

THE PRINCIPLES OF ASTROLOGY

INTRODUCTION: ASTRONOMY AND ASTROLOGY

The astrologer's cosmology is, of course, geocentric, reflecting the general consensus in antiquity. Though Aristarchus hypothesised a universe centred round the Sun in the third century BCE, this hypothesis never found general support. The geocentric cosmos accorded with perception from Earth: we look up to the sky and see the Sun, Moon and planets revolving round us. It seems as if there is a dome above us in which the stars are fixed, and thus a celestial sphere was envisaged revolving round a stationary Earth (Figure 3). The Earth was regarded by ancient astronomers as spherical, as a result of observation of its curvature.

If you were to watch the sky at sunset over the period of a whole year, making a note of the stars which appeared just after the Sun, by the end of the year you would have made a map of a line through the heavens known as the ecliptic (Figures 2, 3). The planets can be seen to remain within about 8 degrees (measuring the celestial sphere as 360 degrees in circumference) on either side, though the Moon may move outside this band of the sky occasionally. This band on either side of the Sun's path is the zodiac, and is divided into twelve equal sectors of 30 degrees each, named after constellations identified by the Greeks, or in some cases by the Babylonians, which lay in the area of each sector. The 360 degrees of the zodiac are measured clockwise from the First point of Aries. The positions of the planets are plotted in relation to the ecliptic, in degrees of celestial longitude (Figure 4). The planets are seen to move in the same direction as the Sun at different speeds, Mercury taking only eighty-eight days to go round once, while Jupiter takes twelve years to go round, thus being

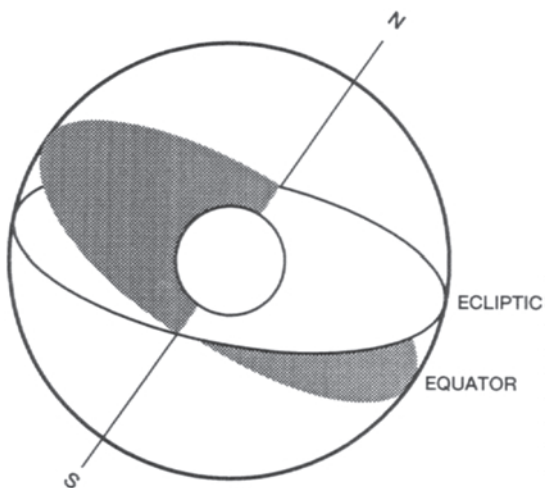


Figure 2 Ecliptic and equator

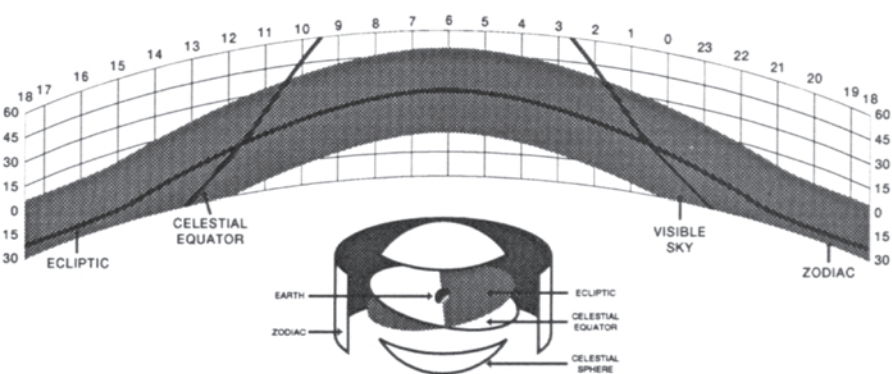


Figure 3 Ecliptic and equator against the visible sky.

in the same zodiac sign for a year, and Saturn stays two-and-a-half years in one sign. The planets Uranus, Neptune and Pluto were not known to antiquity. From the fifth century at least the planets' motions were understood to be basically circular. However, as they were seen to stop this overall motion (described as being 'in their stations') or even go backwards (retrograde), attempts were made to refine the model to explain this.

The apparent path of the Sun, the ecliptic, lies at an angle of $23\frac{1}{2}$ degrees to the celestial equator, the projection of the Earth's equator on to the celestial sphere (Figures 2, 4). This is the reason for the varying seasons and hours of daylight. At the spring equinox, when the Sun is at the First point of Aries, it is directly overhead at the equator, and night and day are of equal length everywhere. In the days which follow, its angle to the equator, measured in degrees of declination, increases to a maximum of $23\frac{1}{2}$ degrees at the summer solstice, midsummer in the northern hemisphere. It then appears to stand still before returning to the equator, which it reaches at the autumn equinox. As the angle increases again, in the northern hemisphere, the Sun's maximum altitude at noon gets lower until the winter solstice (Figure 5).

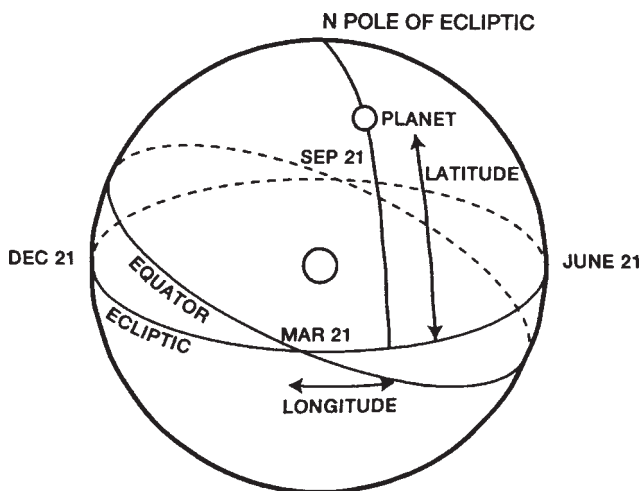


Figure 4 Latitude and longitude.

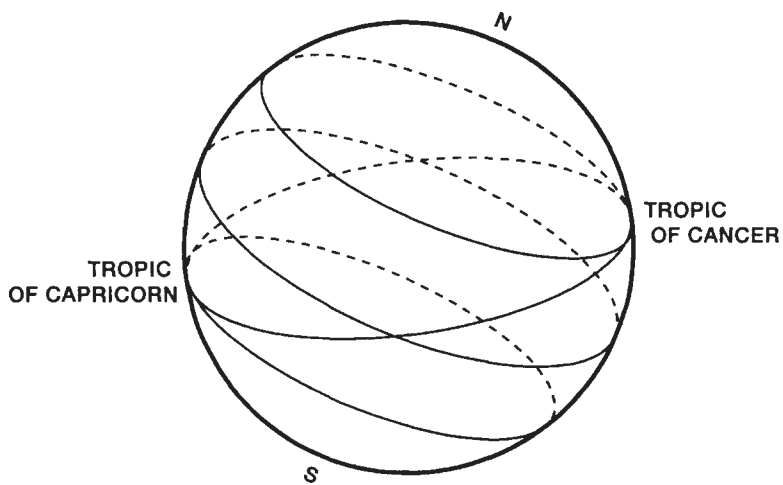


Figure 5 The solstices.

