

Astrology 101: A Basic Reference Guide

*A primer on the basic concepts underlying traditional Western astrology,
prepared by Spindlestar*

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The Planets

Our Basic Operating Assumption

Every thing and activity on Earth falls under the governance of one of the seven classical planets—the five planets visible to the naked eye (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn), and the two lights (the Sun and Moon). These planets (Grk. *planetes*, “wanderers”) move in our view across the sky, against the backdrop of fixed stars, rising each day in the east and setting in the west.

In a polytheistic version of this worldview, the planets are considered gods in their own right; monotheistic cultures typically demote them to angels instead. Either way, it is important to remember that the “planets” we are talking about here are *not* the actual physical lumps of rock or gas floating in space, but rather, powerful celestial spirits with influence over the progression of Fate, whose relationships to each other and periods of relative strength or weakness can be tracked and charted *via* the motion of the physical space-lumps. This knowledge allows us to understand what Fate has in store for us and to plan our actions around those ups and downs; **fundamentally, astrology is not a personality test, but a system of divination.**

Some Non-Essential Notes

- In the lists that follow, the planets will be listed in what’s called the *Chaldean order*, which orders the planets by their speed (relative to the fixed stars) when viewed by the naked eye. If you know the order of the solar system, you already know this order too; just replace the Earth with the Sun (because we’re working from a geocentric perspective) and add the Moon at the end. The *descending* Chaldean order starts from Saturn and ends at the Moon; the *ascending* order goes the opposite way. Sometimes the luminaries (i.e. the Sun and Moon) are broken out of the order and placed together.
- In explaining the significations of the planets I have drawn parallels to the Greek and Roman gods from which the planets draw their names, and if you are familiar with those cultures these are very useful touchpoints for understanding the basic personalities and spheres of influence of the planets, but bear in mind that the planetary spirits are not necessarily equivalent in every particular to their namesake.
- Traditional astrology does not account for the trans-Saturnian planets (Uranus, Neptune, and the dwarf planets), which are not visible to the naked eye and which move so slowly in any case that whatever effects they might have would be spread over an entire generation. (Modern psychological systems of astrology have attempted, with what I consider to be limited success, to fit them in somewhere, but I have other objections to those systems anyway.) In my personal astrological work, I treat the trans-Saturnian planets as more akin to fixed stars, and consider them only rarely, generally in cases of direct conjunction with a faster-moving planet that can “carry the light” to Earth.

The Seven Planets

♄ **Saturn brings death.** Endings, limitations, and boundaries fall under Saturn's rulership, as well as those poisonous, noxious, or otherwise unpleasant things that are inimical to human life. She¹ is stern and prone to melancholy, though disciplined and thoughtful at her best. The symbol of Saturn is a stylized scythe or sickle—the planet is named for the Greek god Kronos, a god of passing time and of the harvest, but is also sometimes associated with the goddess Demeter.

♃ **Jupiter brings prosperity.** Wealth and health and social influence all fall under Jupiter's remit; he has an expansive and generous nature, though he can be less kind to those unwilling or unable to work within the accepted social hierarchy. The planet is named for the Greek god Zeus Pater, king and father of the gods; his symbol can be interpreted as a king's scepter.

♂ **Mars brings strife.** Named for Greek Ares, the god of war, Mars is a brash and rough-spoken planet of passion, ambition, and conflict. While at his best he can be called on as a brave protector or a spur to action, he is often more of a bully than a guardian. His symbol represents a spear and shield.

☉ **The Sun brings vitality.** Called Sol in Latin and Helios in Greek, the light of the Sun is the cosmos' equivalent to the animating spark of the human spirit or soul. Noble and charismatic, sometimes to the point of arrogance, he illuminates every space he's in and captivates the eye. His symbol shows the disc of the sun surrounded by its corona.

♀ **Venus brings pleasure.** Fertility and luxury are hers; much like her Greek counterpart Aphrodite, she rules sex, beauty, and harmony. She is the archetypal lover and mother, though at her worst is inclined to vanity and indolence. Her symbol has been variously interpreted as a copper hand-mirror, the Egyptian *ankh* that represents life, or even an extremely stylized vulva.

☿ **Mercury brings communication.** Hermes, messenger-god of the roads and all who use them, rules over thought, technology, travel, and trade both literal and metaphorical. Honest merchant and guileful thief in equal measure, Mercury moves fast and talks faster. Their² symbol is the caduceus, the traditional herald's staff.

☾ **The Moon brings change.** Sometimes called Luna (Latin) or Selene (Greek). The Moon is the closest of all planets to the Earth, and reflects the light of all the others toward us; in almost all forms of astrology the position and condition of the Moon is the first thing looked for when evaluating a chart. She sets the tides in motion with her constant waxing and waning, and the ever-changing material world and body are also so affected by her influence. She is represented symbolically in her crescent phase.

Malefic and Benefic Planets

One of the simplest categorizations of the planets is by whether a strong influence from them on one's life is typically something one *wants* or not.

Conflict and limitation are unavoidable and sometimes necessary, but they are never pleasant or desired; thus, Mars and Saturn in all their positions are called **malefic** planets. Wealth and pleasure are things humans do generally want more of in their lives; thus, Jupiter and Venus in all their positions are called **benefic** planets.

The intellect is neutral and can be used for good or for ill depending on context; thus, Mercury is treated as benefic when paired with a benefic planet and as malefic when paired with a malefic planet. The Moon is sometimes considered benefic when waxing—because the waxing moon is change that *increases* or adds—and malefic when waning—because the waning moon is change that *decreases* or takes away. The Sun is benefic from far away, but is treated as malefic up close, because his light “burns away” or overshadows the other planet.

¹ This is an idiosyncratic usage; traditional sources refer to Saturn as “he”.

² This is a new usage (but becoming more popular). Traditional sources refer to Mercury as “he”.

