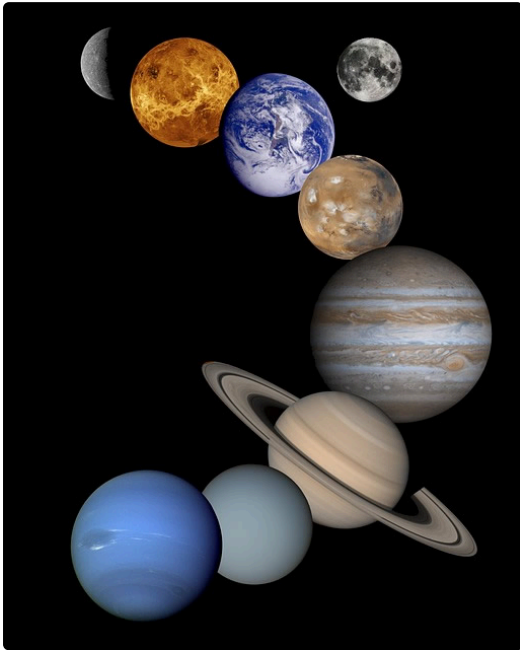


The Planets - Celestial Organs and Their Functions

by Michael R. Meyer

Introduction



The cyclic motion of the planets of our solar system provides the fundamental variables of astrology. The planets are the basic **meaning centers** of an astrological chart, symbolizing organic functions found in all forms of life. Like the organs and glands of your body, they each play an essential role in regulating natural processes, and their activities must be well-coordinated and balanced to sustain health and wholeness.

Everything is needed and proper in its place, in harmony with the whole system. Inhibit or exaggerate the action of any vital organ or gland and illness results. Similarly with astrological planets, each is interconnected with all the other planets, and each has its unique and essential place and function in the whole. Saturn (the “great malefic” of traditional astrology) is as “good” and necessary as Jupiter (classical astrology’s “great benefic”), trouble rises only when a planet’s symbolic function is inhibited, repressed, misdirected or acts against the well-being of the whole.

In the **symbolic language of astrology**, the planets are not regarded as causal or controlling agencies, the planets don’t “make things happen.” In other words, although the human heart is said to be the biological analogue of the Sun in astrology, the Sun doesn’t make the heart beat, no more than the clock on my wall causes me to feel hungry when it indicates dinner time. The symbolic correspondence between the human heart and the Sun is holistic and symbolic rather than causal, the heart serves a function in our biology similar to the Sun’s in the solar system.

We live in a **quantum universe** which works much differently than the classical, force-against-force worldview of nineteenth-century science. It is a universe in which **resonance**, and what the eminent physicist David Bohm calls the **implicate order**, holds things together and allow all parts of a whole to communicate and inform one another and the whole. From this point of view, the astrological planets may be imagined as radiant, gong-like centers of power. The tone of each planetary gong operates at a certain level or octave. A gong sounds a unitary tone comprised of a multiplicity of notes. Each of the astrological planets sounds forth a single, fundamental tone or quality comprising a multiplicity of attributes and functions. In their togetherness, the astrological planets form a celestial orchestra, the tone of each interacting with the others.

According to the **holistic, humanistic approach** upon which this work is founded, there is no such thing as good or bad planets, signs or aspects. Everything is appropriate and needed in its place. Since the 1960s, the basic outlook and philosophy of humanistic astrology has filtered down to the popular level and has influenced astrological literature in general. While Mars, and especially Saturn, are still often assigned very negative attributes in contemporary astrological literature, it is no longer vogue to regard them as “malefic”—as the “bad guys” in a horoscope. Astrological books today usually provide extensive tabulations and descriptions of the planets “negative” attributes. Some attempt a more sophisticated approach, identifying the planets as “gods” and tabulating the planet’s attributes when “dishonored.” Either way, the implicit message is that the astrological planets, signs, houses and aspects possess inherently positive and negative attributes and qualities.

We go a large step beyond the traditional attitude holding that the astrological planets carry positive and negative qualities. The functions symbolized by the planets in astrology, and similarly the qualities of human energies symbolized by the signs of the zodiac, **simply are**. There simply is no such thing as negative Saturn energies or negative Scorpio energies. Mars does not have an inherently “bad” or negative side, nor does any other planet. We may misuse the Mars function or Scorpionic energies, producing undesirable, harmful and generally negative results, but the functions and energies are not

inherently negative in themselves. The functions of any astrological planet may be abused, misdirected, inhibited or repressed in a myriad of ways; yet there seems to be but a few modes of behavior and reactions to situations typical of the blockages and misdirections of a particular planet's symbolic functions.