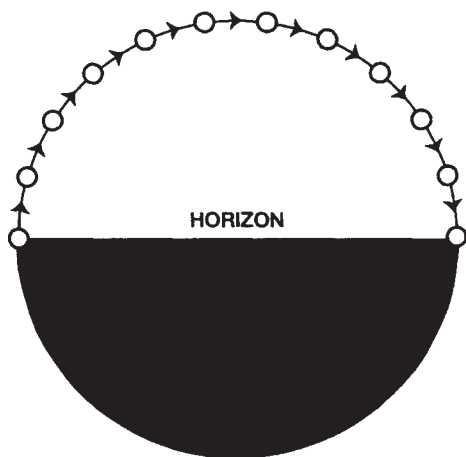


Figure 6 The direction of the Sun's diurnal movement.

Each day the Sun is seen to rise in the East at dawn, and to move upwards until it is directly overhead at noon, and then downwards until it sets in the West (Figure 6). It can be deduced that it continues to describe this circle during the night on the other side of the Earth. The planets too are moving in an East-West direction, and so is the whole sphere in which the stars are fixed. During the night, a new zodiac sign can be seen to rise in the East about once every two hours. However, the starry sphere moves round slightly faster than the Sun, achieving a full revolution in about 23 hours and 56 minutes. This is why given constellations will not always be visible in the night-time, but for part of the year are only above the horizon in day-time. To go back to our initial observation of the night-sky over a year, it is the stars' greater speed which means that the Sun gradually falls behind the point in the zodiac from which it started. So the Sun can be seen to move very slowly in the opposite direction, completing a revolution in a year. This is what gives us Sun-signs in our horoscopes.

But before considering the birth chart and its relation to the heavens, we need to consider the relevance of space as well as time. Clearly, perception of the stars will vary at different points on the Earth's surface. The Sun takes four minutes to pass over an arc of 1 degree. Thus the Sun rises twenty minutes earlier in Amsterdam than in Greenwich, which is 5 degrees east of the Greenwich meridian. Similarly, which sign is rising and setting depends on where you are on Earth. And since all rising occurs parallel to the celestial equator, and as the ecliptic lies obliquely to the equator, some signs can be seen to rise more quickly than others. In northern latitudes the signs from Capricorn to Gemini take less time to rise. In the polar regions, some signs never rise at all. The ancient astrologers were aware of the variation in rising times, and offered tables, which were calculated for different *climata*, or zones based on the ratios of daylight to night on the longest day in the year. The rising time of a given sign is the number of degrees of the equator which cross the horizon of a given locality at the same time as the sign. Accurate tables of rising times, calculated by spherical trigonometry, are found in Ptolemy's astronomical work, the *Almagest*.¹ Astrologers, especially those earlier than Ptolemy or contemporary with him, used rising times calculated arithmetically according to Babylonian schemes, which were less accurate.

Now, of course, it is not the Earth which lies at the centre, but the Sun. It is the Earth's rotation on its axis joining the poles which produces the effects of day and night rather than the Sun's

movement, and it is because the Earth does not ‘stand up straight’ in its orbit, but is tilted in relation to the plane of the ecliptic, that we have the varying seasons (Figure 7). The ecliptic, the apparent path of the Sun, is actually the plane of the solar system. The planets’ motions are approximately in this plane; they are also not circular but elliptical, and, apart from the Moon, orbit round the Sun rather than around the Earth. This is why they appear to stop and go backwards from Earth. As for the Sun itself, it is because the Earth makes a circuit of the Sun once a year that the Sun seems, from a point of view on Earth, to complete a journey round the ecliptic in the same period, appearing against a background of the zodiac. This does not matter, as astrology is concerned with movements relative to the Earth.

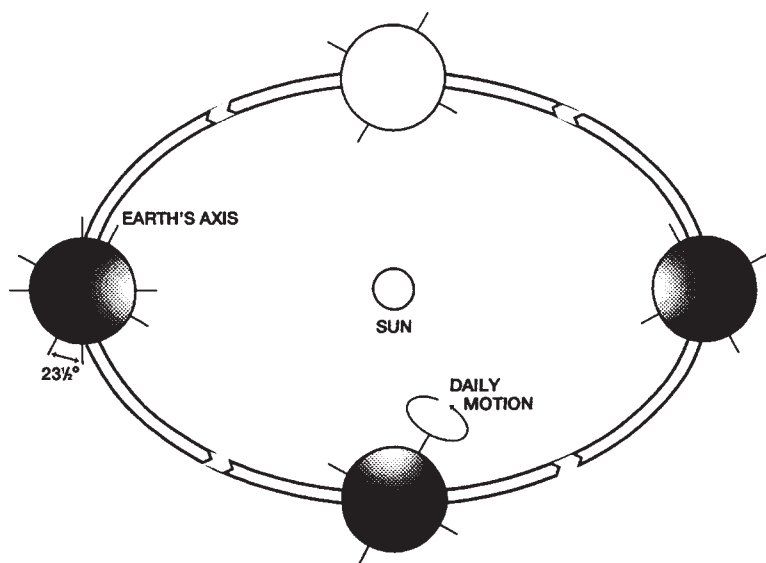


Figure 7 The orbit of the Earth.

In addition, the ‘fixed stars’ within and outside the zodiac only appear fixed because of their great distance from the Earth. A moment in the Sun’s journey is schematically represented in Figure 8, where the inner circle represents the months. Here, in the third month, the Sun is seen against the sign of Pisces.

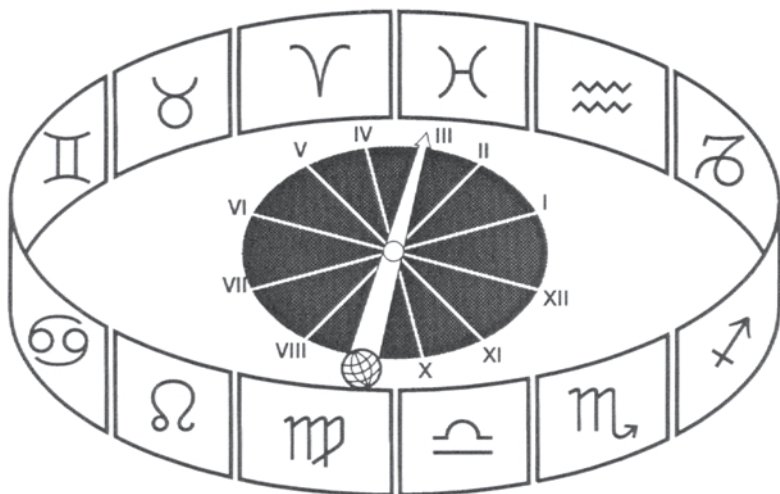


Figure 8 The Sun seen against the zodiac.