Essential Dignity

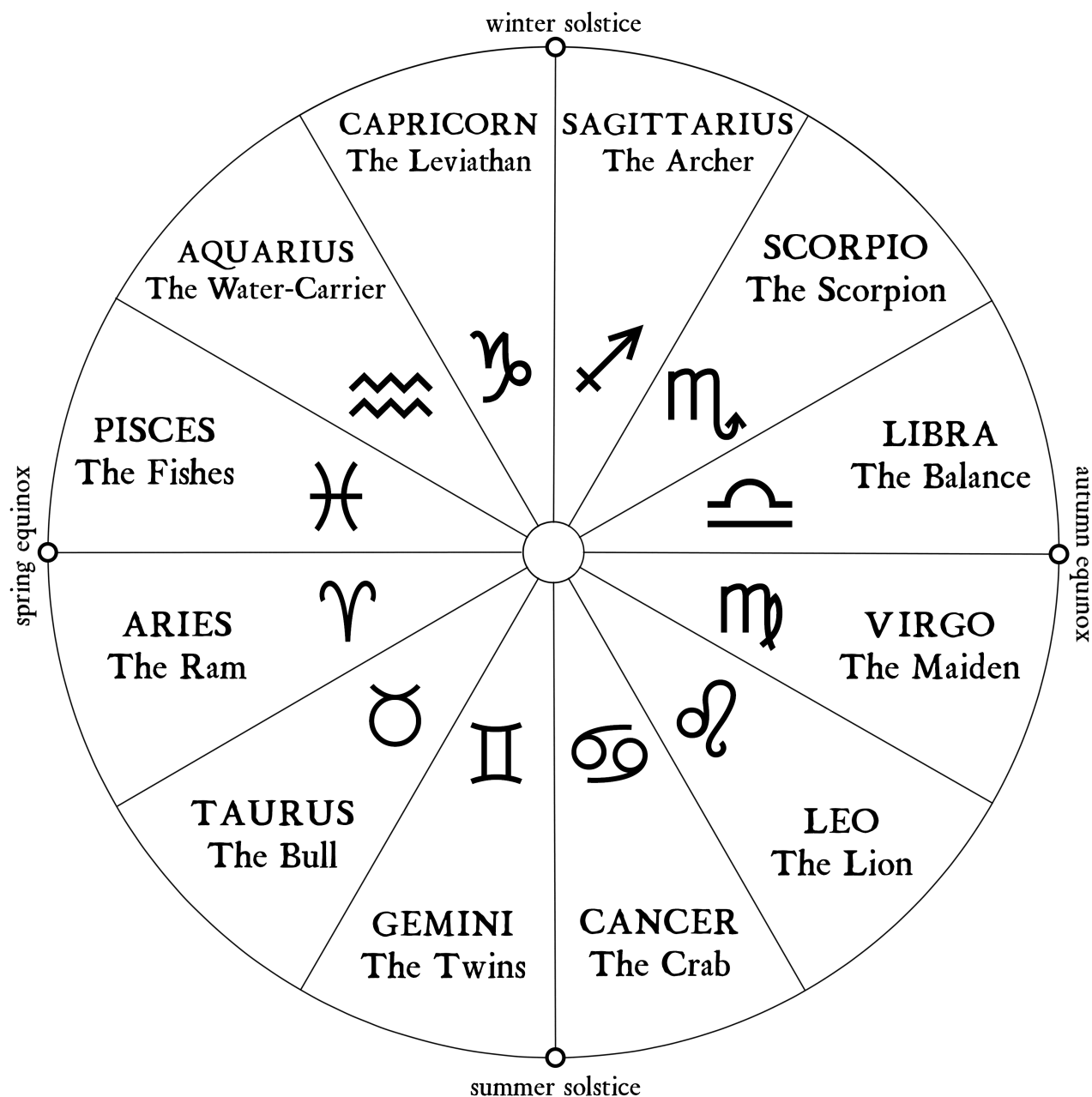
The Signs of the Zodiac

Even as the planets move east-to-west over the course of a day (as the Earth rotates on its own axis), the backdrop of fixed stars behind them moves—from west to east, over the course of an entire year (as the Earth orbits around the Sun). This allows us to talk about the spatial *location* of a planet in terms of elapsed *time*.

The point of the sky that the Sun is in at the exact moment of the northern hemisphere's spring equinox is set to the 0° point of our circle; then the 90°, 180°, and 270° points are likewise set to the other equinox and the two solstices. Based on these points, the sun's ecliptic is divided into 12 equal wedges of 30° each. These wedges are called the ***signs of the zodiac***, and they are what we use to identify the location of any celestial body, and to transfer the sky onto our abstracted astrological charts.

The signs of the zodiac have mnemonic names as follows—

Fig. 1: The 12 signs of the zodiac.

