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## INTRODUCTION: *Ye Olde Astrologie...*

If you're keen on astrology, you've probably noticed a recent revival of "traditional" astrology. Maybe you've attended a local talk on it, or downloaded a lecture, or seen a translation by me or someone else online or in a bookstore. Maybe you're intrigued and want to learn more, but aren't sure where to start. Maybe you've even been turned off by strange Arabic terms, or references to fate, or what seem to be doom-and-gloom interpretations. And yet, lots of people are being turned on to traditional approaches. You might be skeptical that something from 1,500 years ago could be relevant today. Aren't we all more evolved now, haven't we outgrown this old stuff?

This book is for you, the curious modern astrology student or practicing professional. Do you:

- Want an introduction before spending more time and money on traditional books or courses?
- Want to supplement your current practice with traditional techniques?
- Need basic objections to traditional astrology answered?
- Seek a quick guide to basic ideas, vocabulary, history, and the names and works of older astrologers?
- Need an up-to-date reference guide to the best, current books in English?

This book is designed to fulfill all of these needs.

I'm here to tell you that traditional astrology is vibrant, dynamic, and has a lot to offer: interesting predictive techniques, a vocabulary that will help you make more concrete interpretations, and a variety of spiritual and philosophical views that you may already largely agree with. I can't explain everything in this book, but I can guide you through some basic differences between traditional and modern approaches, and help you figure out where to go from here. Even if you don't become a full-fledged traditionalist, you will still improve your astrology with the concepts and techniques in this book.

I will focus on natal astrology, but just about everything I say also applies to horary, event charts, elections, and mundane astrology. In Part I, I'll outline the basic periods in traditional astrology, along with a few "need to know" astrologers. Then I'll describe some traditional outlooks on life, value

theory, and counseling strategies. In Part II, I'll go further with special terms and techniques, sometimes contrasting traditional and modern, but always focusing on how you can use these ideas in a practical way. I'll conclude by answering some frequently-asked questions and challenges about traditional astrology. The Appendices and Glossary provide other valuable information and resources.

Throughout this book I want to reassure you about something very important. Many people can get the mistaken impression that following traditional practices means *abandoning* whatever else you've done in astrology—as though traditional astrology is just a series of “No's” to anything modern. Actually, there is much overlap between modern and traditional practices, and many contemporary traditionalists even use outer planets and even asteroids. Adopting traditional practices mainly involves a shift of emphasis and priority, not the rejection of everything else. Sometimes when I talk about these things with friends who practice the latest of techniques in modern astrology, it can seem at first that we have nothing in common; but after a few minutes we realize that we actually agree on a lot. But it's been so long since our community has engaged in these debates and dialogues, that at first the differences might seem too stark to be overcome. I hope to change some of that through this book.

If we had to list some basic assumptions in modern astrology, we might mention these: a belief in indeterminate free will, positive thinking, being able to create your own reality to a very high degree, and using the chart in constructive ways to show opportunities and alternatives. Actually, I don't see serious problems with some of this, provided that as astrologers we aren't simply saying “anything goes.” Any view of life that says anything is possible at any moment, simply because you believe it or will it, will fail. Of course, even modern astrologers don't really go this far when looking at a chart. But we have been so out of practice in these types of discussions, that many modern people can find themselves endorsing extreme views like that because the alternatives are not well known.

Traditional thought is not so much opposed to everything modern, but requires a difference of emphasis. Let me suggest a list of assumptions and values that animate traditional astrology, divided into two groups.

(1) First are the more moral and spiritual values and concepts. I would include the following: (a) *Sympathy* for the human condition. Because we live in a complicated world we cannot fully control and understand, there is a lot

of misery whose source often some from within us. Some of this misery is reinforced by denial and wishful thinking, as natural defense mechanisms. Then, (b) the cultivation of *patience*. This kind of positive thinking means that we have to understand how our goals fit into the ebb and flow of things around us: we cannot get everything we want right away, but must rely on good timing (such as elections and opportune times predicted from the nativity). (c) Realistic *choice*, as opposed to indeterminate free will. We all have our own characters that are very difficult to change or go against, and we live in a web of events presenting certain limited and ambiguous choices—few of which are absolutely good or absolutely bad. Finally, (d) constructively *managing* who we are, as opposed to absolute self-creation and absolute spontaneity. We all have certain natural gifts and benefits, and certain drawbacks to our characters and lives, and both interpretation and prediction help us manage those things according to our understanding of conventional goods and our spiritual paths. I will discuss some of these ideas more in later chapters.

(2) Second, traditional astrology relies on rigorous and organized methods that help us train our thought and identify what is astrologically important at any point in our interpretations and predictions. I will discuss this point especially in Chapters 12 and 13.