Now in fact the relationship of each area of the sky designated as a zodiac sign to the constellation after which it was named is even more arbitrary than in the original division of the zodiac. This is because of a wobble in the earth's axis as it spins, like a spinning top which is running down. Thus the North Pole describes a circle, taking about 26,000 years to reach the point where it started. The First point of Aries, or the point of the vernal equinox, from which the zodiac begins, has slowly moved backwards well into Pisces. This phenomenon, known as precession, was probably discovered by Hipparchus in the second century BCE. Ancient astrologers, naturally, did not have to consider the problems posed for their model by modern findings about the universe. However, precession was an issue: it was used as an argument against astrology by Origen, presumably drawing on an earlier source. Ptolemy recommended a correction of 1 degree a century for precession; this seems to have been used by some successors.²

BASIC PRINCIPLES OF ANCIENT ASTROLOGY

The chart, whether it concerns a birth or any other event, is simply a map of the heavens, frozen at a particular moment. There are a variety of ways of presenting the information: one is visible in Figure 10,

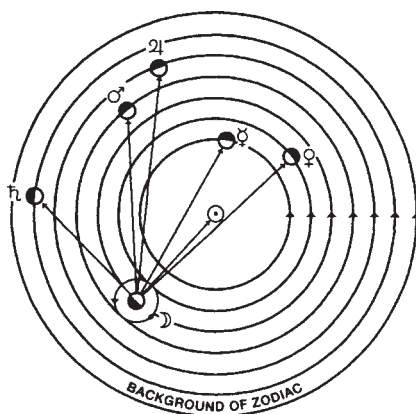


Figure 9 Positions of the planets in their orbits relative to Earth.

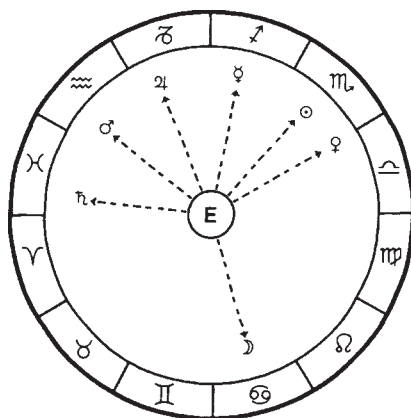


Figure 10 The same positions represented in the birth chart.

which represents the situation in Figure 9. A crude round birth chart, which does not include the Places, known as (mundane) houses to modern astrologers, is found in a papyrus (Figure 11), but astrological manuscripts (which are not earlier than the Byzantine period) are illustrated with square types of chart (Figure 12; Figure 1).

The defining point of the chart is the Ascendant, known to the Greeks as the *Horoscopes*, which was to give its name to the whole birth chart. This was the degree of the zodiac rising over the horizon at the moment concerned. Conventionally, the Ascendant is placed



Figure 11 Diagram from first-century CE papyrus.

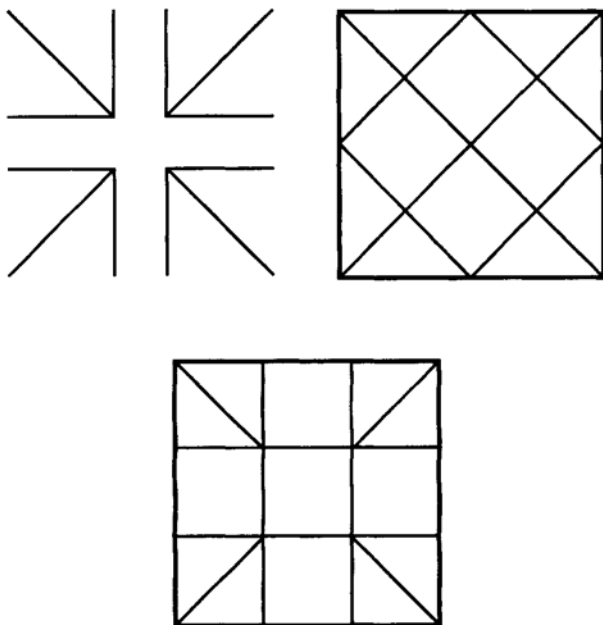


Figure 12 Types of diagrams in manuscripts.

in the middle, on the left of the chart, at 9 o'clock on round charts, representing the point in the East rising at the moment concerned. In fact, it would only be due East when the equinoctial points were rising, or during the rest of the year at the equator, because of the different rising times. Similarly, the other cardinal points, Midheaven (*Mesuranēma* to the Greeks, *Medium Caelum* to the Romans), the point directly above the observer's head, the Descendant (*Dusis*, *Occasus*) in the West and the *Imum Caelum* (*Hypogeion*), known as angles to the modern astrologer, would not, at other times, be 90 degrees apart, as they are illustrated (Figure 13). However, ancient astrologers' attention to this problem was erratic, to say the least. In the earlier horoscopes preserved, it seems most common to assume that the Midheaven was simply three signs from the Ascendant. Where degrees are mentioned, it is usually taken that the cardines are 90 degrees apart. Clearly, astrologers' calculations depended on the tables they used: some later literary horoscopes benefit from the more

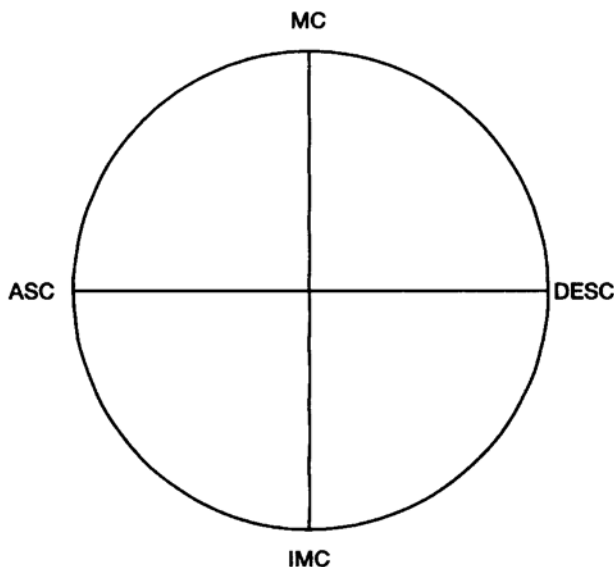


Figure 13 The Carolines (as at the equator).

accurate trigonometric tables of Ptolemy and his successor Theon, but some ignore the rising times when it is a question of calculating the cardinal points.

The planets, a term which includes the Sun and Moon, are thought of as having influences according to their characteristics. Jupiter, the Moon, and Venus are thought of as basically positive in their influence, and are called benefics, while Saturn and Mars are basically negative, or malefics. The Sun and Mercury are mixed. Furthermore, particular associations, based on the mythological attributes of the gods after whom they are named, are obvious in interpretations of their effects (see below). The planets' influence is altered by a number of factors. One is the nature of the zodiac signs in which they are found. Firstly, each planet rules two signs, or in the case of the luminaries, one sign, which are known as their houses to the ancients, and in these signs their influence was increased and generally made more positive (Figure 14). Secondly, each planet was thought to be in its exaltation (thus particularly beneficent) in one sign, or in particular degrees of the zodiac and in its depression (thus particularly