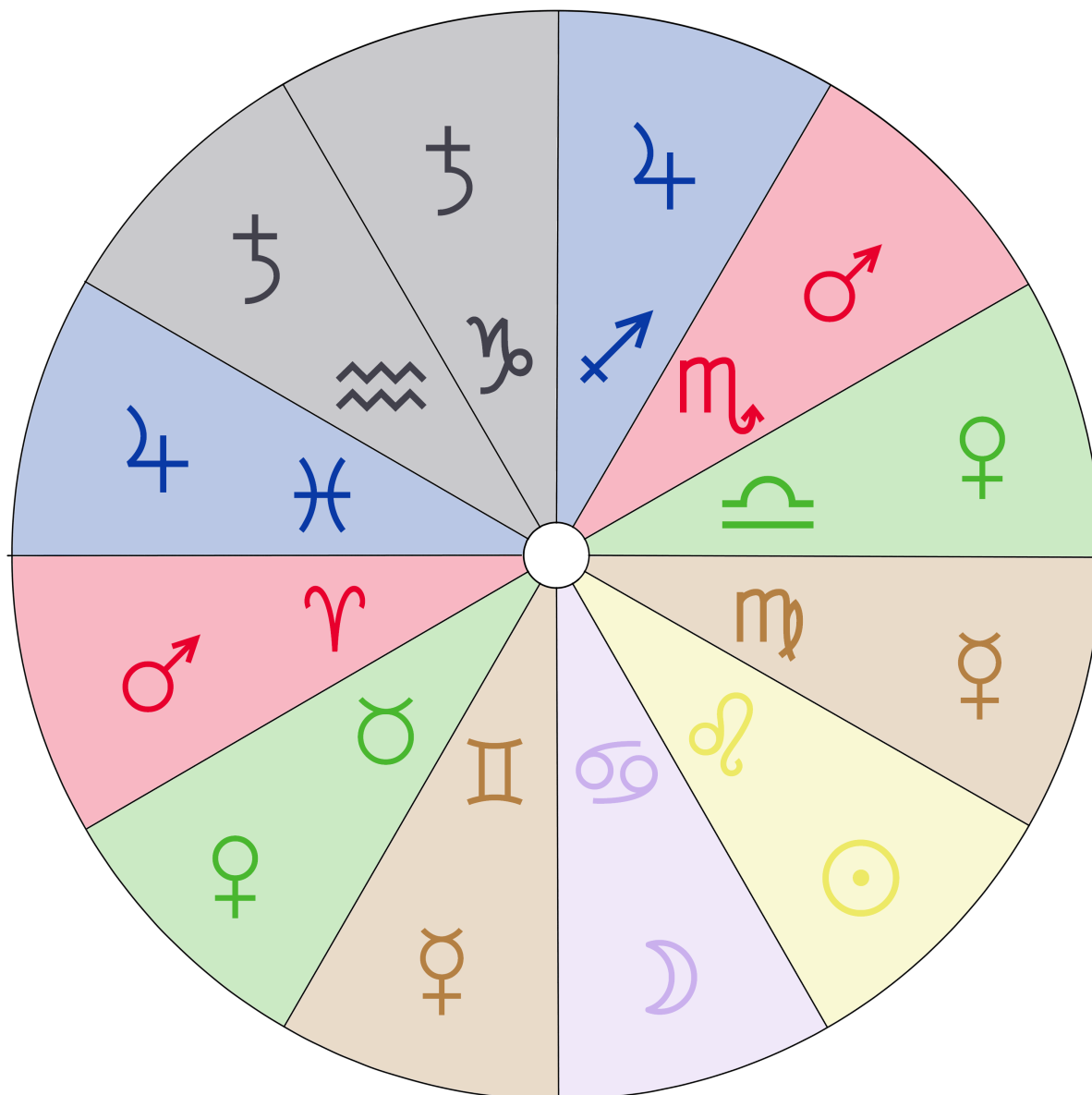


Planetary Rulerships

Each sign is *ruled* by—that is, takes some of its nature from—one of the planets; or, put another way, each planet rules, and imparts some of its nature to, one or two signs. This is determined via a quite pleasing pattern:

The two signs where the Sun is located during the height of summer—Cancer, which begins at the June solstice, and Leo, which falls at the end of July and beginning of August—are ruled by the two luminaries, the Moon and Sun. Then, the two signs on either side of these (Gemini and Virgo) are given to Mercury; the two signs on either side of *those* to Venus, and so on around.

Fig. 2: Planetary rulerships of the zodiac



Regarding the Four Elements

The ancient, medieval, and early modern worldview held that everything in the cosmos was composed of varying combinations of four fundamental qualities. Everything in the universe:

- has either a tendency to rise and expand (we call this tendency “heat”) or a tendency to settle and contract (“coldness”), *and*,
- has either a tendency to flow freely until it takes on the shape of its container (“wetness” or “moisture”) or a tendency to maintain its own discrete shape and resist attempts to deform it (“dryness”).

Even the planets themselves exhibit these qualities—Jupiter is temperately warm and moist, while Saturn is extremely cold and dry. But the expression of these qualities you are probably already most familiar with that of the classical “four elements”.

Things that are both hot and dry—rising, expansive, active, separative, and resistant—are of the elemental nature of **fire**. In everyday life, the element of fire is expressed in one’s burning desires, passions, and force of will, as well as the spark of vital energy that fuels those desires; **fire is the element that acts**.

Things that are both dry and cold—separative, resistant, settling, contracting, and passive—are of the elemental nature of **earth**. In everyday life, the element of earth is expressed in the body, in those things that are practical, material, physical, and grounded; **earth is the element that stays**.

Things that are both cold and wet—settling, contracting, passive, flowing, and connective—are of the elemental nature of **water**. In everyday life, the element of water is expressed in the chaos of one’s internal thoughts and emotions; **water is the element that feels**.

Things that are both wet and hot—flowing, connective, rising, expanding, and active—are of the elemental nature of **air**. In everyday life, the element of air is expressed through intellectual and social pursuits, those thoughts that are shared and discussed with others; **air is the element that speaks**.

Elemental and Modal Significations of the Signs

Each sign has one of the four elements associated with it, assigned in the order FIRE–EARTH–AIR–WATER beginning with Aries. This adds an additional layer of interpretation to the way a sign reflects the nature of its planetary ruler. Consider, for example, the signs of Taurus and Libra: both are ruled by Venus, but Taurus is a sign of Earth, the ‘grounded’ and materially-oriented element, while Libra is a sign of Air, the element of thought and speech. So although both signs partake in the nature of Venus—and any planet passing through these signs will have its influence flavored in a Venus-y way—Taurus reflects an earthier, more physical Venus (luxury-as-comfort), while Libra is an airier, more social Venus (luxury-as-aesthetic).

The third layer of a sign’s traditional meaning is called **modality**, and this is derived from a sign’s position within a season, reckoned according to the 1-zodiacal-degree-per-day passage of the Sun through the year. Recall that four signs (Aries, Cancer, Libra, and Capricorn) have their beginnings set to the points of the equinoxes and solstices. These signs are called **cardinal** signs (*cardinalus*, in Latin, means a hinge or pivot). The cardinal signs have the Sun in them at the beginning of a season—Aries in late March and early April, Cancer in late June and early July, and so forth—and so a cardinal sign has an “initiating” or “pushing things into action” sort of feeling to it.