Planetary Families and Groups

The Lights

In astrology the Sun and Moon are referred to as planets, mostly for convenience, but also because they move against our geocentric (earth-centered) sky. Because the etymological meaning of the word "planet" is "to wander," it made sense for the ancient astrologers who formulated much of astrology's jargon and terminology to refer to the Sun and Moon as planets. Nevertheless, the Sun and Moon are given special status in astrology, together they are known as *the Lights*. They symbolize the life-giving and forming-giving factors of existence. In a sense, they are the solo performers of the celestial planetary orchestra. The Sun, the fountainhead of life energy, represents the will and purpose of all life its power sustains. The Moon, representing ever-changing life-experiences, symbolically gives form to and nourishes solar purpose. Together they represent the bi-polar activity found at the core of all forms of existence—life-force as a unitary power and the distribution of power to wherever it is needed. Their special, cyclic relationship—**the lunation cycle**, from new moon to full moon to new moon—will be explored in a forthcoming series . . . or click on the cover image to the left and order the book that restored cyclicity to astrology.

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There is a deep order and consistency underlying the functions and attributes astrology assigns the planets. The basis for a planet's symbolism lies in its position within the solar system as a whole, as well as its color, size and its orbital characteristics. The planets may be divided into three characteristic groups, based on their positions in the solar system and distance from the Sun. Each group represents a general type of consciousness—our inner, personal consciousness; our consciousness of the outer, social world; and our collective and transcendent consciousness.

The Inner or Personal Planets

This group consist of the planets inside Earth's orbit: Sun, Mercury, Venus and, in a special sense, the Moon. They move quickly through zodiacal space, corresponding with the rapid pace of ever-changing daily circumstances. This group operates largely, but not exclusively, in the personal sphere, representing our personal faculties and our consciousness of the inner world and its landscape. Operating inwardly, theirs is a centripetal movement reaching toward the centralizing self. In this context, Sun represents your core purpose and sense of self, and your personal energy and vitality. Next, Mercury differentiates your primal solar energy, it produces bi-polar, electrical, mental energy. Mercury symbolizes thought processes and mental associations. Venus adds personal values, ideals and goals into the mix. The first planet within Earth's orbit, it represents all inward movement and attempts to reach center. The Moon, spending half its time within the orbit of the Earth and half its time outside Earth's orbit, is **the mediating principle of adjustment**, linking the personal and the social spheres.

