounded by the planets moving in invisible concentric rings, smaller rings nesting inside the larger, out from the center of yourself.

The meaning of a planet is its cycle.

Each planetary orbit defines the boundary system of a specific dimension or sphere of awareness.

Your task, while on earth, is to expand your consciousness, by gradually encompassing larger and larger “frames of reference,” greater and greater dimensions of awareness. You do this by living, through time.

It is precisely your experience of the interpenetrating, concentric cycles of planetary time that introduces you to the multidimensional universe.

Planetary Returns as Life Markers

Each planet takes a certain amount of time to return to the original position it held at your birth. The first return of any planet to the original birth position is a significant event. It marks the time when that energy has fulfilled its basic orbit and sphere of influence. As the planet continues in its circular path, that energy then becomes a “constant,” an established part of your inner life. Your consciousness and experience then move beyond that planet and begin to attune to the next planet out that has not yet completed its first cycle.

Before a planet returns, it absorbs our attention. There seems to be no end to its influence and it goes on forever. After it returns, we have already absorbed the basic lesson it has to offer. (Venus, for example, teaches the lesson of relating; Mercury, of thinking and speaking and gesturing; Mars, of independence and spontaneity.) After the first return, further cycles of any planet are used to continue the new habit it has taught us and to refine that habit in various ways. (Just as a child only has to learn to walk once; from then on, that child learns to run, and may go on to dance, ice skate or do gymnastics. All of these skills are refinements of the child’s basic ability to walk.)

Life as a Developmental Process

After we have completed the first cycle of any planetary energy, we no longer need to focus on it in quite the same way. Our attention is drawn elsewhere; we begin to be fascinated by something larger, more complex, something that will take even more time to master

Our unfolding experience of the cycles of the “inner” (from the Moon to Mars) and the “social” planets — from (Jupiter to Saturn) — is a developmental process, from birth to approximately 30 years of age.

The Moon has approximately a 30-day cycle. Saturn has approximately a 30-year cycle. In between these two extremes lie the cycles of Mercury (116 days), Venus (224 days), the Sun (365 days), Mars (18 months to 2 years), and Jupiter (12 years). Unless we die at a young age, we experience the full cycles of all seven of these energies at least once. This means that each of their influences can be known to us as a whole; we can incorporate each of them fully into our lives.

Personal Planets: Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars

The *Moon* has a 30-day cycle. Before you were a month old, your cries and movements seemed somewhat random, very difficult for your mother to understand. After one month your feelings and your behavior were more connected and predictable; you started to learn how to manipulate your environment in different ways in order to meet your various needs and desires.

The Moon symbolizes our instinctive needs, our emotions, and the subconscious conditioning stemming from infancy and early childhood. Your “feeling nature” is represented by the Moon.

The first return of each planetary energy can be understood in the same way as that of the Moon. Once again, the first time that energy returns, the meaning of that energy as a whole is incorporated into the life.

Mercury and *Venus* both make their first cycles inside the first year of life, encompassed by the *Sun*’s cycle of one year. Within that first year, the infant becomes familiar with and begins to deliberately sound language and gesture (Mercury), develops taste and preferences (Venus), and begins to exhibit his or her own inherent nature (Sun). At the end of that first year, the unfocused newborn has evolved into a toddler with a decided character.

It takes not quite two years for *Mars* to complete its full circle. Mars symbolizes vitality, our temper, willfulness and urge for independence all of which characterize the so-called “terrible twos,” that period in your life when your most common words were “me,” “mine,” and “NO!”

Thus, fully five different energies complete their first cycles during the first two years of life: Moon, Venus, Mercury, Sun, and Mars. This coincides with our common sense idea that people change most during those first two years.

Between two years and twelve years, all these cycles make many more returns, as we deepen our capacities to function in all the ways that they symbolize. Then, when we are twelve years old, something new happens . . .

Social Planets: Jupiter and Saturn

At twelve, another frame of reference clicks in for the first time, when the 12-year cycle of *Jupiter* closes. Jupiter symbolizes the values and attitudes you adopt as a member of a community larger than your immediate family. Twelve years is the period of time right before puberty sets in, when you switched allegiance from family values to peer values.