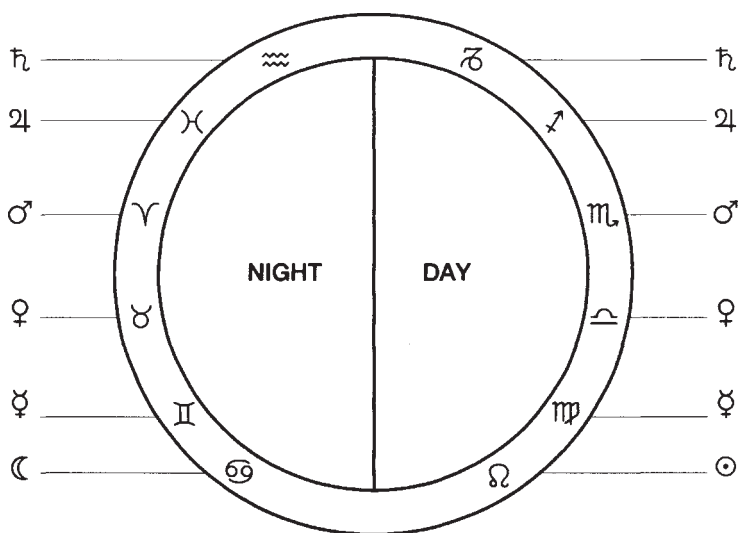


Figure 14 Zodiacal houses of the planets.

maleficent) in another (diametrically opposite) sign. The characteristics of different signs combine with the characteristics of different planets to produce more specific effects.

Modified versions of the houses of the planets are the terms, the decans and the dodecatemories. These are smaller parts of the zodiac wheel than the signs, allotted to the planets on varying principles. The terms were originally based on rising times,³ and the decans, as we saw above (p. 20), were derived from Egyptian methods of measuring time by the stars. There were normally five terms distributed unequally within each zodiac sign (as visible in the outer circle of Figure 22), and three decans distributed equally (Figure 15). *Dodecatemorion* means a twelfth part, but the interpretations of its precise meaning in the horoscope varied. Often, a sign would be divided by twelve into 2 1/2 degree sections, each assigned to a planet, according to a variety of rules: one example of this method is in Dorotheus of Sidon. But Manilius allots half-degrees to the planets, and Firmicus single degrees, calculated on the basis of the individual planets' positions in the nativity concerned.⁴ There were also dodecatemories of the cardinal points, and of other astrological entities.

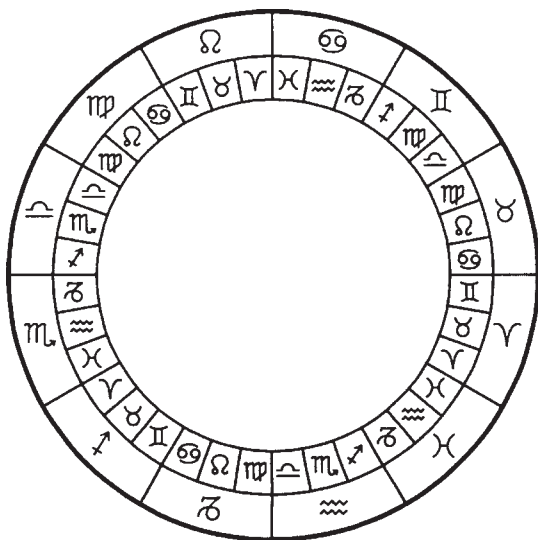


Figure 15 The decans.

The planets' influence was also increased if they were found on or near the cardines. The Ascendant, apart from determining the cardines, was the point from which the Places, normally twelve, were usually calculated. They might be taken to begin from the first degree, or from 5 degrees before the Ascendant, as Ptolemy suggested, or the Ascendant might be set in the middle of the first house, a theory attributed to 'the Egyptians'. In at least one case one or more Places are calculated from the Lot of Fortune (see below).⁵ These Places, so called to distinguish them from the zodiacal houses of the planets, are known as (mundane) houses to modern astrologers. They are visualised as a fixed wheel through which the zodiac signs rotate. Each governs several related aspects of life (see Figure 16). The second Place, for instance, can be said to be concerned with livelihood, property, partnerships, business, profit from inheritance and relations with women. (The native, in the ancient world, was normally regarded as male, though female natives were sometimes specifically considered in the treatises.)

Different provinces of life are also governed by the Lots or Parts, a series of degrees calculated by transferring an arc of distance

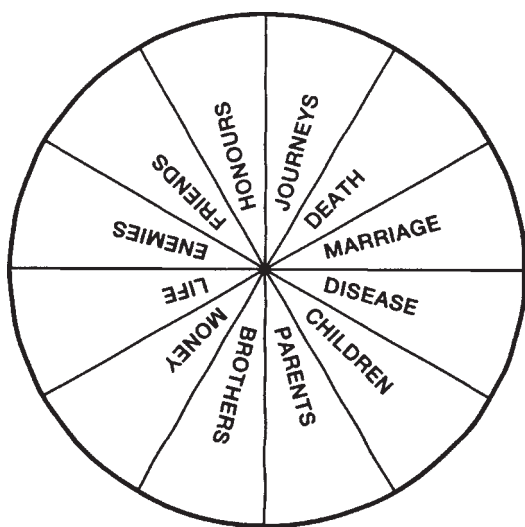


Figure 16 The Places.

between two entities in the chart to another entity, and siting the Lot at the end of the arc. The most important is the Lot of Fortune, seen as being almost as important as another planet. There are Lots of Necessity, Courage, Love, Brothers, Parents and so on. Some of the Lots cast according to one set of rules are visible in Figure 22, drawn as circles.

The planets also interact in particular mutual relationships. Two planets are said to throw shadows on to each other (*antiscia*) when they lie at opposite ends of one of a set of parallel lines linking all the signs (Figure 17). A set of angular distances between planets, known as their aspects, also modify their influence. Conjunction, where the planets seem to occupy the same space in the sky, means that the influence of each planet is strongly affected by the general character and particular characteristics of the other. The approach of one planet towards another, and their moving apart, or defluxion, was also important. Opposition, where they are 180 degrees apart, thus directly opposite one another in the chart, makes planets have a baleful influence on one another (Figure 18). A modified version of this is

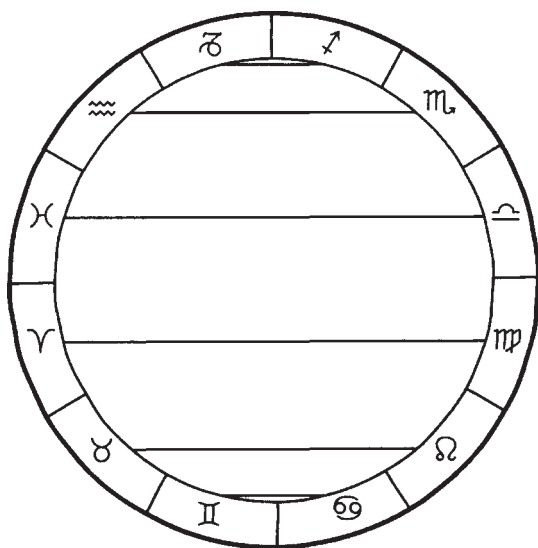


Figure 17 The *antiscia*.