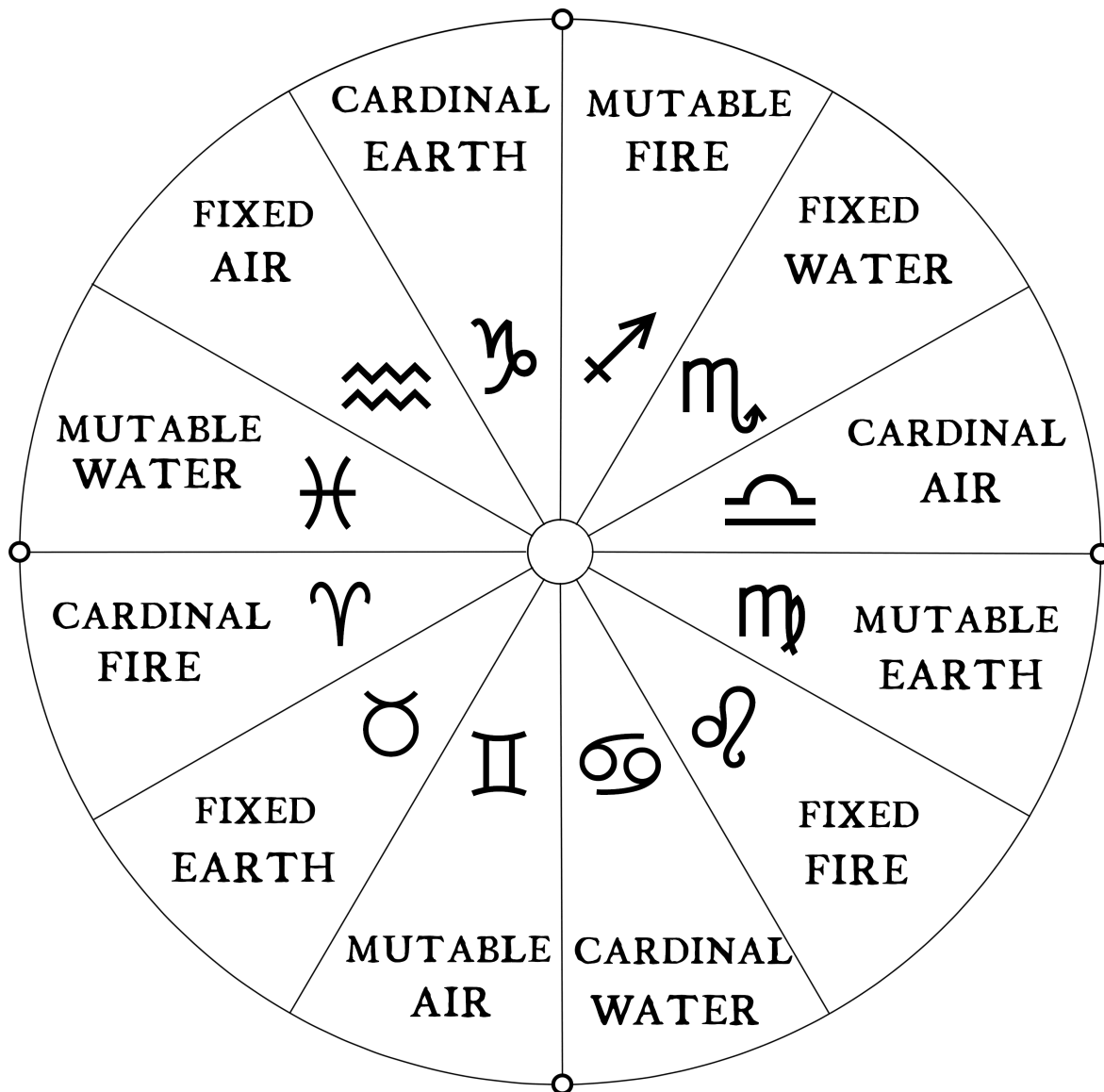
The signs occurring after a cardinal sign, in the middle of a season—Taurus, Leo, Scorpio, and Aquarius—are called **fixed** signs, and their nature is to *keep going*: fixed signs are heavily flavored with a sense of forward momentum and resistance to change.

The remaining signs, Gemini, Virgo, Sagittarius, and Pisces, are called **mutable** signs. Occurring in the transitional phase between one season and another, these signs are colored with changeability, flexibility and adaptability, a tendency to waver back and forth between the ends of a spectrum rather than remaining at a single extreme.

Thinking about the way that both element and modality color and are colored by each other and their associated planets is an important part of mastering this system of looking at the world. Consider Aries and Scorpio—both ruled by Mars, but one a cardinal fire sign and one a fixed water sign. Aries is a particularly bold and forceful Mars, while Scorpio is Mars at his most stubborn and volatile. Mars will strive to bring conflict either way, but how he goes about it in each sign will vary dramatically!

There are plenty of other ways of adding additional nuance to the signs—things like sect³, associations with various parts of the body, or a bewildering array of grouping with names like “humane” or “double-bodied” or “barren”—but if you have a grasp on the sign’s element, modality, and planetary rulership, you pretty much have all of the important stuff.

Fig. 3: Elements and modalities associated with the signs.



³ To be very brief: planets can be categorized as “diurnal” (stronger in the day) or “nocturnal” (stronger in the night), and are considered slightly more dignified in a sign they rule if it matches their own sect than if it doesn’t. Sign sect is assigned starting with nocturnal Cancer (house of the Moon) and diurnal Leo (house of the Sun) to match their luminaries, then alternating around.

Dignity and Debility: Judging a Planet's Strength

Picture the planets as actors, and the signs they move through as the sets against which they act their scenes. The sign “colors” the influence of a planet, because it dictates the resources and methods which the planet has available to it. We know that due to this coloration, planetary influence is stronger and more of the nature of the planet in certain signs; we call this **dignity** (or *being dignified*). Planetary influence is weaker and more constrained in other signs; we call this **debility** (or *being debilitated*). The umbrella term for these conditions is **essential dignity**—“essential” because it depends on the planet’s absolute location, rather than its relative motion; the way a planet’s nature is expressed in different places is an inherent part of the “essence” of the planet.

There are many types of essential dignity, some lesser and some greater considerations in a chart. A good start for a beginner is to track the four most prominent types of essential dignity: **domicile**, **detriment**, **exaltation**, and **exile**.