Puberty and its rebellion against authority is symbolized by Saturn's half-cycle, when it opposes, or moves 180° across from, its birth position, somewhere between 14 and 15 years.

The final planetary cycle we can experience as a whole within one lifetime is that of *Saturn* somewhere between 28 and 30 years.

The “Saturn Return”

The first Saturn Return is potentially the most important turning point in a person's life. Before the first Saturn cycle completes itself, our lives seem to offer unlimited options. They look as if they will go on forever. We tend to feel immortal.

During the year or two before Saturn completes its first cycle we sense something changing. What was formerly endless now begins to look decidedly finite. Whereas before we were trying to look and act older, to be “taken seriously,” now we *are* older, we can see it in our faces, feel it in our bones. And our life, we now realize, is serious, serious business. We realize our time is limited (one of the meanings of Saturn is “limitation”), and that we had better decide exactly what we want to accomplish in the time we have left. (Some other meanings for Saturn are “seriousness,” “plans,” “discipline,” “form,” “goals,” and “time.”)

The completion of the first Saturn Return marks the first time when we sense a pressing inner directive to take stock of our lives. For the first time we can actually look back to see where we began and loop forward to now. We assess what we have and have not accomplished — and whether or not it has been worth the effort! We scrutinize the authorities and the rules by which we have been living — and decide which of them, if any, we will continue to follow. Tentatively, we move towards full autonomy, towards taking real responsibility for ourselves. We begin to make the first of those decisions that will determine the course of our lives for the next 30 years.

During the first cycle of Saturn we evaluate ourselves by comparing ourselves to others. During the second cycle we measure ourselves against our own “inner potential.” As the

first Saturn cycle was the cycle of adjustment to — or rebellion from — social “reality,” so the second cycle, when consciously enacted, becomes the cycle of individual identity and productivity.

The third cycle of Saturn begins somewhere between the ages of 56 and 60 and was, in ages past, recognized as the cycle of wisdom. This makes sense, because, obviously, once a person has lived through two of these long cycles he or she has experienced much of what life has to offer and gained hard-won acceptance of the way things are. This ancient understanding of the third cycle of Saturn has been gradually re-emerging into contemporary culture since the 1990s through the reintroduction of concepts such as “elder” and “crone.” (Cf: www.cronemagazine.com, www.cronescounsel.org).

Saturn and the process of “Individuation”

Before the first Saturn Return we operate in time, linear time, endlessly reaching into the future, straight ahead. After the first Saturn Return our experience of “time” subtly changes. We have now lived through a large chunk of life and felt how, in a very real sense, time circled back on itself. We “started over” at 30, we began again, this time consciously, knowing that each thought, each word, each deed had its consequences, that it shaped our course irrevocably. Our formative years are over now, it is time to build the “forms” that reflect “who we think we really are.”

Having completed yet another cycle for the first time, we have been “launched” again. We are now unconsciously attuning to the next larger sphere of planetary influence. But this time there is little possibility of completion. The next cycle is Uranus, 84 years long. We catch a glimpse of eternity as we are propelled into our thirties, we tap into a dimension of timelessness — the “eternal Now,” that which exists beyond linear time, beyond the world of form.

Depending on our level of awareness, from now on we have the possibility of living in the world in a different manner. No longer identifying with the forms of that world, or even, with our own form nature, we may now be “in the world, but not of it.” We may stop time, at any moment, and hear the universe sing. Observe the cosmic drama. Take part in the dance of life.

From an esoteric point of view, the first Saturn Return is a sacred rite of initiation.

Before its first return this Saturn energy operates like a wall, or force field, keeping us from venturing out beyond what society teaches us is real. By limiting our horizons, it also assures that we will build a social identity, an individual ego. Through the time-span of one Saturn cycle, we learn to function as a separate and recognizable entity in the social world.