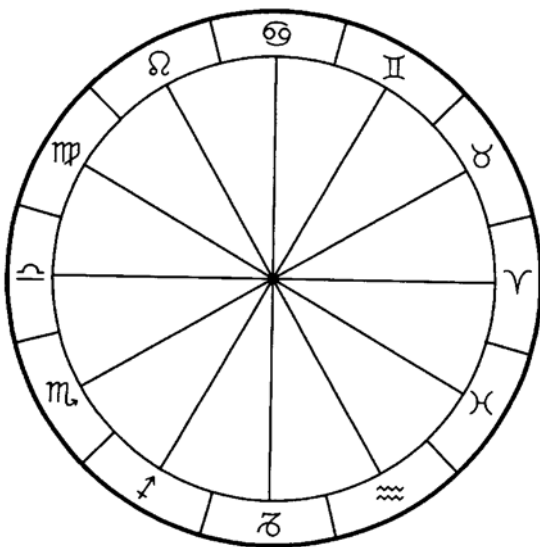


Figure 18 Opposition.

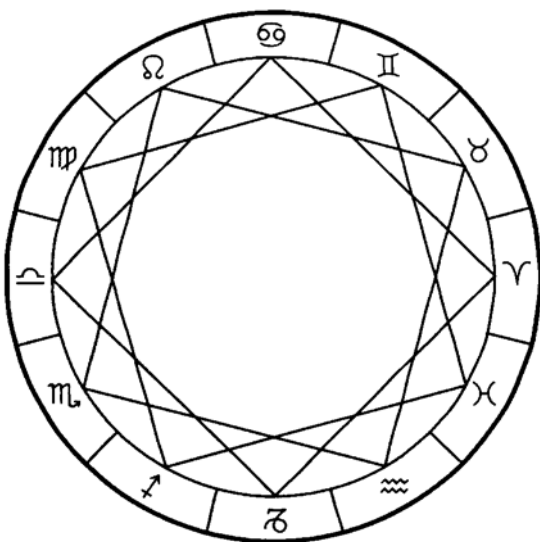


Figure 19 Square.

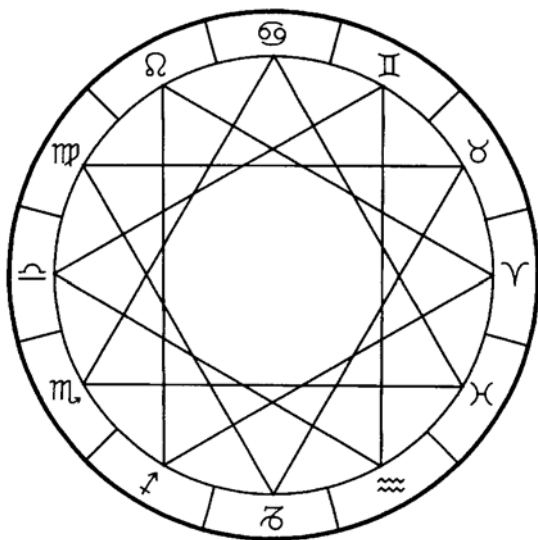


Figure 20 Trine.

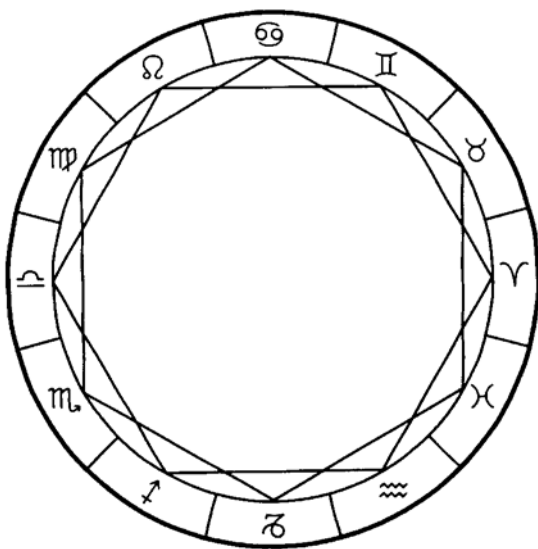


Figure 21 Sextile.

the square (or quartile) aspect, where planets are 90 degrees apart (Figure 19). Trine, 120 degrees (Figure 20), and its modified version sextile (60 degrees: Figure 21), are both beneficent aspects, making the planetary influence positive.

Furthermore, the zodiac signs were categorised in a number of different ways, as feminine or masculine, diurnal or nocturnal, human or animal, fertile or sterile, whole or mutilated, single or double, tropical or cardinal, and by other non-binary distinctions, such as classification by position (standing, sitting down, walking or running and so on). They were divided into groups, into groups of three (triplicities) ruled by particular planets, and into pairs of signs which ‘see’ and ‘hear’ each other (a version of the *antisca*), and of signs which command and signs which obey.

NOTIONS OF ASTRAL INFLUENCE: THE NATURAL-PHILOSOPHICAL BACKGROUND

The above account is a crude synthesis, designed simply to elucidate terminology used in the rest of the book. We shall see that there are a number of features which complicate matters. However, first we need to attempt to explore these ideas of stellar influence, looking at the ideas of natural philosophers as well as those of astrologers.

Astrology was always explained as being on the model of the Sun, whose effects on the Earth and life on it were too obvious to need much justification, and of the Moon, whose influence on the tides was also evident from at least the time of Seleucus in the second century BCE. The Moon was also thought to be the source of dew, and thence of a variety of effects on living beings. The Stoic Balbus, in Cicero’s dialogue *On the Nature of the Gods*, asserts: ‘from her [the Moon] come moisture, the dew useful for nourishment of living beings, for their growth, their reaching maturity, the dew which allows plants to ripen.’ Pliny refers to a relationship between the waxing and waning of the Moon and living creatures:

It is she who saturates the soils, who fills the body with her approach and empties them by her moving away. Thus when she waxes, crustaceans get bigger, and the beings most sensitive to her breath are those which are bloodless; but blood too, even human blood, increases and decreases with her light, and leaves and grass are sensitive to her effects, for her influence reaches everywhere equally.⁶

Both Pliny and the second-century CE medical writer Soranus record the notion that the lobes of the liver in house mice increase with the waxing Moon, but decrease with the waning Moon; Pliny also mentions that ants stop their work during the New Moon, and that the incidence of eye-diseases among cattle fluctuates with the Moon's phases.⁷ Writers on agronomy were careful to say in which lunar phase rural activities should take place.

The Moon was also supposed to affect generative capacities in humans. Some medical writers and natural philosophers believed that the periodicities of the Moon had an effect on the female body in particular, controlling menstruation. Aristotle and the contemporary medical writer Diocles thought that menstruation tended to occur at the end of the lunar month. Pharmacological writings show that plants connected with the Moon were used to bring on menstruation. Some Hippocratic writers, followed by Aristotle, thought that it was the Moon which ensured that conception took place most often in the middle of the lunar month, others that a Full Moon aided birth. The Moon's waning was connected with pain and cold weather. The origins of the term 'lunatic' are seen in the ancient association of the Moon with recurrent fevers, epilepsy and certain forms of madness occurring periodically.⁸ There were a variety of theories about the physical processes involved. Plutarch, who wrote his *On the Face in the Moon* in the second century CE, records the view that the Moon sends down heat to Earth and sends upwards exhalations from Earth, refining and purifying them within itself.⁹ Ptolemy, however, draws on the notion of 'sympathy' in his explanation of the role of the Moon:

The Moon, too, as the heavenly body nearest the earth, bestows her effluence most abundantly on mundane things, for most of them, animate, or inanimate, are sympathetic to her and change in company with her; the rivers increase and diminish their streams with her light, the seas turn their own tides with her rising and setting, and plants and animals in whole or in some part wax and wane with her.¹⁰

The idea of 'sympathy' (literally: experiencing together), together with its corollary 'antipathy' was implicit in a wide variety of ancient writers, particularly in the field of medicine. It is related to the idea of correspondences, which designated animals, plants and stones as sympathetic or antipathetic to particular conditions, which might or might not be seen to be caused by the heavenly bodies. We shall be

returning to this in Chapter 7. This common understanding was expanded into a more general theory by the Stoic philosophers, who perceived a universal sympathy in which everything had connections with everything else. Sympathy was a notion which played the role of a causative action in the unrolling of Fate in the Stoic universe.