Domicile and Detriment

As discussed above, each planet **rules** one or two signs of the zodiac, imparting something of their own nature to that sign. Thus, when a planet is in a sign which it rules—which we call being **domiciled**—it is unconstrained and has all of its preferred resources and methods of action available to it. It is as if the planet were in its own home.

Saturn	Jupiter	Mars	Venus	Mercury	Luna	Sol
Capricorn, Aquarius	Sagittarius, Pisces	Scorpio, Aries	Libra, Taurus	Virgo, Gemini	Cancer	Leo

Each planet is **detrimented** in the signs opposite their signs of domicile. A planet in detriment is like someone in a foreign country, without easy access to the resources they are accustomed to. A detrimented planet may show its influence in unconventional ways, and that influence is highly constrained.

Saturn	Jupiter	Mars	Venus	Mercury	Luna	Sol
Cancer, Leo	Virgo, Gemini	Libra, Taurus	Scorpio, Aries	Sagittarius, Pisces	Capricorn	Aquarius

Exaltation and Exile

Each planet is **exalted** in one sign. An exalted planet is like an honored guest in the house of a friend. I have heard, though have not personally verified, that dignity by exaltation tends to bring faster results, but dignity by sign rulership brings results that are longer-lasting.

Exaltations pattern slightly less intuitively than the rulerships—they seem to have some relation to the planet’s highest point of *declination*, or angle north or south of the ecliptic—but they are easy enough to memorize by rote.

Saturn	Jupiter	Mars	Venus	Mercury	Luna	Sol
Libra	Cancer	Capricorn	Pisces	Virgo ⁴	Taurus	Aries

Each planet is **exiled** or *in fall* in the sign opposite its sign of exaltation. A planet in exile is like someone imprisoned in the house of an enemy.

Saturn	Jupiter	Mars	Venus	Mercury	Luna	Sol
Aries	Capricorn	Cancer	Virgo	Pisces	Scorpio	Libra

⁴ Yes, Mercury is both domiciled and exalted in Virgo; this is a historical artifact of how exaltations were originally calculated. At one time, a planet was only considered exalted at a specific location *within* a sign (in Mercury’s case, 15° Virgo), but the signification eventually spread to the entire sign. Whether I treat the exaltation or the domicile as taking precedence depends on what form of astrology I’m doing.

Peregrine

A planet that is not notably dignified or debilitated⁵ may be called *peregrine* (“wandering”). Its influence is not particularly strong or weak; there’s nothing actively constraining them, but they don’t really have anything helping them out either.

Accidental Dignity

Aspects: Planetary Alliances

In contrast to essential dignity, which is determined by the absolute location of a planet in the zodiac, *accidental* dignity is determined by the *relative* location and motion of a planet—whether relative to other planets, to the planet itself, or to the observer.

There are many kinds of accidental dignity, but the first one we will discuss is the *aspect*. This is a term for the angle that one planet makes to another. If we think about our assumption that the planets are to some degree a “heavenly court” of divine beings, it is only natural to also assume that these beings maintain a constantly shifting web of temporary alliances and enmities. It is by charting aspects that we can track these relationships.

- When two planets are at a 60° angle from each other⁶, we say that they are *sextile* each other (represented with a symbol that looks like this ✎).
- When they form a 90° angle, they are *square* (⊟).
- When they form a 120° angle, they are *trine* (Δ).
- At a 180° angle—directly opposite from each other—they are, of course, *opposed* or *in opposition* (♌).
- When two planets are right next to each other, they are called *conjunct* or *in conjunction* (♌).
- Any other angle is referred to as *inconjunct* or *in aversion*.

Much as we sort planets into malefic and benefic based on their nature, we sort aspects into “easy” and “hard” based on the nature of the relationship.

The trine and the sextile are called *easy* aspects. Planets making easy aspects to each other are temporarily allied, and seek to aid each other’s work.

The opposition and the square are referred to as *hard* aspects. Planets making hard aspects to each other are temporarily at odds, and seek to interfere with each other’s work.

The conjunction is not really easy or hard in itself. Rather, a conjunction is an intensifier: the planets are working together on the same project, and how that goes will depend on the benefic or malefic nature of the planets themselves.