After Saturn's first return, this same Saturn energy can now function as a gateway, or channel, allowing energies from beyond that force field to enter the life in a way that does not destroy the ego.

Jung called this the "process of individuation." In developmental astrology this process refers to the individual's growing awareness of the Self as Soul.

Those individuals who consciously choose to start over at the first Saturn Return are making a decision to transcend their social conditioning, the limitations of their personal egos. This decision frees them to encounter a universe much larger than the one society presently accepts.

Most people do not take this step.

For most people, Saturn serves as a wall their entire lives, separating the inside from the outside. Clinging to their individual "identities" as well as the cycle they have just completed, they try to turn back the clock, remain forever young, and shield themselves from any experience which might threaten who they are desperate to think they are. This can make for a very lonely life.

Some who shied away from launching themselves into a larger universe after the first Saturn return feel almost forced to do so after Saturn returns the second time — as the creative alternative to despair and isolation. This is not surprising, given that in our society, especially women are considered to "lose value" over time, to the point where, after sixty, they recede into invisibility. Indeed, prime time for women, still mostly valued in terms of youthful beauty, peaks prior to Saturn's first return at thirty!

At whatever age they make the leap, individuals who do pass through the "ring-pass-not" of Saturn find themselves in another world. A world that is governed by different laws. A world wherein the individual soul is recognized as both the center of the universe and at the same time one small speck in an immense and glorious creation. A world of paradox, where nothing is as it seems, and everything is more, much more, than could ever be imagined.

This world is symbolized by the cycles of what are called the three "outer planets:" Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto, with cycles of 84, 165, and 248 years respectively.

Outer Planets: Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto

With the possible exception of Uranus, the cycles of the outer planets are longer than our lifetimes. We cannot complete their full cycles; therefore, we cannot fully understand them, control them, predict them, repeat them, or incorporate them into our lives. These energies remain forever mysterious; they speak of nature and her laws, deeper and vaster than our scientific culture has mastered.

Since these energies take so long to complete their cycles, they stay in one place a long time. Both their positions and the patterns they make with one another serve as generational signatures. These outer planets represent the energies of the evolving collective unconscious mind and signify, usually, mass conditions and events.

Usually, but not always.

We all know the saying, “there is a fine line between genius and insanity.” This saying is true, and both these states of consciousness are correlated with the functions of the outer planets. Those individuals whom we call “geniuses” interact with these energies creatively, consciously. The others, unfortunately, are lost souls; they have been overwhelmed by these same energies, their egos shattering under the impact of forces beyond their control.

Who knows why some people give up and “go crazy,” while others are able to rise to the occasion. Who knows why some are curious enough and courageous enough to use these challenging times to encounter and begin to express previously unknown qualities of their own character? These qualities are so astounding and so powerful, that we would never believe it, were we not to surrender to the experience of discovering our own genius! And what, then, is genius, but the experience of opening more fully to the endlessly creative energies of the universe?

My First Saturn Return

My decision to seriously study this language came at my first Saturn Return, when I discovered that the transits of the outer planets had coincided with the timing of a powerful transformational time within my own life — so powerful that for awhile I was terrified that I truly had “gone crazy.” Had I, during that intensely difficult, disturbing, and exhilarating time in my mid-to late-twenties, consulted with an esoterically-oriented astrologer, I would have been presented with a larger — outer planet — context for understanding. This would have gifted me with an opportunity to see and feel the meaning and purpose within my strange experiences; it would have helped me to release fear and embrace the unprecedented growth potential of that time even more fully than I did.

Throughout these decades as a consulting astrologer, over and over and over again I have seen stunned shock and relief wash over troubled faces when I note that our appointment coincides with difficult and therefore challenging outer planet action in their lives. What made no sense begins to make sense. The light dawns. Not only are their feelings about what is happening to them acknowledged, but these feelings are put into a new framework of meaning so awesome that it takes the breath away

These individuals, on a soul level, have decided that it is now time to move beyond time, beyond the ring-pass-not of Saturn’s boundary system. By opening their Saturn channel to outer planet energies, they are learning to trust the universe — and their own

unconscious minds. They expand beyond beyond left-brain logic and reason — to right-brain mystery, magic, miracle; to the human capacity for continuous transformation.

