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On the Primacy of the Ascendant
ASA Lecture, Friday, May 20, 2005

Jean-Baptiste Morin de Villefranche (1583-1656) was a French astrologer, physician, and mathematician. He taught mathematics on the university level and developed a system for calculating longitude while at sea. In his lifetime, he was renowned as an astrologer, and for 20 years was in the exclusive service of Cardinal Richelieu who, as advisor to King Louis XIII, consolidated the power of the monarchy against the French nobility and expanded France's power against its enemies in Europe.

From Morin's writings, it does not seem that he enjoyed being at Richelieu's beck and call, but he had no choice. Morin had Venus, Sun, Jupiter, Saturn and the Moon in Pisces in the 12th; and Pluto in Aries also falls in his 12th. As a young man he many times risked imprisonment and even death, but thanks to Venus and Jupiter, always escaped.

Morin taught astrology as a rational discipline. His greatest contribution was to show us how to see the horoscope as an integrated unit.

According to Morin, the Ascendant is the single most important component of a horoscope, making up 80 percent of the chart's meaning. Everything must be viewed through its lens. Robert's teacher, Zoltan Mason, made a practice of always keeping his forefinger on the Ascendant as he went through a chart to remind himself of whom he was talking about.

Why is the Ascendant so important? If you believe in reincarnation, the Ascendant represents the problem you have been given to solve. How well you do during this lifetime depends on the condition of the Ascendant. When the Bible states, "A sign has been given," it is referring to the rising sign.

Astrology is an art. You can go through the chart in a rational, systematic way, but in the end, your interpretation is based on your instincts, skill, and temperament. The horoscope is a mirror of the soul. It makes the invisible visible through the use of symbols.

What is the Ascendant?

Our first impression of a person.

Its sign shows the house affairs that are most important to the person.

The physical body and the mental and moral disposition.

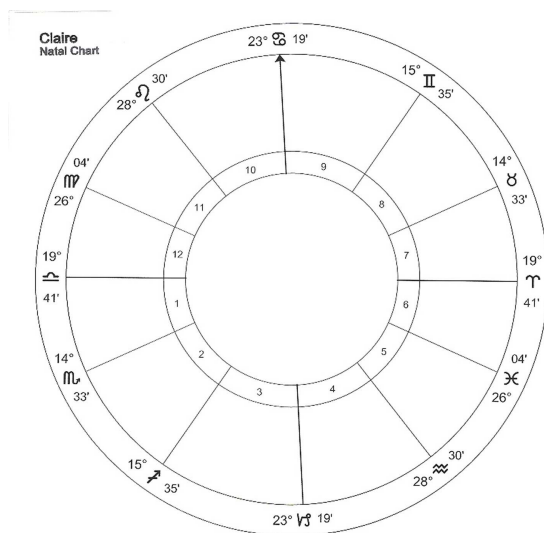
Health (not sickness). The old astrologers called the First the House of Life.

Judging a horoscope is a structured exercise. You can measure the quality and quantity of a given planetary influence. Quantity is the strength of the chart, as seen in terms of survival. Problems with survival are linked to the Ascendant. For this reason, quantity is more important than quality.

Everything can be measured as you go through the horoscope systematically. Analyze: break the chart down into its components. Then synthesize: reassemble it into a meaningful whole. Eventually, doing this becomes a habit. Then you gain speed - images merge - you come to reality. Synthesis makes the chart come alive.

Quantity and Quality

We measure quantity through house position and quality through sign position. If a planet is angular, its impact on your life is tremendous. Whether the angular planet is helpful or harmful to you depends on its quality. A planet in a succedent house has about 50 percent of the impact of an angular planet, and a cadent planet has only about 25 percent of the total impact. This can be good if the planet is a malefic or poorly aspected.



Interceptions also detract from planetary power.

If a horoscope is powerful and the person has gone nowhere in life, something is interfering to weaken the person or block his success. Some horoscopes are just weak; for instance, a mutable Ascendant with its ruler in a mutable sign and in the 3rd house would need some strong mitigating factors to give it strength.

We measure quality through the dignities: domicile, detriment, exaltation, and fall. Whether a planet is in good or bad state, it will realize the affairs of the house. If it's in good state, it will do so in an ethical

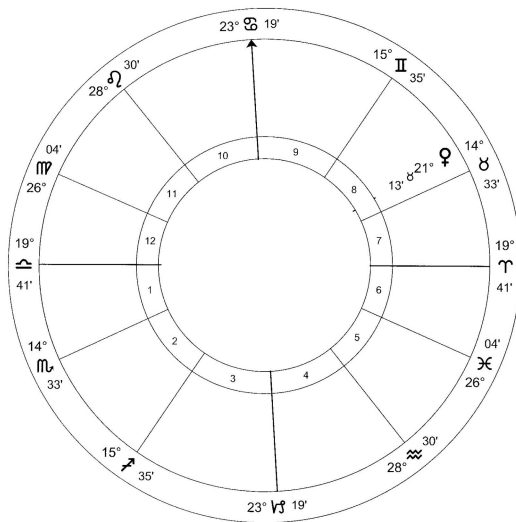
way with fortunate results. If in a bad state, it can do so with reprehensible methods, poor timing, or with no happiness. Judging quality is subtle and difficult because many factors come into play. The influence of a planet in detriment can be mitigated by good aspects or other considerations.

Claire

Robert illustrated his point with the horoscope of Claire, a fine-furniture saleswoman. He began with a blank horoscope, with only the rising sign, 19° Libra. This is the sign she was given to work with in this life.