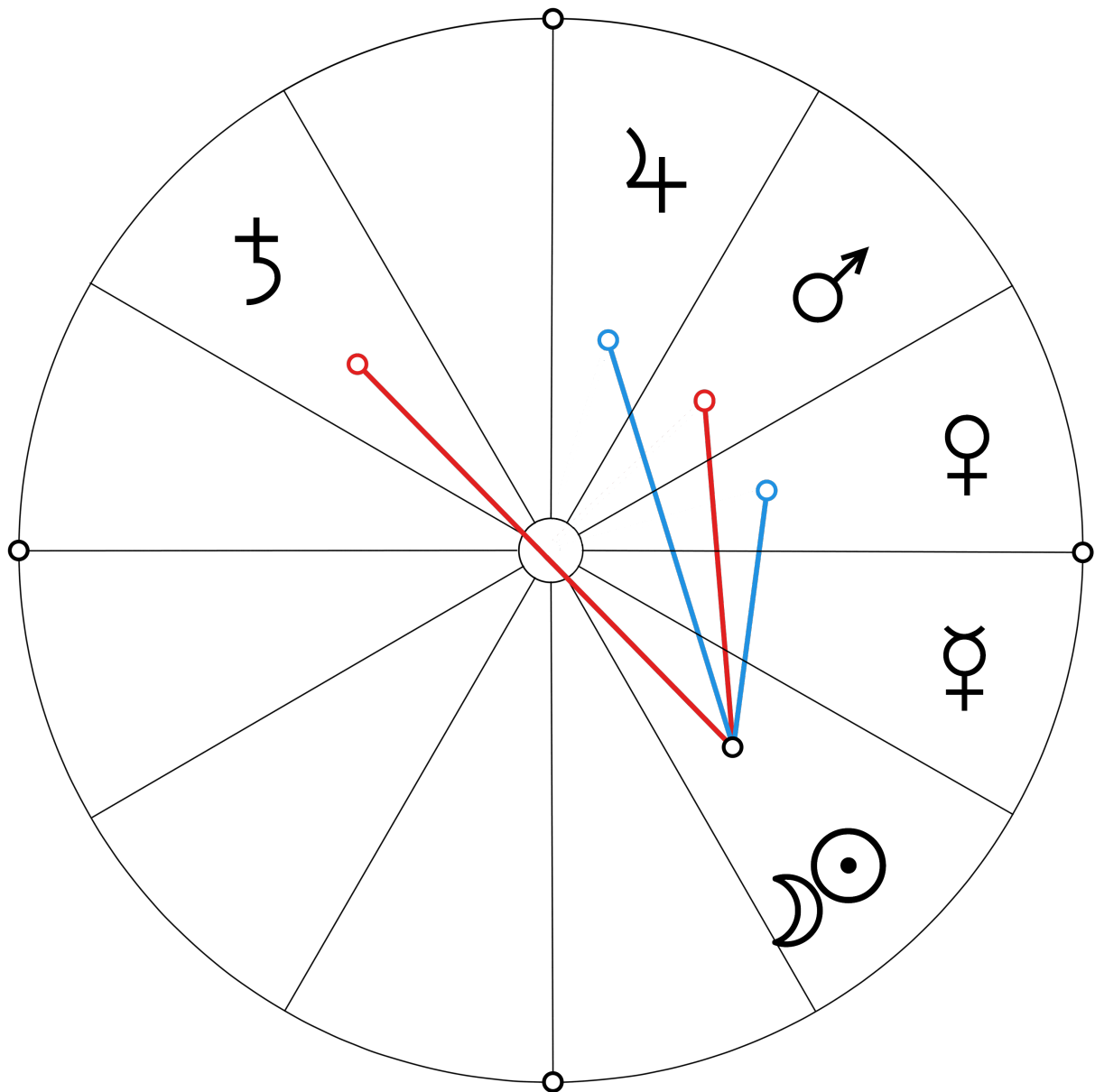
Inconjunct planets currently have no relationship to each other and don’t care about each other’s work.

The derivation of these aspect meanings is actually quite clever. Return for a moment to our chart of the planetary rulership of the signs (Fig. 2), and look at the arrangement of planets there. Do you see any patterns in the relationship of the benefic and malefic planets to the luminaries?

⁵ There are other types of minor essential dignity which can save a planet from being fully, technically, peregrine, but this is Astrology 101 so we’re not going to worry about them.

⁶ The “wobble room” distance on either side where an aspect ‘counts’ as an aspect is called the *orb* and there are varying traditions for it, often varying depending on which planets are involved in the aspect. For beginners, an orb of 7° on either side is a simple and easy rule of thumb. The 7° leading up to the exact degree make an *applying* aspect as the influence strengthens; then the 7° leading away make a *separating* aspect as the influence fades away.

Fig. 4: Or, I suppose, you can just look here! In this hypothetical chart, the Sun is: opposed to Saturn; trine Jupiter; square Mars; sextile Venus; conjunct the Moon; and inconjunct or in aversion to Mercury.



Retrograde Periods: Direction of Motion

As the planets revolve around the Sun, their relative orbital paths and speeds result in the Earth sometimes “pulling ahead” or “falling behind” compared to them. From a geocentric perspective, this sometimes creates the illusion that the planet is temporarily “moving backward”. This period is called a **retrograde** (“backwards motion”) period, and may weaken the planet’s influence, or introduce extra delay and difficulty to actions ruled by the planet.

In some ways this is similar to a hard aspect, but rather than the planet being actively interfered with, things aren’t happening because the planet itself is waffling, or keeps walking its decisions back. The planet is literally “backtracking”, and so it’s not a good time for things that require measurable forward

progress.

A planet *not* in retrograde is called **direct**. The switch between retrograde and direct motion or vice versa is called **stationing**; things often seem to “stand still” during a stationing period, just as the planet appears to slow down and stand still in the sky as it changes direction.

The Twelve Houses: Arenas of Action

The signs of the zodiac are not the only way we can divide the sky up. It’s not even the only way we can divide the sky up into 12 pieces! However, unlike the signs of the zodiac, which divide space based on the Sun’s *yearly* motion, the **Twelve Houses** divide space based on the Sun’s *daily* motion.

Stand facing south for an entire day, and you will see that the Sun rises over the horizon on your left; rises to its zenith above you; sinks below the horizon on your right; and, if you were to trace the continuation of the path, the nadir (lowest point) of that path would be below you. We mark those four points on our astrological chart as, respectively, the Ascendant (AC), the Midheaven (MC, for Latin *medium coeli*), the Descendant (DC), and the *Imum Coeli* (IC). Split the four wedges thus formed into groups of three⁷ and you have 12 houses, through which the planets will travel throughout the course of a day.

Another way the houses differ from the signs is that the position of the planets in the signs remains constant in relation to Earth, no matter where one views the sky or makes the calculations from. The position of both planets *and* signs in the houses, though, depends on the viewer’s exact location, with both latitude and longitude affecting the visible path of the Sun and thus the calculation of the four angular points.

On the Meanings of the Houses

The 12 houses have their own significations. If the planets are actors and the signs are the sets against which they act, the houses are the actual script they’re reading from, the subject of the conversation and the arena in which the planets act. While moving through a house, a planet applies its preferred methods (based on its own nature) and available resources (based on its essential dignity and the flavor of its current sign) to the area of life denoted by the house.

