

Are "Bad" Aspects Necessarily So? by Dane Rudhyar

One of the first things a student of traditional astrology learns is that there are two kinds of aspects: some are called good, others bad or fortunate and unfortunate. The good aspects are the trine, sextile and semisextile; the bad ones, the opposition, square, semisquare (or octile), sesquiquadrate (or tri-octile). The conjunction is said to be either good or bad, according to the nature of the planets involved. There are also other aspects, such as the quintile and semiquintile, septile and novile, which are not often used by the average astrologer; but I shall not deal with them at present.

My purpose in this article is to present and discuss what seems to me the real meaning of the series of aspects usually called bad and to stress, much more than is ordinarily done, the importance of the octile or semisquare (45° angle) and tri-octile or sesquiquadrate (135°) aspects. It would seem time for astrologers to revise their views concerning this negative moral judgment passed on a whole series of planetary relationships and to realize that such an evaluation was based on a type of approach to astrology which no longer adequately meets the requirements of an age characterized by its confrontations with power and its emphasis on psychology rather than on morality.

But, first of all, let us try to grasp clearly what astrology really means when it speaks of aspects.

The Two Categories of Aspects

An aspect between two planets defines the relationship which exists between the two types of activity represented by these planets. Let us say that Mars represents the type of activity which demonstrates one's ability to go out into the world in the pursuit of what one desires or needs, and that Saturn represents those activities which aim at consolidating one's position in a most secure and traditional manner. If Mars is in a person's birth-chart 120 degrees away from Saturn (or, at least, close to 120 degrees — i.e., within orb), the astrologer says that the two planets form the aspect called a trine.

This means that the relationship between the Martian outgoing, aggressive function and the Saturnian consolidating, security-building function in the person's life has certain essential characteristics definable by the nature of a trine aspect. As the trine signifies a harmonious, constructive relationship based on understanding or vision, we say that the person is able to relate constructively his forceful outgoing impulses to his need for stability and security; he takes initiative in terms of what he understands adequately and visualizes as productive of security and solidity.

If on the contrary, Mars and Saturn were in square aspect (90°) in the birth-chart, the native would tend to act at cross-purposes with his own requirements for inner or social stability; he would tend to develop a mood of rebellion against whatever is stable and authoritarian, at first perhaps against his father.

However, this person may be perfectly justified in challenging a wrong or oppressive kind of authority. It may be his rightful destiny to be a challenger and a rebel. If so, this natal square of Mars and Saturn should not be considered as bad in the over-all pattern of the life. But it would seem bad if the person were to be made to yearn for a quiet, conventional family life in a very bourgeois setup, on the understanding that such a conformist's life alone is good. Yet is that kind of living necessarily to be glorified in all cases?

Obviously, the classification of good and bad has meaning only with reference to some very general standards of value. It is good to have strong health, an abundant vitality, family happiness, devoted children, a good job, security for old age, and so on. But if an individual is born to fulfill the destiny of a mystic, or even of a pioneer breaking open new trails in the arts, in philosophy or politics, such a happy and comfortable setup would not, in most cases, be good for his purpose. He needs rather to experience tensions, conflicts, crises, dissatisfaction, restlessness — yet not be destroyed by these, but use them as sharp and strong tools to build an undaunted and indomitable personality.

We should, therefore, substitute other words for the traditional good and bad qualifications; or, if we have to use them, we must be aware of their limitations and inadequacy. Perhaps the best way to convey the fundamental difference between the two series of mostly used aspects (trine, sextile, semisextile vs. opposition, square, semisquare) is to say that the first one refers to the type of relationships which are normally oriented toward the **fulfillment**, in established forms, of **natural or social existence**; while the second series of aspects refers essentially to the **generation and release of a transforming energy**.

Self-fulfillment in natural and social forms of living is considered by most people good. The forms are there; you are born into them; you don't question their validity, but you simply try to understand how they operate and how to fit into them. In other words, you fulfill your life by conforming — and that is deemed good. But to draw from the natural, spontaneous flow of your bodily vitality or to use your social vitality (wealth, inherited cultural abilities, etc.) for the purpose of transforming what is established, natural, traditional and good — that is disturbing, dangerous to the normal functioning of your body or social position. If you do that, you are bound to deprive yourself of part of the energy needed for normally healthful living; you induce tensions or conflicts. These may lead to illness of body or mind, to social ostracism, poverty, solitude, even to the hospital or prison. Thus, it is bad.