In order to interact with outer planet energies creatively, we must release our identification with the ego, and allow the soul to take over. Within this new focus, the ego becomes transparent, something to be seen through.

Rather than being that with which we identify, by which we recognize ourselves, the ego then functions as an instrument, or ally, a tool to help the soul achieve its ends while on earth. Serving as a channel, a discipline, “Saturn” then helps us ground our native capacity to both surrender to and transmit higher forces.

As the untamed ego’s need is service to self, so the soul’s need is service to others. Individuals who have expanded their awareness beyond the limitations of Saturn realize they are meant to devote their genius to the service of humanity and the planet in this most difficult and magnificent passage into the new age, beyond ego, beyond war, beyond separation.

Astrology and Peace

When understood and practiced from within the esoteric world-view, astrology has the capacity to serve as a universal language, bonding us to one another. This ecology of the stars can both help us to appreciate the wealth of untapped potential lying inside each of us, and to accept and encourage the richness of our diversity.

Used as a predictive art, astrology teaches us to tune in to our own natures, to become one with what is and what is unfolding. By pointing out times when energies wax and wane, astrology helps us to describe the possibilities within any given moment. It encourages achievement during times of high promise and it teaches patience when energies lie fallow.

Here we sense intimations of the eternal message: peace on earth, good will to all. If each of us were to express our original natures fully and naturally, then the life force within us would flow freely and there would be harmony within. Were we all at peace with ourselves, we would find it easy and natural to harmonize with others, to demonstrate good will. The famous Pythagorean “harmony of the spheres” would be echoed, here on Earth. And what a joy that would be!

APPENDIX

A (VERY) SHORT HISTORY OF ASTROLOGY

The precise origins of the language of astrology are unknown. Astrology goes back at least to the Chaldeans of Mesopotamia, and from there recedes into the mists of prerecorded time. The first specific astrological records are dated 7th century B.C. Egyptian star charts exist from around 4200 B.C.

Languages vary according to the needs of the people who use them. Just as Eskimos have hundreds of words for different qualities of snow and ice, so did ancient peoples look to the heavens to help them understand and plan for living on Earth. The Great Pyramid, Stonehenge, the Serpent Mound in Ohio, and other ancient monuments were originally used for astronomical purposes, to plot the timing of solstices and equinoxes.

We separate astronomy from astrology, and consider the former “scientific,” the latter “superstitious.” Such a distinction would have puzzled the ancients; for them, understanding the heavens helped insure survival. Knowing the date of the vernal equinox (the first day of spring), for example, was of obvious benefit for spring planting.

For the ancients, astronomy and astrology were one, and both conceived within a larger sacred dimension. Solstice and equinox events structured the calendar year, and these portentous cardinal moments called for religious ceremonies celebrating the union of the various members of the entire natural kingdom, including the skies above. All of life was sacred, and the entire universe alive.

Today, the few remaining indigenous, land-based peoples — Eskimos, Hopis, Australian Aborigines, the native peoples of the Americas — still assume an all-pervasive spiritual dimension to the natural world that sustained their ancestors for millennia.

Even as late as the 17th century, Copernicus, Kepler and Newton were astronomers who also studied astrology and other occult matters. Yet the separation of astronomy from astrology dates from this time. To understand how that happened we must look beneath the specific discoveries of these early scientists to the world-view of Newtonian science that emerged during the 17th century.

The new “scientific method” decreed that only those “facts” which were “empirically verifiable” by our five outer senses could be called knowledge. The “facts” (of astronomy) were obvious — the positions and motions of the planets in the heavens. The (astrological) meaning of those “facts,” their relevance to earthly and human affairs, was symbolic, “unverifiable” and therefore “meaningless” — according to the new scientific doctrine. Thus did astronomy divorce itself from astrology, which then gradually fell into

disfavor, going underground for three hundred years, only to begin to re-emerge in the last half of the 20th century.