The specific meanings may differ slightly depending on which branch of astrology you’re using, but in general:

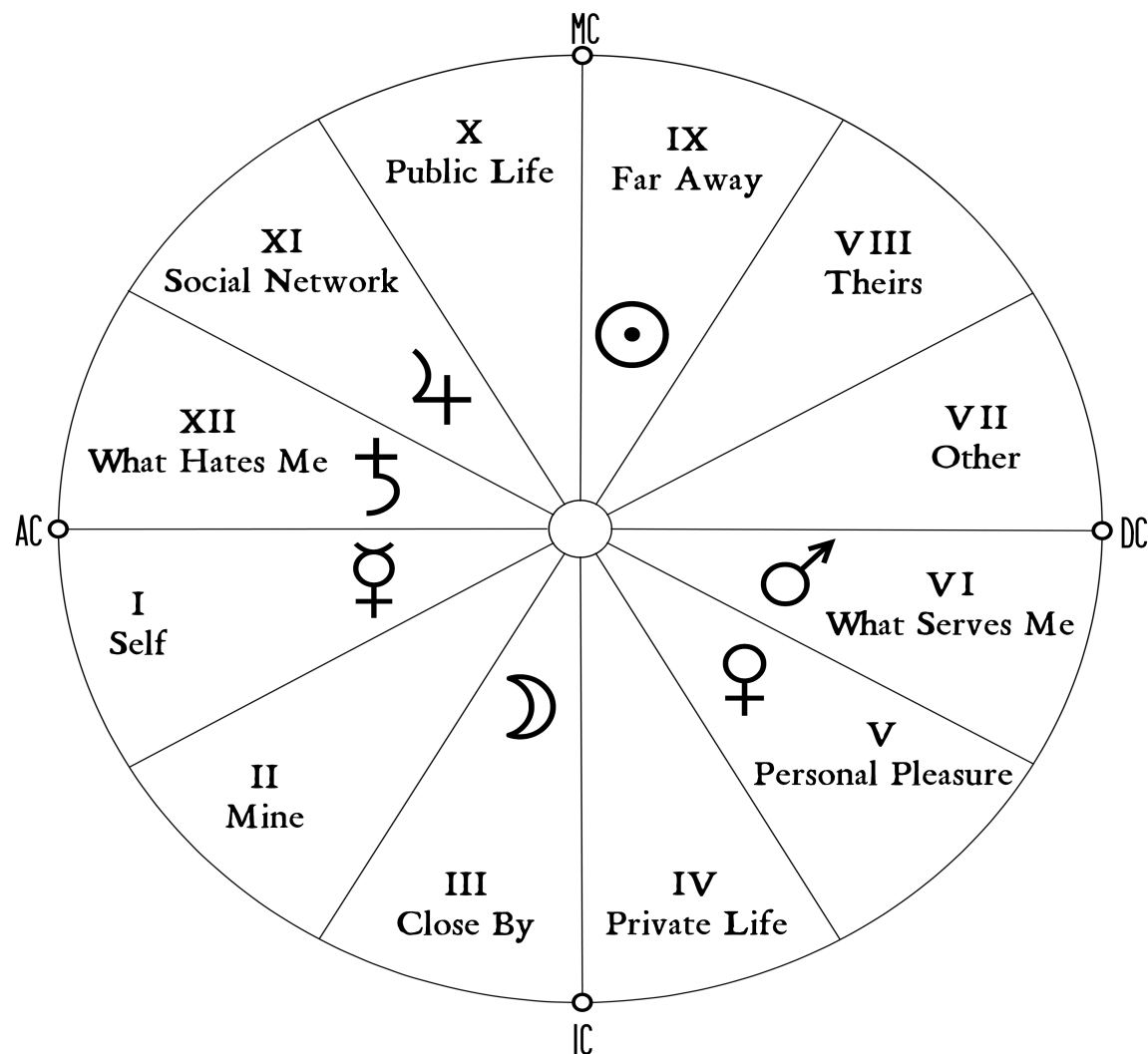
- The 1st house begins at the Ascendant (the rising point, where the Sun crests the horizon), and represents the self, that is, *you*.
- The 2nd house represents your possessions, the inanimate things you own and hold close to you.
- The 3rd house represents your immediate surroundings, your close family, and short-term journeys.
- The 4th house, which begins at the Imum Coeli (the nadir point, under the earth from whence the Sun comes), represents your most private life, your home, your parents, and your origins.
- The 5th house is the house of creation, recreation, and procreation: the things (children and art) you make, and the acts (sex and hobbies) that make them.
- The 6th house is the house of servants, pets, employees, and bodily health: things you rely on, and which are *yours* in some ways but also often have their own wills and desires which must be navigated.
- The 7th house, which begins at the Descendant (the setting point, directly opposite from the

⁷ There are many different ways of doing this, most of which do *not* result in equal-sized houses. I recommend the Placidus calculations. You don’t have to learn how the math works yet; any decent site that lets you look up an astrological chart for your own location will calculate the house cusps for you.

Ascendant), represents individual other people, particularly spouses, business partners, and the like.

- The VIIIth house, directly next to the VIIth, represents the possessions of the other; this very early on was applied particularly to *inheritances*, and thus by analogy in two different directions, to a) legal contracts in general and b) death.
- The XIth house represents journeys to distant places, both literal and metaphorical (thus education and religion are topics of this house as well).
- The Xth house, which begins at the Midheaven (the zenith point), represents the public life and vocation.
- The XIIth house represents friends, patrons, and social networks as a group (rather than as individuals).
- The XIIth house represents hidden enemies, secrets, and curses⁸—in the twelfth house is found the things you can't control and that mean you harm.

Fig. 5: The Twelve Houses, with their planetary joys. Remember that although the houses are numbered counterclockwise, the Sun travels clockwise, so will rise out of the 1st house and into house XII at dawn.



8 And also, for some reason, large animals and livestock.

Planetary Joys

Each planet *joys* or *rejoices* in one specific house: the house that aligns most closely with its own nature, a house whose topic it has a vested interest in. While moving through a house, a planet is ‘working on’ that topic as it is willing and able; while moving through a house where it joys, the planet is working on something that it is naturally good at and interested in, and will throw itself into the work with excitement, potentially to extremes.

- The Moon, closest planet to our own, joys in the IIIrd house of moving back and forth within the local environment.
- The Sun, opposite her, joys in the XIth house of illuminating distant lands and ideas.
- Venus joys in the Vth house, which deals with the private pleasures of sex and art and growth.
- Jupiter, opposite her, joys in the XIth house of public pleasures, of generosity given and received.
- Mars joys in the VIth house, the house of things and people one must impose one’s will on by force.
- Saturn, opposite him, joys in the XIIth house, the house of things that constrain one’s actions and threaten death.
- Mercury, who goes sometimes before the Sun and sometimes behind, and who deals in the presentation of personal ideas to the wider world, hovers on the horizon and joys in the Ith house of the self.