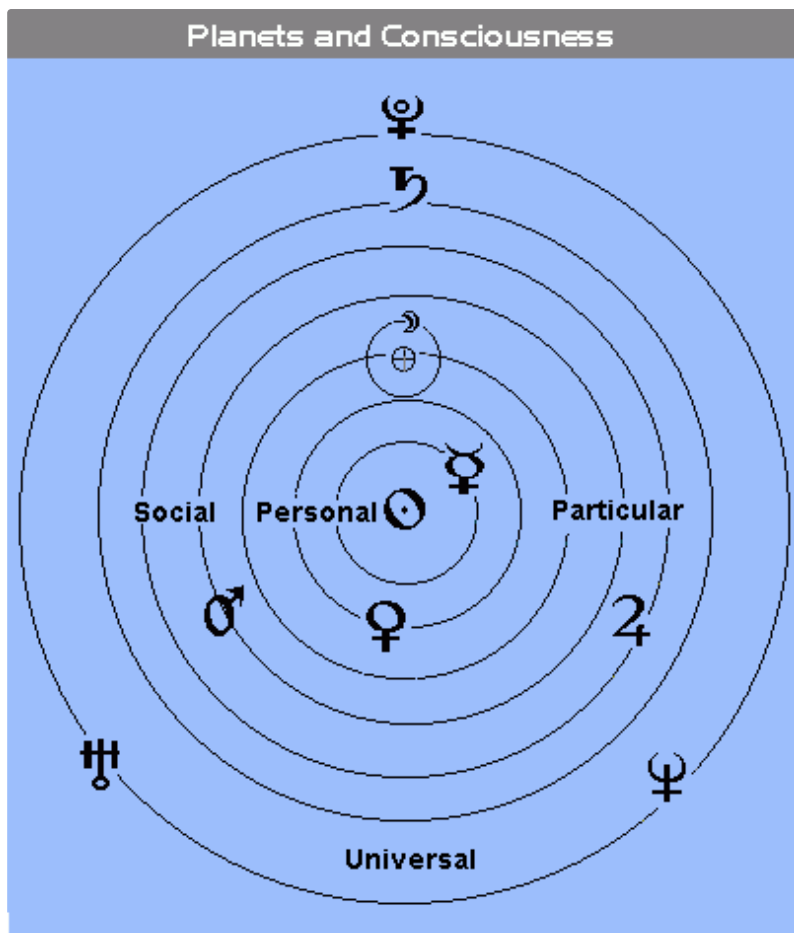
The Social Planets

These are the classical, visible planets beyond Earth's orbit: Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. While the inner planets symbolizes an inward movement toward self, the social planets represent outward activity and participation. They represent consciousness of the outer world. These slower moving planets (Mars has a 2-year orbit, Jupiter's is 11 years and Saturn has a 29-year orbit) relate to functions and activities that place you within a social context, within situations requiring ambition and interaction with others. Mars, the first planet outside Earth's orbit, symbolizes all forms of outer action and mobilization. Jupiter expands the external field of activity. It represents participation and the social sphere in general, and what it can give you. Saturn is the outermost planet visible to unaided human vision. It symbolizes the principle of form and definition. Saturn is the binding principle that structures and holds things together.

On the biological level, it represents the skin, hair and bone that holds your body together and gives you a unique form and appearance. On the social level, Saturn symbolizes the laws, traditions and special identity of a society or social group.

The Collective or Transcendental Planets

This group is made up of the three known planets outside Saturn's orbit and beyond the range of human sight: Uranus, Neptune and Pluto. Operating largely in a transcendent sphere, they refer to consciousness of the collective and universal forces operating behind the scenes acted out by Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. They are very slow moving bodies (Uranus has a 84-year orbit, Neptune's orbit is 165 years and it takes Pluto 246 years to orbit the Sun), and they function primarily in a collective, historical, unconscious or transformative mode. Uranus, the first planet beyond Saturn, symbolize the breaking-down of barriers. Uranus represents transformations and revolutions—inner and outer—and the inventions which alter our lives and relationships. In our personalities, it is the unrelenting urge to go beyond any limitation. Neptune represents universalizing and dissolving processes, and our transcendent faculties and mystical or psychic experiences. Pluto is the cosmic tester and integrator. It tests for fitness to operate at a higher, more inclusive order, and it reintegrates the psychic material Uranus transformed and Neptune universalized around a new center of being and purpose.



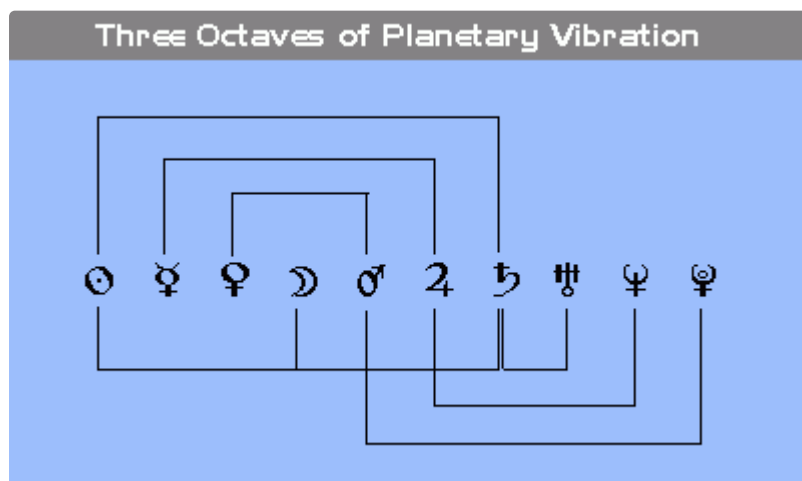
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Particulars and Universals

The planets can also be divided into two groups: Sun to Saturn, dealing with the realm of particulars—consciousness of particular things, people and experiences; and the trans-Saturnian triad of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, representing the realm universal principles.