Too much conformism, however, leads to stagnation and inertia. Growth demands transformation and crises. Crises are periods of dynamic activity starting with a radical

feeling that the forms one has taken for granted are not necessarily right, they may mean bondage. The better is nearly always the enemy of the good. Above all, the consciousness of being an autonomous person, self-reliant and free to make decisions, is something that can come only out of sharp contrasts, of division.

Contrast means duality: this opposing that, I myself and some other person. It implies relationship of sharp, inevitable character: you are related to the person you hate as well as to the person you love. This brings us to the most basic of all astrological aspects: the opposition.

Oppositions and Squares

The usual way of explaining the genesis and meaning of these astrological aspects is to show how they are produced (most of them at least) by the division of a whole circle into 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, etc., parts. As the circumference contains 360 degrees, dividing by two produces 180° (the opposition aspect); by three, 120° (the trine); by four, 90° (the square), etc. However, we should realize at once that when we operate in such a manner, the basic aspect is the opposition. The conjunction is not, then, the first and primary type of astrological relationship — as you cannot divide the circle by one! The conjunction is the last aspect possible. We might say that it is the result of dividing the circle by 360 if we think of a conjunction of two planets as being exact within one degree.

Aspects mean, I said previously, relationship. The first relationship is that in which you suddenly face something: you and that other entity which you do not know but which you must look at and upon which you must pass some kind of judgment. Will it help me or hinder me; is it friend or foe? The result of any such confrontation is awareness. You become aware of what is facing you. Awareness changes into consciousness (from *con*, together, and *scio*, to know) when you have established some sort of rapport between the other and you.

Before the confrontation occurred, you were "the whole show." But now a second entity has appeared, to share life with you, and you have to be related to that other. The problems of relatedness are intruding upon your feelings, your thoughts; they will grow ever more complex. The world, once it begins to be divided in two, keeps dividing, just as the fecundated ovum in the mother's womb keeps dividing, each cell becoming two.

Whenever we deal with life energies and with living organisms division in two is the rule, because what we call life (or the life force) is fundamentally an interplay between two polarities — and the same is the rule, because what we call life or still more cosmic or universal, and as yet unknown, power which transcends both electricity and the life force. But there is also a realm of activity in which division by three is the activating principle. It is the realm of the formative mind — the realm of ideas, of logic, of planning and organizing.

The basic type of relationship in that mind realm implies a threefold kind of activity, a relation between three factors. As the whole circle is divided into three equal parts, an

equilateral triangle is formed. The three points of the triangle are, therefore, 120° apart in terms of zodiacal longitude; they are in trine aspect to one another.

In this article, however, I am dealing with the process of dividing by two and by powers of two: 4, 8, 16. This process liberates energy. It does so because, when you are confronted by some other entity, you must not only be aware of it as fully as possible, but you must also act in relation to it: you may go toward it in love or run away in fear. Even if you should freeze in hostile or puzzled attitudes, this also means action of a sort, for you have to make a deliberate effort to be absolutely still it is a negative kind of activity.

Let us use again as an example Mars and Saturn. If Mars is in opposition to Saturn in your birth-chart, the desire to go out eagerly or forcefully toward some experience faces within you the will to security, the desire to become firmly established as a strongly entrenched ego in your own well-defined place in society. Each of these two pulls must learn to be aware of the other and to acknowledge its right to existence. They must come together in terms of some mutual understanding, which involves discussion, interaction and the play and byplay of attempts at harmonious relationship — or perhaps in terms of insoluble conflict and inner warfare, which is also a type of relationship, only a negative and destructive one. The awareness of each other comes first; the discussion, argument, compromise, agreement to cooperate or internecine warfare — all modes of activity and interplay of energy will follow.