Angularity: Inclination to Act

The four points used to divide the houses—the Ascendant, the Midheaven, the Descendant, and the *Imum Coeli*—are called the **angles** of a chart, and so the Ith, IVth, VIIth, and Xth houses are referred to as **angular** houses. The IIth, Vth, VIIIth, and XIth are called **succedent** houses (because they “succeed”, i.e. follow, the angles); the IIIrd, VIth, IXth, and XIIth houses are called **cadent** (“falling”).

The **angularity** of a planet—meaning whether it appears in a house that is angular, succedent, or cadent—is a form of accidental dignity that primarily indicates how eager the planet is to act. A planet in an angular house will act quickly, decisively, and overtly, while a planet in a cadent house is unwilling to put itself out too much⁹.

Branches of Astrology

There are several *types* of astrology, of which some are decently easy for a beginner to pick up and others are the ones everyone actually starts with. The following list is in order from what I think are the least to most complex, and thus the easiest to hardest to learn.

Electional Astrology: Picking the Right Time

If you know what activities each planet rules, and if you can look at a chart and judge the essential and accidental dignity of a given planet, then you can do electional astrology—because that’s all that electional astrology is! This is the most fundamental form of astrology-as-prediction: If I perform this activity at that time, will the conditions be favorable for it? Can I reverse-engineer a date and time when the conditions for an activity I want to do *will* be favorable?

(This is why it’s called electional astrology: to *elect* something means to deliberately choose it.)

⁹ This distinction is primarily useful as a rationale for certain rules-of-thumb in electional astrology and astrological magic, and less useful in natal astrology, where the meanings of the houses take precedent.

The 3 golden rules of thumb for basic electoral astrology are:

- always look to the condition of the Moon, in addition to any other relevant planets. The Moon is the mirror that carries the light and influence of that planet to Earth; an afflicted Moon can negatively affect even an otherwise favorable influence.
- neither the Moon nor the *significator* (the planet that rules or is most relevant to the desired activity or question) should be afflicted by a hard aspect (a square or opposition) to a malefic planet (Saturn or Mars). (Take a moment to think through the reasoning here: this would indicate that ‘conflict’ or ‘limitation’ would be ‘actively interfering’ with the activity, and we definitely don’t want that!) In addition, neither the Moon nor the significator should be essentially debilitated—that is, in detriment or exile—if you can possibly help it.
- for best results, place the significator in an angular house: ideally, either *rising* (on the Ascendant) or *culminating* (on the Midheaven).

There are plenty of more granular and specific rules, but just following these three will give you a good sense for the natural ebb and flow of planetary influences, and how to best take advantage of them.

Astrological Magic: Nudging Things Along

There are two different practices that can fall under the name of “astrological magic”. The first is really just electoral astrology, but the activity you’re finding an auspicious time for is a magical rather than mundane one. If you’re planning to do a money spell, performing it at a time when Jupiter is well-dignified can give the magic a useful boost.

But if you’re not much of a fan of patiently waiting for Fate to throw you a bone, you can go for the other kind of astrological magic: using astrological talismans, which can ‘store’ the beneficial influences or spirits of a well-placed planet, so that you can draw on it later to get the same effects even after the planet in question has moved into a less ideal position. The process of actually creating astrological talismans is beyond the scope of this booklet, but the process of choosing a time to make the talisman is basically just the same as any other election, although with slightly more finicky in-depth rules.

Horary Astrology: Asking the Right Question

Once you’ve whetted your teeth on electing haircuts and doctor’s appointments, you can try out *horary* astrology to answer specific questions that *aren’t* just about timing. (Lost object charts are popular—and notoriously tricky to interpret.)

Doing horary requires you to have a solid grasp on the meanings of both the twelve zodiac signs and the twelve houses, because whatever question you’ve got, you need to figure out what house topic it falls under. Then:

- cast an astrological chart for the exact moment the question was ‘born’—either when you decided to do an horary chart for it, or when someone else asked you the question.
- find the *cusp* (the line that starts the house off when going counterclockwise) of the relevant house. Identify which zodiac sign the cusp is in. The planet that rules that sign is the significator of the question.
- find the significator (which represents the subject of the question) and the Moon (which represents the question itself). The conditions of both planets, both in terms of essential/accidental dignity and which signs they appear in, will give you the answer to your question. Particularly if the question is or can be framed as a yes-or-no question, look for any aspect, even a hard one, between the Moon and the significator. If there is an aspect between them¹⁰, the answer is ‘yes’; otherwise, the answer is ‘no’.

¹⁰ This is called *perfection*.

Natal Astrology: Planetary Promises

This is the astrology you think of when you think of astrology: drawing up the *natal chart*, the map of the sky at the exact moment when you were born, and reading the entire course of your life from it.

Unfortunately, natal astrology is actually very hard; a human life is complex, and interpreting the course of one off a chart is a skill that takes many years of dedicated study to truly master. Natal astrology uses a lot of specialized techniques, and has to pull a lot more meaning out of a chart than a simple election or even an horary query does. Still, it can be both fun and rewarding to take a peek at your own chart and see how much you recognize about yourself and how your life's gone so far!

The key to remember about traditional natal astrology (as contrasted to many modern pop-psychological astrological systems) is that the positions and conditions of the planets in your birth chart represent, fundamentally, the promises the planets have made about how they intend to treat you—the ways they intend to meddle in your life for good or for ill. In many ways, looking at a natal chart is like getting an insight in the bickering family dynamic of a group of fairy godmothers who all mean well, but have very different ideas about what *well* looks like¹¹.

Go ahead—try it out. What planets are particularly dignified or debilitated in your own natal chart? Which houses contain clusters of planets, and which houses are empty? What sign is on your ascendant, and where is the planet that rules it in your chart? Where is that ruling planet in the sky *today*? And what might all of those things tell you about the planets' plans for your life?

Of such basic questions, and a lifetime of experience, are natal delineations made.

¹¹ Should the dress be pink or blue?