Traditional astrology has significant contributions to make to the astrological future. In terms of philosophy and psychology, traditional astrology draws on a broader choice of value systems than many modern systems do, and makes a serious commitment to moral values and a concrete notion of human flourishing. It also provides more realistic treatments of choice and freedom, tempering modern notions of absolute personal freedom. It would also be valuable to revive the theory of temperaments which is already partially familiar to psychological astrologers, but is also connected to herbal and other holistic medicine. In terms of magic and practical spirituality, through traditional astrology we may recover Neoplatonic and other metaphysical approaches to astrology, which emphasize not simply chart reading but practical engagement with, and an active spiritual connection to, higher levels of being. These practical attitudes allow us to reach beyond our own minds and characters, and participate with the Divine Mind in the administration of the universe. I can't describe the details of all of these ideas in this short book, but as the traditional revival continues, you will be able to learn and do much more in this exciting field!

# PART I: HISTORY, IDEAS, VALUES

## CHAPTER 1: A HISTORY OF TRADITIONAL ASTROLOGY IN A FEW PAGES

We astrologers like to talk about the antiquity of what we do, but many people don't know much about the practices and people that actually made our history over the last 2,000 years. Don't worry, I'm not going to overwhelm you with names and dates! Appendix A directs you to books on that sort of thing. In this chapter I simply want to give you an outline of the basic periods and name some "need to know" figures in them. This will give you a general orientation to our heritage.

The way I look at it, the period of traditional astrology lasted from about the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC in the Mediterranean, to the 17<sup>th</sup> Century in England and continental Europe, starting with works in Greek and ending in English and Latin. (There is some disagreement about exactly what dates and people define the "bookends" of this vast period.) But I should make clear that I am talking about "horoscopic" astrology here: that is, astrology that uses charts with an Ascendant (rather than omen-based astrology). This is the kind that you and I practice, with its full-blown use of planets, dignities, signs, houses, aspects, and a number of the predictive techniques you already know. I won't be discussing ancient Babylonian or pre-Hellenistic Egyptian practices (whose exact nature and history are controversial).

### **Hellenistic period (1<sup>st</sup> Century BC – 6<sup>th</sup> Century AD):**

Our first period starts in the Greco-Roman world, particularly in Alexandria. By the time of Alexander the Great's conquest of Egypt and the Near East (even up into India) in the 330s BC, at least some horoscopic natal astrology was being practiced. But certainly by the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC, Egyptian, Babylonian and Persian practices had been combined and enhanced to form the complex system of astrology we understand today: signs, houses, planets, rulerships, aspects, numerous predictive methods, Lots (or "Arabic Parts"), divisions of the planets into malefics and benefics, diurnal and nocturnal planets, and so on. Because Alexander's conquests more or less unified the

## CHAPTER 4: GOOD AND BAD: VALUES IN TRADITIONAL ASTROLOGY

*To God, all things are beautiful and good and just;  
but for humans, some things are just and others unjust.*

-- Heraclitus, Fr. 85

Traditional astrologers often speak about something being good or bad, or planets and their influences as being benefic or malefic. This is a turnoff for many modern people. But when we speak of goods and evils, we are dealing with important ethical and philosophical concepts: what is the nature of good and evil? Are some things only apparent goods and evils? Can normal goods and evils truly affect our ability to be happy? And how can we apply these notions in a counseling context? If we refuse to recognize these values, it will be more difficult to connect with people we are trying to help.

In this chapter, I'll talk about two broad ways of thinking about good and evil, and in the next chapter I'll show how they apply in counseling contexts: in a more conventional approach to happiness (Aristotle), and in a more "spiritual" approach (Stoicism).

### *1. Functional values and planetary conditions*

Traditional philosophers had some common ways of identifying what made something good—and for some of them, goodness was virtually equivalent to *being* something. Here are some general qualities that a situation or dynamic or person might have to have, to be good:

Knowable  
Unified or organized  
Consistent  
Present  
Balanced

Note that these qualities don't make something *morally good*. They show whether something performs its functions *well*. Their opposites suggest functioning *poorly*: things that are obscure, disorganized, inconsistent, absent, and unbalanced. It's in this spirit that traditional texts talk about planets being in a good or bad condition, or being strong or weak. So when we look

at a chart, we look to see whether planets are in a good or bad *functional* condition. This helps us know whether the people and events they indicate are consistent and smooth and helpful, or unruly, full of extremes, and so on.

The following table gives you a general idea of what these typical categories mean in terms of planetary functioning. Don't worry if you don't understand all of these terms yet, I'll introduce them later.