Three Octaves of Planetary Vibration

Grouping planets as pairs and triads provides a powerful key to unlocking the psychological dynamics of a birth chart. A forthcoming series on planetary pairs and triads will be featured at CyberWorld Khaldea, but for now you can figure things out for yourself with the help of the accompanying diagram.



The Sun, Moon, and Saturn are a natural group. The Sun at the center of our solar system, the Moon defining Earth's "sublunar" realm, and Saturn, the outermost visible planet, symbolizing definition and limitation. These planets are keys to the understanding parental complexes and issues of security. Uranus, the first planet beyond Saturn, may also be pair with Saturn, and together they provide a symbol of the interaction of stability and radical change. Jupiter and Saturn, though not paired in the diagram,

are an important pair, representing social, economic, political, and religious institutions and the authorities who run them.

Venus and Mars are an obvious pair, the first planets within and beyond Earth's orbit. Together they are keys to our emotional, creative, and sexual lives. Pluto ties into the pair on a "higher" octave, suggesting that our creative and sexual natures often drive us to express our most intense qualities . . . for better and for worse!

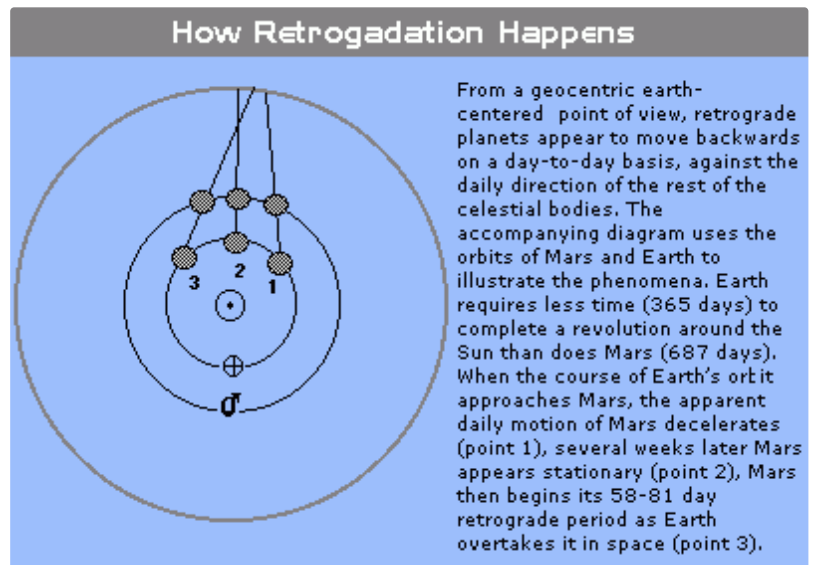
As a pair, Mercury and Jupiter symbolize our faculties of association (Mercury) and participation (Jupiter). Neptune figures as a "higher" aspect of the pair, it symbolizes music, religious compulsions, and psychism (the psychic network and its powerful binding energy) that bind a culture . . . and often holds its members in psychological bondage.

There are other valid combinations, and there are forty-five pairs total. Don't be concerned if all this doesn't make perfect sense to you at this point. As you read the sections on the individual planets, the whole picture will take on clearer features. For now it's important to merely grasp in outline the coherent, holistic framework upon which we derive the symbolism of the individual planets.

For more on planetary pairs and groups, refer to my [A Handbook for the Humanistic Astrologer](#), or online browse the chapter on [Planetary Groups](#)

Retrograde Periods

Astrology views the planets from a geocentric (earth-centered) perspective because we live on Earth and natal astrology requires a "person-centered" system depicting the space surrounding the birth of a person. The geocentric system, however, gives rise to the phenomenon of planetary retrogradation. A planet is said to be retrograde when its day-to-day motion appears to be moving in the sky against the motion of the other planets. The Sun and Moon are never retrograde, but all other planets spend a certain amount of time each year retrograde. See the accompanying sidebar for a graphic depiction of the phenomenon.