If some agreement is reached so that you are ready to go out in your eager desire to feel, love and conquer others (Mars), but only after due consultation with your Saturnian sense of stability and "not-too-far-please," then the next problem is how to make that combination of your Mars and Saturn energies work out satisfactorily. The two have agreed to cooperate; but how are they going to divide the tasks ahead in terms of actual operation?

With this problem we come to the meaning of the square aspect. The field of your total personal activity has been divided in two by the Mars-Saturn agreement to cooperate; it must now be further divided in two in order to plan precisely for and to solve the problems of joint action. Thus, the two becomes the four. The line becomes the surface with its four cardinal points.

Consciousness which has generated energy through the interplay of relationships becomes focused by means of a plan and a procedure for effective concrete action. It is to this kind of activity that the square refers essentially.

But there may not have been agreement between the two opposite functions (or pulls of desire) within you! The argument may lead to war. Then the two opposite powers will have to fight it out on some kind of battlefield. The fight and the battlefield, and all the strategy of the commanding wills, can be said to be characteristic of the square.

The square aspect (90°) in astrology may, thus, represent two completely different conditions of existence — one positive (anabolic), the other negative (catabolic). The first deals with the establishment of a procedure and schedule for cooperation and the building of a foundation on clear ground; the other refers to a state of affairs in which, neither of two

opposite forces having decided to compromise and agree, the squaring operation digs graves for dead fighters rather than foundations for a building in which cooperation would have been the basis for culture and all-inclusive mind processes.

But we must go one step further. We can divide the square angle in two and obtain the semisquare or 45° angle. What does such a type of relationship signify?

The Meaning of Semisquares

The best word to characterize a 45° angle relationship is probably **engagement**, using the term in the sense in which we speak of two gears becoming engaged. When two armies which have been maneuvering for attack actually come to grips and shoot at each other, or when the steam-shovel put in place for excavating, as the building of foundations is starting, bites the dirt which it is to remove — this means engagement. There has been a **confrontation** (opposition aspect); it has led to an active **interaction** between the confronted powers; now the inevitable results of this interaction, be they constructive or destructive, are released. The dynamic forces are **engaged**, for the sake of greater living or for death; there is no going back — the business has started in earnest. In some cases, indeed, the irresistible force has met an immovable resistance — to quote an old saying — and the result can be explosive.

In almost any case, the semisquare should be considered as signifying the type of relationship which means dynamic action. In **Lincoln's birth-chart**, the Moon in late Capricorn is 47 degrees behind Pluto in Pisces; the Aquarian Sun is 44 degrees behind the Aries Venus; Mars has just left (41°) the semisquare to Neptune. His life was one in which he had constantly to engage the facts of existing situations, not merely plan or be aware of them. His life (Sun and Moon), his most personal and emotional nature (Venus and Mars) were involved in semisquare relationships to big world issues (Neptune and Pluto). In Russian revolutionist **Leon Trotsky's chart**, Saturn is in 47-degree relationship to Pluto, both planets retrograde on either side of the midheaven; Venus is in semisquare to the Sun on either side of the nadir.

An interesting instance of semisquare activity is found where a planet is in the center of the square aspect of two other planets. In **Henry Ford's chart**, Venus at 23° Virgo squares Uranus at 24° Gemini; and the Sun is at 8° Leo, almost exactly at the midpoint of the Venus-Uranus square. We cannot speak authoritatively of Ford's personal character, but this square could be said to denote the interplay of an inventive Uranus and a critical sense of value; it certainly produced new procedures of activity and changed social values all over the world, besides bringing him great wealth. The strong Leo Sun at the center of the square intensely energizes the planning and technique, forcing the concept into sharp, almost ruthless, concrete activity (assembly line, mass production, etc.).

In steel magnate **Andrew Carnegie's chart**, we find also a square (Saturn to Neptune) bisected by Venus — which, thus, acts as a focusing power, rousing intense activity and producing value (that is, in our modern world, money). In **George Bernard**

Shaw's chart, we have a similar configuration, with the Moon and Uranus (22° and 25° Taurus) bisecting the square of Jupiter (10° Aries) to Saturn (8° Cancer). Neptune is also in semisquare to Pluto (21° Pisces to 6° Taurus). In this case, Jupiter and Saturn are planets indicative of a social consciousness in a state of reorganization and radical transformation — a meaning stressed by the Neptune-Pluto square which characterized his immediate generation. The Moon-Uranus conjunction, as it makes its semisquares, rouses an imaginative, original way of forcing social issues into the open — and humor is a very effective way of clearing the ground for social changes!