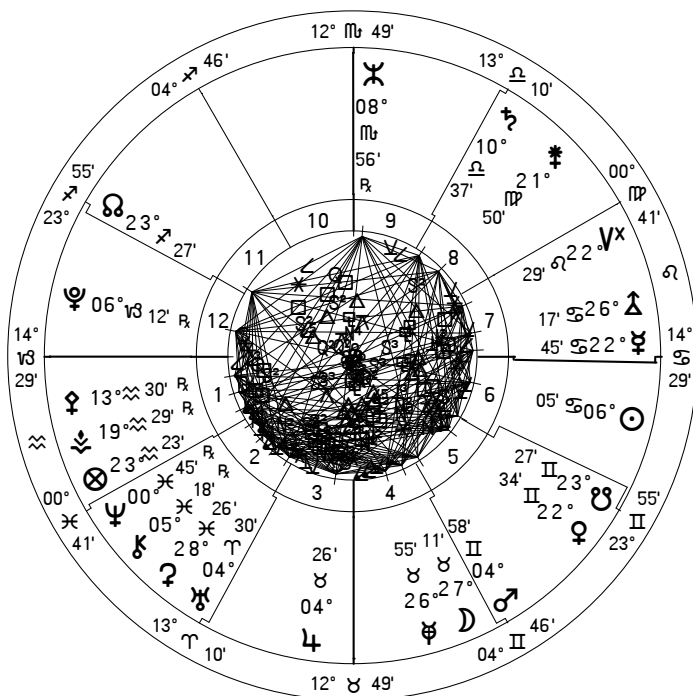
Functionally good	Functionally bad
<b>Configured.</b> Being in communication, able to manage and be seen.	<b>Aversion.</b> Being invisible or out of communication.
<b>Angular or succedent.</b> Being prominent or strong.	<b>Cadent.</b> Being obscure or weak.
<b>Aspected by benefics.</b> Often, encountering balanced and growth-bearing influences.	<b>Aspected by malefics.</b> Often, encountering extremes.
<b>Domicile.</b> In a state of unity, competence, and control.	<b>Detriment.</b> In a state of disintegration and disunity.
<b>Exaltation.</b> Being prominent and confident.	<b>Fall.</b> Being obscure, ignored, fading away.
<b>Free of the Sun.</b> Able to work on its own, visible.	<b>Combustion.</b> Being overwhelmed, destroyed.
<b>In any dignity.</b> In a place of belonging, able to depend on its own resources.	<b>Peregrine.</b> Not-belonging, dependent on external influences.
<b>Direct.</b> Moving forward, consistent, open.	<b>Retrograde.</b> Repetition, detours, hiding motives.

**Figure 3: Some Planetary conditions**

The idea is that every planet is trying to do its own thing well: it's trying to rule a house, stand out and be prominent, have a sense of ownership and competence, move forward with its agenda, and so on. But if it's in a functionally bad situation, it is somehow hindered. Much of the time, functionally bad placements also result in conventionally bad events (or they prevent good events). But I'll save that for later. My point is that these planetary conditions reflect real affairs in life. In life we do count it as good when we feel competent, visible, honored, and can move forward; but we feel like life has something wrong in it when our bodies are sick, we are unknown and ignored, are weak or incompetent, insecure, and can't com-

## CHAPTER 12: TWO RULES FOR INTERPRETING CHARTS

I once gave a talk to a group of modern astrologers, and was teaching a certain medieval technique that involved finding the Lot of Fortune. But in the back of the room I noticed a young woman who was visibly very upset. It turned out that she had only been studying astrology for a couple of months, and felt very lost. I went over and asked if she had a copy of her birth chart. She had a copy that had been printed out by someone else, and it looked something like this:



I told her to put her chart away and just try to follow the method in her head.

This chapter is not really about how our charts look (though I think people should use simpler diagrams), but it serves as a good metaphor for what I want to express. As astrologers we are visual people. We like to look at charts. But in a chart like the one above, we can easily get thrown by all of the symbols and lines and details: our eyes move to one thing, and then we

are easily led to another, and another, and pretty soon we are lost. For many people, when trying to understand something about the client, the same thing happens: we look at Venus, then we suddenly see an aspect, then we jump to another planet, look at its sign, see something else, and so on. Pretty soon it seems as though everything in the whole chart is implicated in one simple issue. This jumbling of symbols and in our approach can affect our eyes and our minds, and lead to confusion.

One benefit of traditional astrology is the use of rules and methods. Rules do not prevent counseling or hinder us from helping a client understand what something means in their lives. They are not there to restrict us in some bad Saturnian fashion. Rather, they *enhance* our ability to help: *traditional astrology helps us block out the noise, so that we know how to proceed, and not get overwhelmed.*

Traditional texts usually proceed by defining a problem, identifying what to look at, and then listing a variety of possibilities—often going from the easiest and most obvious things to note, to some more obscure and second-best indications for what you seek. The goal of this kind of approach is to help you *rank and prioritize what you are looking for*. Even if everything in the chart is somehow implicated in some situation with your marriage or your brother, most indicators offer so little information, or are so tangential, that they can often be safely ignored. Traditional astrology helps you *slow down* and *discipline your mind* so that you don't end up feeling confused and throw out a bunch of intuitive guesses as to what something means.

Let me first outline a few things about what traditional astrologers generally think a planet does,<sup>33</sup> then I'll give you two key rules for interpreting *any chart*. In general, every planet does four things simultaneously, and you should think of them in this order when you interpret what a planet means:

- **Natural or general signification.** This means nothing more than that each planet tries to be itself, indicating something of its nature in the most general way. Some natural or general significations of Venus are: love, partying, play, beauty, jewelry, a sister, and so on. We are all familiar with this. What we must add to this basic nature is the planet's condition, such as moving direct or retrograde, being in its detriment or domicile, and so on. The planetary condition

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<sup>33</sup> I am drawing on explicit teachings from Robert Zoller and Morin here, but they are generally applicable to all traditional texts.