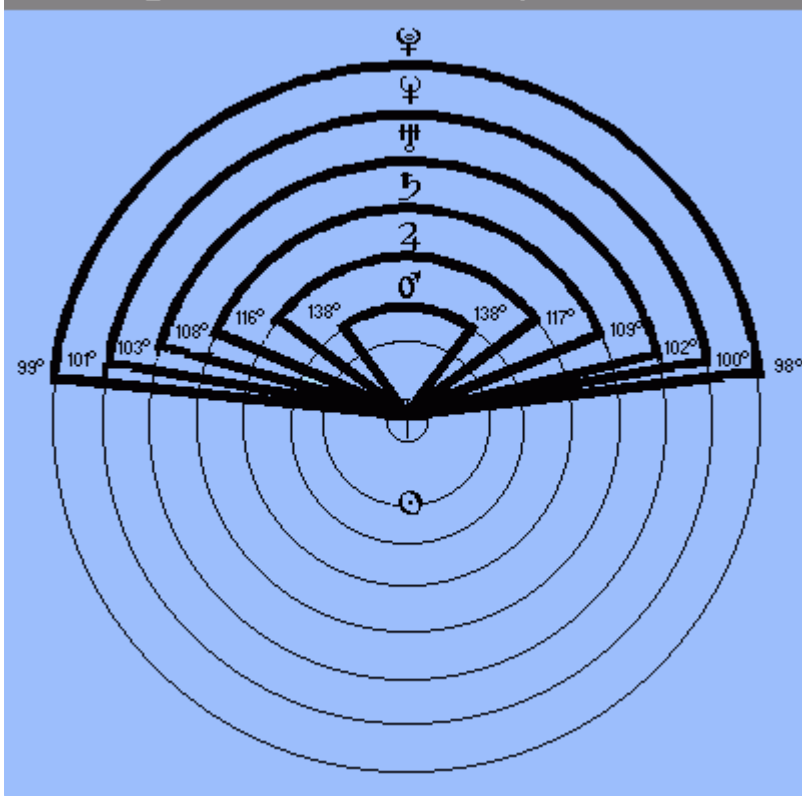


When a planet is retrograde, its function symbolically **runs against the natural current**. Its processes may be turned inward, more or less powerfully impacting the personality, or it may find an unusual channel for outer expression. Each planet takes on its own special attributes when retrograde, and a great deal depends on how the retrograde planet is placed within the chart as a whole, as well as the person's sex. Venus retrograde, for instance, carries a much different symbolism in the birth chart of a woman than it does in the horoscope of a man. Before you finish this book, you'll have a good grasp on how to interpret the significance of retrograde planets in any horoscopic situation.

A planet is said to be stationary during the beginning and the end of a retrograde period. It is the transitional moment when it appears to stand motionless before changing direction. The planet's symbolic function is intensified and particularly focused during the days around its station.

In a general sense, a planet's retrograde period represents a time to **retrace our steps**, learn from past experience, resolve difficulties and tie-up loose-ends in the life-department represented by the retrograde planet. In the instance of a natal retrograde planet, this process is often **internalized**. The person may be much concerned with the issues, functions and processes symbolized by the retrograde planet, and attempts to understand, internalize and integrate them into the fabric of his or her life and personality.

Retrograde Periods of the Superior Planets



A basis for the counterpoint and internalized characteristics of a retrograde planet is provided by the astronomical fact that planets are retrograde only when they are roughly opposite to the Sun. As depicted in the accompanying diagram, with the exception the Moon, all planets roughly opposed the Sun in a horoscope are retrograde.

In recent years much attention has been placed on the retrograde periods of transit planets, especially Mercury. Unfortunately, much of what has filtered down to the popular level has a “doom and gloom” quality which tends toward self-fulfillment. As discussed in-depth in Part Four, there is no substance—either in astrological tradition or in real-world observation—in claims that Mercury retrograde causes mechanical, computer and electronic failure. We may be more prone to error during such times, but no mysterious rays against which we are helpless are out there striking and knocking-out our

computers and lines of communication.

The Planets and Their Symbols

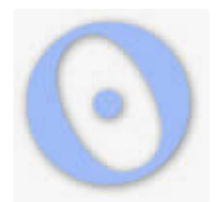
The presentation that follows is meant to facilitate a personal understanding of the core principles and essential meanings of the astrological planets. Memorized fragments or tidbits gleaned from astrological cookbooks can take you only so far, and they seldom explain how and **why** their interpretations suit any given astrological factor. Throughout this volume, the focus is on helping you directly understand and **internalize** the principles at the foundation of astrology, so you can **meaningfully** apply them in any situation.