Unfortunately, although Newtonian physics has been replaced by Einsteinian relativity, the underlying world-view of Newtonian science and its methodology is still so sacrosanct that even some contemporary astrologers do not question it. Instead, they attempt, through inductive research and statistics, to “make astrology scientific.” The work of Gauquelin, for example, is cited for its “statistically significant” results in showing the emphasis of certain planets near the horizon and midheaven of the charts for famous people of certain professions (e.g. Mars for athletes, Saturn for scientists). While this kind of study may provide astrological data as another grist for the scientific mill, it ignores and even, at times, subtly repudiates the essentially symbolic, mysterious core of astrology which makes it so profound and so elusive to those who would try to pin it down.

Contemporary Astrology

During the 19th century, Newton’s theory reigned supreme, and so did the world-view within which it was embedded. Scientific knowledge was sure, certain; and life was viewed dogmatically, moralistically. Whatever happened, there was a definite way to look at it, good or bad, black or white. Not surprisingly, those who studied astrology lent it a decidedly Victorian cast, and the literature from that time reflects it.

The 20th century witnessed the Einsteinian revolution in science and its aftermath, the slow, gradual crumbling of the Newtonian world-view. As the new millennium opens, we continue to incorporate the pioneering work of Freud and Jung in depth psychology, Piaget in developmental psychology, Kohler in perception theory, Polanyi and Kuhn in the philosophy of science, the drug-induced discoveries of ‘60s “consciousness-expansion,” the parallels between the new quantum physics and mysticism, and the spiritual meeting of East and West. All these influences and many more have built a foundation for the many new voices now outlining what is emerging as a revolution in consciousness, a brand new — and much more relativistic (and thus Einsteinian) — world-view.

The Newtonian view of the world focused on conscious, “clear and distinct” knowledge. Now we are becoming more realistic; we recognize that our conscious beliefs lie embedded within a confused, unsystematic matrix of unconscious attitudes, hunches, prejudices, complexes, genetic programs, conditioned responses — far cry from the clarity and order of the Newtonian ideal. The Socratic maxim, “Know Thyself,” is once again becoming the standard of excellence — and a certain humility in the face of our inner complexity is replacing the naïve Newtonian goal of certainty in knowledge.

Within the past 35 years, perhaps the most crucial development in our cultural understanding has been the continuing rise in the status of women, and the valuing of “the feminine,” i.e., right-brained, intuitive, non-rational, synthesizing modes of thinking. Despite the last reactionary gasp of one-sided dogmatic patriarchal domination in politics

and religion — and perhaps because of it — humanity is having to learn how to place logical, rational, analytic, left-brained science within this larger, more spacious context.

We are gradually moving towards a recognition of the “scientific method” as one among many ways of exploring reality. Furthermore, we now acknowledge that science is not as “objective” as it claims to be; that science, like all other human endeavors, is subject to both personal and cultural prejudice as well as outright fraud. Moreover, more and more of us are now lamenting the fact that science, far from improving our lives, has often placed its handmaiden, technology, between us and our lives. Science, which began as the unfettered study of the laws of nature, has created a non-material, virtual world.

Parallel to, and resonating with, this re-valuation of both science and the feminine has been a growing appreciation of the richness and complexity of nature — both the nature of our own physical bodies, and of the natural world around us. Both environmental studies in ecology and the many new healing modes are oriented towards understanding the laws which govern whole and open systems.

Astrology, as practiced going forward into the 21st century, incorporates and reflects all these new and more varied and subtle approaches to human character and destiny. More than perhaps any other discipline, the language of astrology has the capacity to study aspects of character as viewed from within the integrity of the whole.

Despite three centuries of official banishment, astrology is alive and well and always has been, at least in the serious study and practice of those whose minds and hearts are open to values which lie beyond the limitations of the crumbling, but still official Newtonian world-view. An unusually spacious language, astrology is capable of continually incorporating ever-shifting cultural points of view. This vigorous and resilient ability to adapt itself to changing cultural currents may be one cue to why it has survived for so many thousands of years.