At this point, all we know about Claire is that 7th house matters are important to her. Her life will revolve around relationships in some way.

Robert then added a chart showing the Ascendant ruler, Venus, in the 8th house. Now the sign has been given direction and quantity. Venus is determined toward 8th house matters (its direction) and has a moderate impact (succedent house).



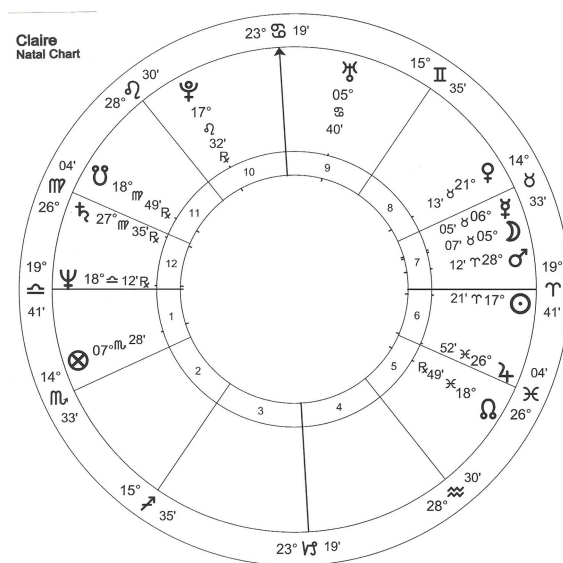
The ruler of the Ascendant goes toward the 8th house. Life goes toward the house of death. This is not particularly good. But Venus is a benefic - it isn't so bad. If Claire had had Aries rising, Mars in the 8th could have made her a soldier: fearless, unafraid of death, maybe subject to mood swings.

Venus in the 8th is very interested in the money of other people. But there's a weakness: Venus in the 8th is not connected to the Ascendant. Planets in the 6th, 8th, and 12th houses are called

"inconjunct," as they do not make major aspects to the Ascendant. If the Ruler of the Ascendant isn't in aspect to either the Ascendant or to planets in the 1st, its impact is mediocre. The quality is the same, but the chart is weakened.

The 6th, 8th and 12th houses are also considered unfortunate houses, the 6th because it rules sicknesses; the 8th because it rules death; and the 12th because it rules institutionalization and imprisonment.

The sign Libra belongs to autumn. It's a ripe, mature sign. Venus in Taurus is a spring Venus. Therefore, Claire is a younger Libran. Contrast this with Britney Spears, who has Libra rising and Venus in Capricorn. Regardless of the image she projects, Britney is highly disciplined and works hard. She's older, riper.



At this point, Robert put up Claire's whole chart and told us a little more about her. Claire was raised in western Pennsylvania by her father, an undertaker and her mother, a housewife. Both were alcoholics. Claire is a fun person who drinks a lot. She never finished college, never married, and has no boyfriend and no pension. She grew up in a household where there was fine furniture and knows the business.

Neptune is conjunct Claire's Ascendant from her 12th. How does this modify our image of Claire? With Venus ruling her Ascendant, automatically relationships are

important. But Neptune interferes with her ability to have relationships by making her too sensitive. Neptunians can't take a harsh environment. Their homes are like wombs; everything is soft, no edges. Neptune people are out of tune; they don't see clearly. Is this a good Neptune?

Let's put it in context: (1) Where is it? On the Ascendant from the 12th. (2) Where does it come from? The 6th, where it rules. (3) Where does it go? The 8th, because its dispositor, Venus, is there.

Neptune connects two houses that are not connected to the Asc.: 8 and 12. These houses are unfortunate because they are connected with values that go against the building up of life.

Jupiter and Venus are in the 6th and 8th. Benefics in unfortunate houses are not great. They destroy through excess.

However, Claire's problem is Neptune. Capricorn on the 4th describes her childhood. Her father was an undertaker - a Saturnine profession. The 4th is the soil from which you arise - the ruler of her 4th is in the 12th. Her childhood was lonely and unhappy. What about the men in her life? The ruler of her 7th is Mars in Aries in the 7th. They would be crude, coarse, and arrogant. Claire is very sensitive. Others overwhelm her: The Sun and Mars in Aries oppose her Ascendant. She may have come to see marriage as undesirable.

The context of astrology

Robert cautioned his audience that astrology is not the complete answer to all human behavior. Before doing any horoscope, we have to take 4 factors into account.

- 1- is the birth data correct?
- 2- the person's gender.
- 3- age of person. Generational issues.
- 4- social-cultural background. This conditions a person. Secular vs. religious, for example.

If the sign on the Ascendant goes against the person's gender, there's a built-in inferiority complex. The person feels out of sync.

If the modern planets are very strong, they take away from the person's ability to survive. The person goes against the norm, which works against survival. Uranus is out of the times: it deals with the far past or the far future. Neptune doesn't discriminate, it has no boundaries. Pluto goes to extremes. Whether good or bad, its first step is always to destroy. If good, a reconstruction follows. Either way, it is very destructive.

Seldom will people be able to respond in a constructive way to the finer energies of the modern planets.

The houses are more important than the signs because they are where we can make meaningful changes. Behavior is based on habit, and habits can be changed through the force of will.

The average person is evolving toward the outer world, from their head to their feet (Aries to Pisces). A person on the spiritual path is evolving toward the inner world, from Pisces to Aries. They are going from the houses they were born with to the Archetype (the natural zodiac, the ideal).