

Natal Houses *What Do They Represent?*

American readers of astrological magazines published in the continent of Europe or in contact with astrologers overseas are often puzzled by the way in which astrological charts made on the continent look, with the circle of zodiacal signs and degrees printed where we are accustomed to find the basic framework of the horizon and the meridian of birth. Because this reversal of the positions of the zodiac and the house-wheel is also beginning to be in use among a few American astrologers, and the implications of this change are indeed of the greatest significance, it is essential for everyone interested in astrology to understand the meaning, superficial and as well philosophical, of the two basic contemporary types of chart arrangement.

Many astrologers on the European continent use a type of chart arrangement which emphasizes the zodiac by drawing the zodiacal band around the chart. They do so, whether deliberately and knowingly or merely as a matter of customary practice, because in their judgment the zodiac is the one foundation of all astrological patterning and interpretation and factors such as the ascendant and midheaven are understood by them merely as points of individual emphasis within the zodiac.

Such an attitude is not the only valid one. The "American-style" chart is the evident product of another approach to astrology, an approach according to which the wheel of houses is a factor as basic and as **significant in itself** as the zodiac of twelve signs. Insofar as the actual experience of any individual person is concerned, the horizontal and vertical axes of this type of chart pattern are factors of more primary and spiritual significance than the equinoctial and solstitial points of the zodiac. Moreover, the meaning and importance of the ascendant and descendant — indeed, of the entire sequence of houses — are not merely derivatives from those of usually related elements in the zodiac. This meaning and importance are of an entirely different order.

House Oriented Chart



Zodiac Oriented Chart



The two factors, zodiac and wheel of houses, are expressions of two basic aspects of human experience and human nature. It is only as these two are integrated, without the one being sacrificed or made subservient to the other, that a profoundly valid and

psychologically real interpretation of individual personality is possible. All astrology rests upon the principle of the integration of dualities.

Historically, the zodiac was almost certainly the first of these two astrological factors [the zodiac and the circle of houses] to be used. But whereas the dominance of the zodiacal factor belongs essentially to the archaic type of astrology, as we shall see presently, today the entire trend of our western civilization and of our individualistic mentality, compels us to give to astrology a more complex and a more personalistic basis.

Archaic **vitalism** is superseded by modern **personalism**; the zodiac of life instincts, though retaining its basic value, is, nevertheless, to be seen in its true meaning for modern man only as it is brought to a focus in the conscious experience of the individual person. This conscious experience of the individual person is shown operating in and through the framework of houses defined essentially by the natal horizon and meridian.

As already stated, most astrologers in France, Germany, and in other countries of the Continent generally use horoscope forms in which the essential, unchanging feature is a circular zodiacal band divided into twelve equal sections, one for each sign; these sections, moreover, are subdivided in most cases into six and even thirty parts (one for every zodiacal degree). Aries 0° is located (usually, but not always) at the left of the figure, where we are accustomed in America to find the eastern horizon point. As to the ascendant, midheaven and the other house cusps, these are drawn as lines cutting across the zodiacal band, according to their zodiacal longitudes. Such an arrangement obviously makes of them secondary factors subservient to, and falling **within**, the zodiac.

Besides, much is made in Europe of the fact that there are several ways of calculating the cusps of houses; harsh arguments go on as to which way is best, casting doubts as to the importance of the entire house setup. These arguments are often vitiated by the fact that the basic distinction between zodiacal signs and houses that **are sections of the space surrounding the new-born** is forgotten. For instance, astrologers speak of "equal" houses when they mean houses whose cusps are separated by 30 degrees of the zodiac or "unequal" houses when some contain more, some less than these 30 degrees of the zodiac. Yet all houses are actually equal in terms of what they should be considered to measure — that is, the twelfth part of the space around the new-born or the twelfth part of the time of a complete rotation of the earth around its axis (a sidereal day).