Keeping things essential actually makes it easier for you to see the connections between the many attributes and qualities assigned to each planet. In addition to modern, humanistic interpretations, most of a planet’s traditional attributes are also provided on the following pages, as well as the people, places and things which traditionally corresponds with each planet.

A few words regarding how a planet’s significance differs for men and for women is given in most instances. Generally, the tones of meaning attributed to the Sun, Moon, Venus, Mars and Saturn shift the most according to gender context. When appropriate, insights are also given on how to interpret a planet’s significance when its motion is retrograde. Gender and retrograde shadings, however, are not provided here for Uranus, Neptune and Pluto because their general significance is more generational than individual. Gender shading become significant for these three planets only when they are viewed in context of the horoscope as a whole.

The Sun

The centralizing force that sustains, integrates and bestows purpose to individual existence. The Sun symbolizes the principle of selfhood and will necessary to participate creatively in a greater whole.



Traditional Attributes

Vitality, personal power and leadership. Activities and things associated with personal success and satisfaction. Grandeur, dignity, wisdom, eminence, generosity, mastery, honor and fame. Will power. The personality or ego. Fatherhood and the masculine principle. The

The Sun

Zodiacal Affinity: Leo

solar principle is represented by the sun gods and father-godhead images of the many traditions: Ra of the Egyptians, Surya of the Hindus, Helios of the Greeks, and others.

Humanistic Interpretation

The Sun represents the basic tone or vibration of one's selfhood. In a birth chart it symbolizes the **root power** which sustains the whole person. It does not necessarily indicate how others perceive you, how you present yourself in daily life, or how you cope with the multiplicity of everyday demands—all of which are better symbolized by the Moon. Rather, the Sun represents your **core purpose** in life, and the **quality of will** necessary to realize and fulfill it. The Sun is the integrating principle which provides purpose and direction in life. In your birth chart, the Sun symbolizes your fundamental **tone of being** to which everything else resonates.

For A Man

The Sun in a man's horoscope symbolizes how he sees himself, his residual self-image—the idealized image of himself he formulated in youth, worked to fulfill through mid-life and continues to identify with during late-life. It represents the personal ambitions, qualities and characteristics he most closely identifies with and seeks to embody. For a youth, the Sun (along with Saturn) represents the father figure and the idealized male role model. For a mature man, the Sun in his birth chart symbolizes his personal power base and his core sense of self and self-purpose.




For A Woman

The psychological functions and qualities represented by the Sun in a horoscope do not really differ between men and women, but social and cultural circumstances usually encourage women to express and actualize their solar potential within a more limited and specific context. The Sun's place within the context of the chart as a whole often reveals the special sort of opportunities and difficulties a woman may experience in realizing her solar potential.

The Sun in a woman's birth chart also represents the key men in her life, and much can be said in a general sense on the subject.

For a virgin, the Sun (along with Saturn) represents the father because he is the central male figure in her life until that role is assumed by a lover or husband.

For a mature woman, the Sun in her horoscope represents the husband or lover, or the principal male figure in her life, because the Sun is the **central** masculine principle in astrology. For her, Mars symbolizes not so much the key man in her life as it does the general type of masculine expression she finds appealing and attractive. The Sun in a mature woman's horoscope represents her **idealize** image of the father, the psychological material she tends to project upon men, qualities she generally expects them to express, and characteristics in men she finds desirable. Mars, which also carries a masculine polarity, in her chart represents lovers in general, especially in their biological aspect. In the horoscope of women, Saturn—another planet of masculine polarity, symbolizing age and authority—is the prime symbol of the father as an actual figure in a woman's life.

House Affinity: 5th
Polarity: Masculine
Colors: Orange, gold and deep yellow
Anatomy: Anterior pituitary gland, the heart and arteries, and the spinal cord. Vital force.
Metal: Gold
Gem: Diamond and ruby
Astronomy: The center of our solar system, the Sun is also a galactic star. The ecliptic of the zodiac is the apparent annual path of the Sun across the sky.
People: Executives, leaders, CEOs and heads of state. Persons in governmental posts and in positions of honor. The husband and male lovers, because the Sun represents the central masculine principle.
Things: Anything valuable or scarce. Items or issues of special importance.
Symbology: The glyph for the Sun is the circle of oneness and infinite potentiality with a point in the center, giving solar potential a finite focus.
<div></div> <p>The Sun in a man's horoscope represents his residual self-image.</p>
<div></div> <p>The Sun in a virgin's horoscope symbolizes the father. For a mature woman, the Sun represents the husband or lover, and the ideal qualities she seeks in men.</p>
<div></div> <p>Robert Graves, George Bernard Shaw, and the early liberated woman, Victoria Woodhall, have Sun emphasized in their birth charts.</p>

Mercury

The mental faculties engaged in perceiving, associating and communicating.