The Sesquiquadrate Aspect

The semisquare represents the eighth part of the whole circumference; it is interesting to note that the number 8 has always been associated in ancient symbolism with the Sun or any solar power or being. In India, Surya (the Sun) rides in a chariot drawn by eight horses (or vital energies). Among the early Christian mystics (called the Gnostics), Christ-Jesus was represented by the number 888 — or 8 at the three basic levels of existence (physical, mental-psychic and spiritual). Number 8 in modern numerology has much to do with wealth and success in the exteriorization of faculties or potential talents.

The reason for this is evident: the Sun is that power able to engage matter, to mate with its resistant earth substance and through this to arouse in it life. Likewise, the Christ-Power is that which impregnates and transforms the human ego and arouses in it the "living God," the God within the heart (also ruled by the Sun and the number 8).

In other words, all fecundant activity operates according to a bi-polar principle, requires a fourfold field of activity (4 cavities of the heart, etc.) and actually operates according to an eightfold rhythm. In electromagnetic fields, the greatest dynamic activity is produced at the 45° angles bisecting the basic quadrature of the field. In the zodiac, the middle of the fixed signs — 15° Taurus, Leo, Scorpio and Aquarius — have been spoken of as the points of "avataric" (God-manifesting) descent; for this reason, the four Evangelists have been associated with the symbols of the Bull, the Lion, the Eagle (Scorpio after total regeneration) and the Angel (Aquarius). They are the four gates through which the word of God is spoken and God's power is released.

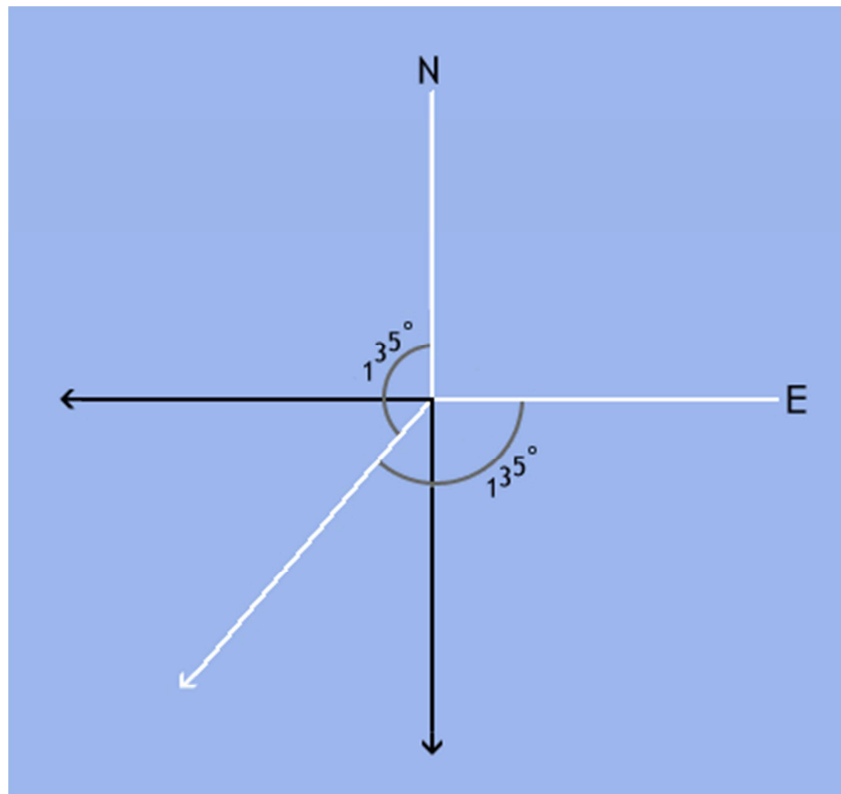
This does not mean that the four cardinal points of the zodiac (equinoxes and solstices) do not constitute the basic framework of the solar cycle of life on Earth; but it indicates that the points of maximum release of power where solar power makes its actual transforming impact upon Earth substance or human egos are at 45-degree angles to these four basic cardinal points.