The Stoics followed Plato and Aristotle in seeing the four elements of fire, earth, air and water as fundamental qualifications of all matter, though for them fire (as in innate heat, as opposed to the destructive fire) is the only permanent element. These elements denote the properties of hot, cold, dry and wet. A species of the hot was the *aithēr* or ether, the celestial fire. The term originally referred to clear air as opposed to *aēr*, or mist. In Plato's cosmology there are two concentric layers of air outside those of earth and water, with *aēr* closer to earth and ether outside it, and fire forming the outermost circle. Aristotle saw the ether as a fifth element, the element from which the heavens are constituted, quite separate from the elements found beneath the Moon, which formed the boundary of the heavenly region. Ptolemy works within an Aristotelian model to explain astral influence:

A very few considerations would make it apparent to all that a certain power (*dynamis*) emanating from the eternal ethereal substance is dispersed through and permeates the whole region about the earth, which throughout is subject to change, since, of the primary sublunar elements, fire and air are encompassed and changed by motions in the ether, and in turn change all else, earth and water and the plants and animals therein.¹¹

In this vision, the heavenly ether acts on the intermediate elements of fire and air, which then alter the other elements.

It is impossible to say who first connected the workings of astrology with the Aristotelian universe, for it may have been much earlier than Ptolemy. In the middle of a passage usually seen as taken from 'Nechepso and Petosiris' which is preserved in Hephaestion of Thebes, is a description of the manner in which the effective force of the planets is transmitted through the spheres to the sublunar sphere.¹² In this depiction, the planetary system is based on epicycles and eccentrics, which certainly comes from Hellenistic astronomy. The rest of the passage concerns predictions from the heliacal rising of Sirius, which is similar to Babylonian texts and has parallels in Demotic, which suggests an early origin. If the passage on influence were to be dated like the rest to the second century BCE, we would have here the earliest discussion of celestial influence, anticipating

Ptolemy in explaining it in Aristotelian terms. The astronomy might even point to Hipparchus, but as usual in the history of astrology, we are left only with conjectures.

Alexander of Aphrodisias, a Peripatetic (of the school of Aristotle) who flourished in the mid-third century CE, discusses the question of astral influence in a number of texts. He had perhaps been influenced by Ptolemy's text.¹³ He seems to argue that the heavenly bodies created both simple and complex organisms in form as well as essence:

Uncompounded bodies have the cause of their changing into one another outside them, for cooling and heating which occur on account of the varying state of the heavenly bodies in relation to them are the cause of their coming to be, destruction and change into one another.¹⁴

In another text he addresses the question of planetary influence more specifically. The planets, as they moved round the zodiac, made the particles nearest to them hot or dry, since they were fiery, while they produced the other elements: air (hot and wet) and water (cold and wet) and earth (cold and dry), from a greater distance. As the positions change, there is a process of continual change in the material affected. More perfect, active, rarified bodies are generated from fire and more imperfect, passive, dense bodies from the other elements.¹⁵

In one passage which bears a close resemblance to the discussion of Alexander and ultimately to Aristotle's account in *On Generation and Corruption*,¹⁶ Ptolemy sees the elements as all being provided by the Sun, in different amounts according to its position relative to the Earth:

For the Sun, together with the surrounding environment, is always in some way affecting everything on earth, not only by the changes that accompany the seasons of the year to bring about the generation of animals, the productiveness of plants, the flowing of waters, and the changes of bodies, but also by its daily revolutions furnishing heat, moisture, dryness and cold in regular order and in correspondence with its positions relative to the zenith.¹⁷

The effects of all the heavenly bodies are explained by Ptolemy in terms of the four qualities. Elsewhere¹⁸ the Sun's active power appears as heating and drying, while the Moon's is humidifying. Mars is drying and burning, in conformity with his fiery colour and because

of his nearness to the Sun. Jupiter has a temperate heating force because he moves between the cooling Saturn and the burning Mars; he also humidifies and produces fertilising winds. Venus warms moderately because of her nearness to the Sun, but mainly humidifies because of the amount of her own light and because she appropriates the exhalations from the moist atmosphere surrounding the Earth. Saturn is cooling and drying (because he is removed from the Sun's heat and the moist exhalations from the Earth).

Here, in mentioning the moist exhalations from the Earth, Ptolemy draws on ideas which may have originally been put forward by the Presocratic philosophers, Heraclitus and Anaximenes. But again, it is probably Aristotle who is the direct influence. In Aristotle's cosmology, the basic constituents of the sublunar atmosphere are the hot, dry, smoky exhalations from earth and the cold, wet vaporous exhalations from water. The upper atmosphere consists of the hot exhalation, and the lower is a mixture of the two.¹⁹

These ideas about exhalations were often bound up with an understanding of the universe derived from the human body. The third-century BCE Stoic Cleanthes suggested that the heavenly bodies were sustained by exhalation from the oceans and other liquids of the world's body in the same way as the human soul (seen as corporeal) was sustained by exhalation from the blood. This was the explanation for the solstices: the Sun turned round when it reached the edge of the ocean, because there was no more nourishment to sustain it. The heavenly bodies, like the human body, took in liquid and poured out heat. Similarly, in the depiction of one speaker in Plutarch's dialogue *On the Face in the Moon*, while the stars revolve like radiant eyes in the face of the universe, the Sun, playing the role of the heart, transmits and disperses out of himself heat and light as if it were blood and breath. The Earth and sea act like bowels and bladder, and the Moon, situated between the Sun and the Earth, fulfils the function of an organ like the liver or perhaps the spleen, and directs the heat from the Sun to Earth, and the exhalations from the Earth to the Sun, after refining and purifying them.²⁰

In a variety of ancient philosophies, the correspondence between the universe (the macrocosm) and human individuals (the microcosm) was an important axiom. Thus Cleanthes expanded the medical view that innate heat is the principle of life in humans, arguing that it was the principle of the universe itself. By analogy, as humans have intelligence as their commanding faculty (the chief part of the soul), so the universe too has pre-eminent intelligence as its commanding

faculty.²¹ The notion of the connection between the microcosm and the macrocosm is also associated with the Pythagoreans. The Christian Epiphanius, in his account of pagan heresies, attributes to Pythagoras the view that God, or the sky, is a body, and that his eyes and other features are the Sun, Moon and other elements of the sky.²² Theon of Smyrna, a second-century CE Platonist, mentions that some Pythagoreans saw the Sun as the commanding faculty and centre of the planets, like the heart of the universe.²³ The Neoplatonist Porphyry, in his *Introduction to the 'Tetrahiblos'*, also gives the Sun the heart as its special province, but also the Moon the spleen and Jupiter the liver. The relationship of analogy between human beings and the universe is an old idea: the slogan 'Man is a small universe' (*microcosmos*) is attributed to the Presocratic philosopher Democritus. But there was endless scope for the basic idea to be developed in different ways. As we have seen, such ideas were particularly important in Hermetic philosophy.