Traditional Attributes

The concrete, mundane mind and its faculties. Perception, memory and speech. The hands and coordination. Thought, reason and analysis. Learning and communicating. Interacting with things and surroundings. Electricity and electrical energies. Data and information. Technology and efficiency. Computers, transportation, cars, telephones and the media. Youth.

Humanistic Interpretation

Mercury symbolizes the principle of interchange, association and relatedness. It gives a mental formulation to one's solar principle, giving one a unique reason for being. Mercury represents the coordination of our many organic, emotional and mental processes—our central nervous system is one of its many manifestations. Mercury is also the symbol of differentiation; it steps the unified solar force down to positive and negative electrical changes. Like the mind, which separates and analyzes, Mercury has a dual character, shown in the mythos of Hermes, the Greek Mercury, who was not merely the messenger of the gods, but a divine liar, theft and trickster. Mind and language may attempt to communicate facts, but it can never do so with complete truth and it can't replace direct experience, because it necessarily separates the knower and the known.

For A Man

Although Mercury's role in a birth chart doesn't vary significantly for men and for women, in a man's horoscope Mercury indicates where a man should be able to operate best without gender conditioning. As explored in-depth in another feature, Mercury's angular connections with other planets, especially Mars and Saturn, reveals how gender biases are transferred to Mercury and the mind.



For A Woman

Because Mercury is neutral, biases and prejudices can be exposed with its aid. In woman's birth chart, Mercury shows her best approach to attaining social recognition and equality without engaging in or reacting to gender conditioning and sexual politics.

Retrograde

Mercury spends about **three weeks** of its 88-day cycle retrograde, and about twenty-percent of all horoscopes feature Mercury retrograde. In a birth



Mercury
Zodiacal Affinity: Gemini and Virgo
House Affinity: 3rd and 6th
Polarity: Neutral or dual
Colors: Specked or spotted
Anatomy: The thyroid gland, the brain and nervous system. Sight, the tongue and organs of speech. The hands.
Metal: Quicksilver
Gem: Quicksilver and lodestone
Astronomy: Mercury completes its orbit around the Sun in 88 days. Because it is inside Earth's orbit, it is never more than 28 zodiacal degrees from the Sun.
People: Students, writers, editors and journalists. Technicians and messengers. Employees and staff. The intelligentsia.
Things: Documents, letters, books and pictures. Neighbors, bargaining, buying and selling.
Symbology: The glyph for Mercury combines the crescent of receptivity, the circle of oneness and the cross of matter. It has a serpentine, intertwining property, as seen in the caduceus of Mercury, signifying the planet's dualism and its creative, electrical energies.

The horoscope of Courtney Love features a powerful Mercury.

Mercury retrograde is seen in about 20% of all horoscopes

chart, Mercury retrograde indicates a mind turned inward toward introspection and self-examination. Exploring one's inner dimensions may be easier and more inviting than dealing with "real world" issues, and the larger, philosophical issues underlying life often hold more appeal than life's more mundane side. One's own ideas and thoughts are likely to be more interesting and intriguing than those of others. Mercury retrograde, therefore, is well-suited for writers, artist, musicians, philosophers and people whose work require the development of new ideas and high degree of concentration and creativity. Far from indicating mental slowness, Mercury retrograde figures largely in the horoscopes of some of the most intelligent individuals of any era.



[Aldous Huxley](#), [Ralph Nader](#), [Hillary Clinton](#), and [Chrissie Hynde](#) were born while Mercury was retrograde.

Because Mercury's polarity is neutral, its significance when retrograde does not differ as significantly between men and women as do some other planets. Yet there are some subtle differences.

In a man's chart, Mercury retrograde suggests an aptitude for studiousness and intense mental work requiring long hours of solo work.

In a woman's chart, Mercury retrograde suggests a personality who strikes out on her own, often breaking new ground and embodying the ideals of new womanhood during any era.