Houses exist as a matter of primary and personal **experience of space**, whether or not the concept of a zodiac exists in the mind. The flat horizon, the sense of a vertical up-reaching leading up to the zenith are matters of basic and common human experience — as basic, though of a different order obviously, as the experience of the seasons upon which is founded the concept of the zodiac. These two "orders of experience" are equally valid, and no really modern astrology can exist without the full recognition of what they both mean.

One order can, however, be emphasized more than the other; whenever the chart's arrangement features so predominantly the zodiacal belt and its subdivisions that the zodiac factor actually is made to absorb and contain not only the planets but also the cusps of the

houses, then this is an evident indication that the kind of astrological thinking accepting such a type of chart as valid is still controlled by an archaic emphasizing of the zodiac. It has not yet understood or accepted the profoundly spiritual significance of the horizon and the meridian.

What happens then — and this is still very often the case even among astrologers in America — is that the zodiac is seen as the one and only basic "frame of reference" for all astrological types of patterning. If there are twelve houses, it is thus reasoned, it is **because** there are twelve zodiacal signs. If there are twelve signs, there must be twelve planets to "rule" over them, etc.

While this type of "zodiac-haunted" thinking is expressed graphically by the continental type of chart in which the zodiacal belt dominates and encloses everything astrological, in the familiar "American-style" chart the zodiacal belt is not shown directly and graphically at all. It is merely implied in the names of signs and figures of degrees which accompany the cusps and the planets. What is pictured in the printed wheel and its twelve spokes is the universal sphere of the sky (in two-dimensional projection) as it is **seen from the place of birth**, the center of the space surrounding the new-born. The zodiacal belt and the planets are contained in that total space which extends to the farthest stars.

Such a type of chart arrangement constitutes not as much a "geocentric" frame of reference as an "anthropocentric" (i.e., man-centered) one. The center of the chart **is not** the earth as a whole but, instead, a particular human being born at a particular point of the earth's **surface**.⁽¹⁾ The chart is a symbolical representation of what the newborn could **actually** experience. It is the symbolical representation of universal space, the whole of it as it is **in fact**; the whole of space as a symbol of the vastness of human experience, yet divided into twelve basic and **equal** space sectors to show that these are twelve basic categories discernible in the complex field of the total experience of the individual person.

The zodiac is not space as such. Originally, it was the path of the apparent motion of the Sun. Today, we see it as the orbit of the earth defining a zone of influence, a planetary electro-magnetic field. It is a field of energies. It is the "universal matrix", the great field of distribution of the one basic solar power, as this power becomes differentiated into twelve primary types of energy. Energy is always born of relationship; and zodiacal energies are **the product of the constantly changing, dynamic relationship between the Sun and the Earth**.

The Sun is the one source whence is released that power which, in a twelvefold differentiated condition, meets and answers the periodical and seasonal demands of earth organisms for vital energies of varied types. It is the needs of earth organisms which call forth the outpouring of solar power, power adapted at any time to the earthly needs it must fill.

Truly, a man on the surface of the earth lives within the electro-magnetic field which the zodiac symbolizes; he lives in a sea of solar and zodiacal energies. But the essential thing for him, as a concrete person, is that he succeeds in absorbing, assimilating, then

releasing these energies. This threefold process is the process of individual experience. The zodiacal energies are **brought to focus** in the complex experience of the individual.

Actually, what is brought to a focus in personal living are the many functional and organic activities of the body and the psyche. Astrologically, these activities, reduced to a few basic categories, are represented by the planets. "Planetary" activities presuppose, however, the expenditure of adequate types of energy. Thus, the position of a planet in a zodiacal sign shows the type of energy which "feeds" the corresponding functions in the total organism of personality.

The zodiac is the energy food upon which man depends to **function** as a living body and psyche (planets) and to **fill the needs** of his individual development through the field of concrete earthly and social experience (wheel of the houses). The food may "make the man" (as some people say), according to its quality and the abundance or scarcity of it; yet the drama of absorption and assimilation of this food and the use man makes of it is the central and most significant factor for man. This drama is his experience as an individual person; astrologically, the stage on which the drama is played is the wheel of houses — i.e., **universal space** focused within the field of the particular experience of a particular man, at a particular time and place.