However, it should be clear that if one measures the angular distance between 0° Aries and 15° Leo, one finds a 135-degree value. That is to say, a square plus a semisquare make an aspect which has been called sesquiquadrate. But we might also say that an opposition (180°) minus a semisquare (45°) make a sesquiquadrate (135°). This, I believe, is the most significant way such an aspect can be understood. It is a falling back from the

opposition; as such, it tends to be a negative symbol — unless we have a chart in which we find several semisquares, one after another, so that planets are disposed of at least several (if not all) of the points of an eight-pointed star.

For instance, if we find a planet at (or near) 1° Aries, another at 15° Taurus, still another at 1° Cancer, a fourth at 15° Leo, the first would form a sesquiquadrate aspect to the fourth; there might be another 1° Capricorn which would be in sesquiquadrate aspect to the one at 15° Taurus. In such a case, we have the incomplete but definite outline of an eight-pointed star. Such a configuration of five planets in mutual semisquares and squares must be considered as a most significant whole, denoting an extreme of forcefully engaged activity, at one level or another.

But where we find only an isolated sesquiquadrate aspect linking two planets, the usual indication is that the relationship is heavy with residue of past activity (loaded with the ghosts of un-lived experiences). In other words, there was a confrontation (opposition aspect) from which the person shrank; this failure to establish a real relationship produced certain negative results —perhaps regrets and a sense of frustration, remorse and a sense of guilt.



When I referred in the beginning of this article to a square of Mars and Saturn, I spoke of outward action (Mars) at cross-purposes with the requirements for stability (Saturn).

Consider what happens when two cars meet violently at an intersection, one coming from the north, the other from the east. As they collide, the energy resulting from the impact tends to spend itself toward the southwest — that is, following a line which divides in two the north-south and east-west directions of the cars. In other words, if the cars proceed ruthlessly, refusing to cooperate at the square intersection, the energy generated by their related motions turns destructive; they meet in death at a 135° angle to both their directions of motion.

Examples of Sesquiquadrates

It is never too easy to find in the charts of well-known people illustrations for processes which depend on inner reactions and on the person's approach to his life experiences. But let us consider the chart of Marshal von Hindenburg, who in his very old age was built up during World War I as a German national hero and, after the defeat, was made the official head of the State as a symbol of national pride and stability. In his birth-chart, Saturn retrograde at 7° Pisces forms a 135° angle with the Moon (on the descendant) at 23° Cancer. Some astrologers would think of the relationship as a broad trine; but this should miss the important point. Saturn and the Moon stand for the two parents, for the ancestral tradition. It is this traditional figure of the Prussian general which von Hindenburg rigidly and almost anonymously exemplified (he was mostly a figurehead); but it was a disintegrating and defeated tradition! The Moon at the descendant was von Hindenburg's public, confusedly trying to build a democratic home state.

This is, of course, much strengthened by a powerful T-cross in cardinal signs with Uranus-Pluto in Aries, Jupiter-Moon in Cancer, the Sun-Venus-Mercury in Libra; all planets in the eastern hemisphere are retrograde, including Mars. But (the chart's ascendant ruler) has special meaning as being off the T-cross, yet in semisquare to the midpoint of the Uranus-Pluto pair, and in sesquiquadrate to Jupiter (131°) and, more precisely, to the Moon (136°).

As one deals with such matters, one has to come to grips with subtle psychological problems; the true interpretation of these sesquiquadrate aspects often seems to go back to ancestral or karmic influences. Our un-lived life indeed often strikes back at us in many and subtle ways, I trust, however, that enough has been said to show how important the semisquare and sesquiquadrate aspects can be for a true understanding of an individual's life.

I hope above all that the reader will be sufficiently impressed by this discussion, incomplete as it is, to question seriously the validity of calling the entire set of aspects produced by a dividing-by-two operation bad.