NOTIONS OF INFLUENCE: PTOLEMY'S EXPLANATIONS

Ptolemy uses a wide range of explanations in which principles of analogy are always important, but the tendency to anthropomorphise the heavenly bodies is reduced. He invokes the four elements to explain the beneficent and maleficent roles of the planets. The hot and the moist qualities are beneficent, being fertile and active, because all things are brought together by them, while the dry and the cold are destructive and passive, forces of separation and destruction.²⁴ Furthermore, according to the mixtures of elements in them, the planets can be classified as masculine and feminine. Moisture is a feminine quality, so Venus and the Moon are feminine, while the Sun, Jupiter, and Mars are masculine. Mercury, being dry and moist, is hermaphroditic. In addition, the planets' gender is altered by their aspect to the Sun and the quadrant they are in.²⁵ The account here does not quite fit with the explanation two chapters on. As we saw in Ptolemy's description of the Sun above, all four elements are produced in turn. The Moon, in the period from waxing to its first quarter, produces more moisture; in its passage from first quarter to full, more heat; from full to last quarter, more dryness; and from last quarter to occultation (New Moon), more cold. The planets, in oriental aspects only, produce more moisture from (heliacal) rising to their first station, and so on in the same order, to evening rising, to second station, to setting.

The logic also seems to break down in the account of the reasons for making some planets diurnal and some nocturnal: while the Moon, Venus, the Sun, Jupiter and Mercury are assigned on the basis of their genders, masculine to day and feminine to night, the malefics Mars and Saturn are assigned to day and night respectively on the grounds that their predominant element needs to be tempered by its opposite.²⁶

Aspects were also difficult to explain on the elemental model or on a common-sense physical one. Earlier astrologers referred to the action of the planets in these angular relationships as *actinobolia* (the emission of rays) but never explained why the rays were activated in particular positions. As mentioned above, Geminus was sceptical about the idea that influence was increased at certain angular distances. He demanded why signs should not have more influence if they were next to each other rather than, say, 120 degrees apart. Ptolemy explains by invoking music as an analogy, following Pythagorean ideas about the role of certain ratios:

The explanation of opposition is immediately obvious, because it causes the two signs to meet on one straight line. But if we take the two fractions and the two superparticulars [$3/2$ and $4/3$] most important in music, and if the fractions one-half and one-third be applied to opposition, composed of two right angles, the half makes the quartile and the third the sextile and trine. [$1/2$ of $180=90$ (quartile) and $1/3$ of $180=60$ (sextile).] Of the superparticulars, if the sesquialter and the sesquitercian be applied to the quartile interval of one right angle, which lies between them, the sesquialter makes the ratio of the quartile to the sextile and the sesquitercian that of trine to quartile. [$3/2=90/60$ and $4/3=120/90$.]²⁷

He also applies another kind of analogy in his explanation of why some aspects are beneficent and others maleficent. In his explication of the zodiac signs, he makes signs alternately female and male. He begins by making Aries male, because the male leads and is active and superior. He says that the aspects trine and sextile are harmonious, because those are the angular relationships between signs of the same gender, while quartile and opposition are disharmonious because they link signs of opposite genders.²⁸

Ptolemy has explanations for almost every element of astrology. The houses of the planets are accounted for by their natures and positions. So Leo and Cancer belong to the Sun and Moon respectively because they are the most northerly of the signs, and thus closer to the

zenith, and productive of heat, and Leo is masculine like the Sun and Cancer feminine like the Moon. The exaltations and depressions find similarly varied justifications. But the very variety reveals the strain involved in such rationalisations. When we hear that Venus is exalted in Pisces because she is moist, and it is in Pisces that the moist season of spring is *pre*-signified, the sense of strain is obvious even without the knowledge that Aries is the sign normally associated with spring.²⁹

NOTIONS OF INFLUENCE: THE DIVINE STARS AND THE SOUL

Ptolemy's naturalistic explanations are often clearly rationalisations of theories which had their origin in myths about the stars. He attempts to remove all elements of the personification which had formed part of the common understanding of the heavens. He is rare among astrologers in his efforts to find rationalistic explanations, and to suppress features he finds too fanciful. It is a distinction obvious to us, but it is difficult, and often artificial, to separate religious understanding from 'scientific' in antiquity. This is particularly clear in theories about the soul, which veered between a spiritual and a physiological entity. The soul was, from at least Plato onwards, associated with the stars. In the *Timaeus* souls are made by the Demiurge (the craftsman-creator) in numbers equal to the stars.³⁰ Inside its star, the soul is taught that it is subject to the passions, but that if it masters them, it can return to its native star. The stars, among other 'young gods', are assigned a subordinate role in creation: while the Demiurge made the rational part of the human soul, they formed human bodies and the lower, mortal parts of the soul, will and passion.³¹ Some of the Neoplatonists, followers of Plato in late antiquity who tended to lay emphasis on the mystical side of his work, offer a kind of religious physics. Macrobius, for instance, in his commentary on Cicero's *Dream of Scipio*, attributed the rotation of the universe to the World-soul, which is intimately related to the individual human soul. Soul, drawing deep on Mind, gave divine minds to all the heavenly bodies with spherical shapes in the process of creating them. Now, the soul's essence is motion; and it thus imparts it to the body of the celestial sphere:

the body of the celestial sphere, which the World soul fashioned to participate in its immortality, in order that it should never cease functioning, is always in motion and does not know how

to rest, since soul itself, by which the sphere is impelled is never at rest...the celestial sphere is compelled to turn with a rotary motion because it must always be in motion and there is no place beyond to which it can proceed, its motion is perpetually within itself...the only progress of a sphere embracing all spaces and regions is within revolutions. As a result it always seems to be pursuing soul, which moves around its vast immensity...The sphere would rest if it should ever find soul resting, but since the latter, leading the chase, is ever pouring itself into the universe, body is ever commingling with it.³²

Other Neoplatonists developed a more obviously mythical account of the soul's relation to heaven, while Aristotle and the Stoics took a more physiological line. Aristotle asserted that there is material of the soul in the *pneuma* (breath, or spirit) within human sperm which is like the material of the stars.³³ The Stoics too saw a connection between the material of which the soul was made, ether or *pneuma*, and the stars.³⁴ It was Pythagoreans and Platonists who laid emphasis on the astral origin of the human soul. Epicureans, however, saw no connection between the soul, which in their view was simply dispersed after death, and the stars.

Doubtless, for the vast majority, the heavens always remained peopled by entities less abstract than Ptolemy's elements and qualities. The Elder Pliny, in the first century, thought it was a belief increasingly common to learned and unlearned alike that each individual had his or her own star, which rose with him or her at birth, and fell with him or her at death, varying in brightness according to his or her estate in life.³⁵ From as early as the first century BCE, some Roman writers were acquainted with the idea of the astral soul. Cicero's famous *Dream of Scipio* has the great second-century general Scipio dream that he feels his soul leave his body for the stars.³⁶ In this account the Milky Way is made the province of heroes after death. His contemporary Varro mentions three doors to the starry heaven: one near Scorpio, one between Leo and Cancer, and the third between Aquarius and Pisces.³⁷ Beginning with Porphyry (232–305 CE), who wrote an introduction to Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*, it was standard doctrine that the soul's astral body came from planetary spheres and returned to them at death. Neoplatonists developed an account of the soul's ascent after death, some suggesting that the stars purified the soul as it went up, others that the stars assisted its progress.³⁸ Others said that the stars contributed something of their own to the

human soul. Plutarch said that the Moon contributed the individual soul, the Sun the mind.³⁹ Servius, the fourth-century commentator on Virgil, records that, according to the *physici*, (the natural philosophers, or ‘Scientists’), people receive *pneuma* from the Sun, body from the Moon, the blood from Mars, inventiveness from Mercury, desire for honours from Jupiter, passions from Venus, and tears from Saturn. Here the mythical characteristics of the gods, probably thanks to the doctrines of astrology, are influential. He also preserves a list of vices contributed by each planet to the descending soul: laziness from Saturn, anger from Mars, lust from Venus, love of money from Mercury, desire to rule from Jupiter.⁴⁰ A Hermetic fragment offers slightly different lists of positive and negative planetary contributions to the soul. In one account, it is simply stated that all seven planets are within every person, since the planets each bestow something, while in another it is said that the soul gives back negative attributes with each sphere through which it passes on its ascent, until it passes the seventh and escapes the rule of Fate administered by the planets.

Such doctrines had certainly spread beyond the philosophers. Though there may be distortion in the Platonist accounts of Mithraism, that most popular religion of the Later Empire, the ascent of the soul through seven planetary spheres seems to have played a central part, as we see in Chapter 7. It reappears in Gnostic and Christian texts, where the stars were generally seen as either moved by intermediate powers, angels or daemons, or their visible form.

THE STARS AS GODS

For most schools of thinkers, the stars’ divine nature was selfevident. Indeed, their motion was difficult to explain if it was otherwise. The Epicureans, who denied that the heavenly bodies were divine, were forced to explain their movements by gusts of wind. In this case, their depiction of a universe of atoms in random motion was hard to substantiate, and the regularity of the planets’ motions was frequently cited by those who wanted to argue for a divinely ordered cosmos.

The stars were in ancient Mesopotamia regarded simply as gods. Hellenistic astronomers were more cautious, either designating the stars with names reflecting their appearance, such as ‘the scintillating one’ (Mercury) or ‘the shining one’ (Jupiter), or referring to them as the stars of particular Greek gods. Thus Saturn was ‘the star of Kronos’, Jupiter ‘the star of Zeus’ and so on. It was with the dramatic

rise of astrology from the end of the Roman Republic that the planets became known simply by the names of the gods.

By this stage they carried with them the connotations of a complex amalgam of myths from different civilisations as well as the independent developments which had come from astrology. This is evident if we look at the planets individually. The Sun, in Babylon Shamash, had taken second place to Sin, the Moon. In Greece the Sun, Helios, was quite a minor deity, and the Olympian god Apollo had taken over control of the Sun as one of several provinces. But astrologers like Vettius Valens drew on Egyptian mythology, associating the luminaries with Isis and Osiris.⁴¹ In Babylonian cosmology, the Moon came from Anu, Enlil and Ea, who gave him all powers in the course of his phases. He presided over destiny and royalty together with his daughter Ishtar (Venus). In Greek mythology Artemis was the goddess associated with the Moon, as well as with childbirth; the Roman Diana took over the same roles.

Saturn in Babylon was a priestly figure. For the Greeks he was Cronos, the god from a more brutal era, before the civilised rule of the Olympians in heaven. He was thus seen as old, and his name inevitably associated him for Greeks with Chronos, or time. It was perhaps the cruelty of the figure who castrated his father and swallowed his children which made him a maleficent planet; he was also seen as the Father, as he had been the father of the gods.

Jupiter was Zeus, king of the Olympians, the most dynamic planet. He was also the source of fecundity, perhaps reflecting the number of children he was described as fathering in myth. He took over from the Assyrio-Babylonian Marduk, the patron of Babylon, his role as king. Mars, or Ares, also followed the Babylonian designation as Nergal, the god of war, based on his reddish colour. He was seen as impetuous, passionate and prone to anger and violence. He is also particularly associated with violent death.

Venus, or Ishtar, daughter of the Moon-god in Sumerian mythology, united with the Sky-god, was the mother of the universe. In Greek mythology she was Aphrodite, goddess of voluptuous love. But from the Egyptian Isis she gained the reputation for purity and grace as well. Mercury was Hermes, the wily messenger of the gods, who presided over intelligence and communication. The planet was cast in this role in astrology too: it was thought to make people good at mathematics, *natural* philosophy and using words. It was perhaps the speed of the planet's movements which led it to be identified with the messenger.

The interactions of the planets can also be explained in part by their mythological personae. Thus Venus, in a bad aspect with Mercury, the swift-moving and therefore unstable messenger, would provoke jealousy. Together with Mars, with whom she had a notorious adulterous liaison, she frequently incited adultery.

The planets were certainly described as if they were like humans, as were the gods in ancient polytheistic systems. They are seen to show hostility or favour to other astrological entities or to humans, they get up (rise), walk, see and hear, and are gendered. The luminaries are 'attended' by other planets surrounding them or are 'enthroned'.

SUMMARY

In this chapter we have seen what the basic doctrines of ancient astrology were, and have set them in the context of the geocentric universe, explaining exactly how a horoscope is related to the stars. But it is important to understand not only the fundamental ancient ideas about the movements of the planets in relationship to the rest of the universe, but also ideas about the way they and the other stars could be imagined to affect life on Earth. Obviously ancient understanding of these effects was built on the model of the visible effects of the Sun and Moon, which was thought to be closely related to the generation of life. Another notion which was generalised was the idea of an analogical relationship between macrocosm and microcosm. However, there were a number of competing models which could explain astral influence. The Stoics were the ones who put most emphasis on the idea of sympathetic links between the different parts of the universe. The Pythagoreans saw musical harmony as the crucial model. However most enduring proved the Peripatetic model, in which the elements of hot, cold, wet and dry combined to produce their varying effects, thanks to Ptolemy. But regardless of Ptolemy's rationalisation of astrology, for most people the stars retained supernatural powers. After all, the philosophers mostly agreed that the stars were divine creatures. And philosophers and other religious sects developed a variety of visions of the relationships between the human soul and the stars, perhaps building on the common belief that each had his or her own star. Astrological theory, meanwhile, tended to work on implicit rules in which the composite mythology surrounding the stars determined their effects on Earth.