In our familiar American-style chart arrangement, the degrees of the zodiac placed, as figures, at the cusps of the natal houses show the nature of the "food" (or type of energy) available to meet the basic twelve categories of individual experience on the earth's surface and in human society. Each department of experience (i.e., each house) is, thus, shown to have a definite type of food energy to expend, just as every planet has its definite type of zodiacal energy to function with (as shown by its longitude).

The factor of zodiacal position (the type of energy available) is, thus, attached to every element of the chart — cusps, planets and other astrological points; but nowhere, in this type of chart, is the zodiac plotted out on paper as an entity. On the contrary, in the European-style chart pushed to its logical conclusion, planets and cusps are mere dots, stressing one degree or another of the zodiacal belt. This belt **is** the chart; the planetary and cuspal points are merely emphases or functional accents.

What this European Approach means philosophically is that the zodiac is considered to be the one theme, **man**; the individual person is merely a set of emphases or accents introducing variations upon this one solar theme, zodiacal man — man, not as a person but as a cosmic matrix. This may be the traditional occultist's approach — or at least a phase of it — but it is not the modern psychological approach. It does not establish the individual person as the central fact of the spiritual human universe — as we find this to be the case in the general doctrine now known as "Personalism", which embodies the typically modern point of view.

We can easily trace the traditional occult approach to its origin in the "Vitalism" of the great agricultural societies of some three to five thousand years ago; it is in these societies

that, as far as we know, the astrology inherited from the Near Eastern past by medieval Europeans was established. The "individual person" was not yet developed as a real, operative spiritual factor. The unity of the tribe (growing later into a strictly planned theocratic society such as was known in China, India, Egypt, Palestine) was the real fact; and the tribal community was ruled by "Life" and its functional seasonal rhythms, its dynamic compulsions.

These could naturally be referred to the zodiac and its twelve types of dynamic qualities. The tribe, glorified into the universal man, was the expression of the zodiac. The function, the office were the basic factors of value, rather than the individual person fulfilling its tasks. There was no astrology for the individual person but only for the tribal office — for the throne, far more than for the King.

The type of astrology which features primarily and in the structure of its charts the zodiacal circle is a type of astrology not yet emerged fully from the vitalistic stage — from the mother, a psychologist would say. It is a type of astrology which has not yet reorganized its traditional thinking and values to meet the challenge of our modern era, the challenge to the individual as a microcosm. The zodiac is not the microcosm (nor is it the macrocosm, which the **whole universe** alone is); it is merely an electro-magnetic field. The only microcosm there is is the fully individualized human person, free from all mother images and from all dependence upon the rhythm of seasonal, instinctual energies because he has become the center of his own universe — even though he must also realize in time that this center is but one of myriads of such centers.

The natal horizon, shown in the east-west line of the usual American-style chart, is the foundation of all individualizing processes. It is the key to God's answer to the need of earthborn man, at a particular time, focused in a particular place. It is the "individuality of the situation" of birth. To let this natal horizon line cut at any angle the printed form of the zodiacal belt, as is done in many continental European charts, is to show a total lack of understanding of the meaning of the ascendant and of the individual person.

Surely it makes a quick-glance calculation of aspects between the planets easier than is possible in an American-style chart; but this convenience is paid for by a basic philosophical incongruity or, even more, is the expression of an archaic psychological and spiritual attitude to life — archaic because dominated by the mother image and the sense (unconscious though it be) of dependence upon that which **provides** energy and which guides the capacity to adjust to everyday life.

A very large portion of astrological thinking is still today dominated by such an attitude to life, its irrational biases, its psychic compulsions, its subconscious fears and its dependence upon external and mysterious "forces". It does not matter that these "forces" have become now "electro-magnetic" instead of "occult" or "astral"! The change of verbal clothing does not alter the basic psychological situation. The situation can be changed only by reorienting astrological values and judgments away from the zodiacal position meanings

featured in textbooks and in the direction of a thorough and clear understanding of the phases of the process of personal experience symbolized by the cross of horizon and meridian and by the entire wheel of houses.

In saying this, I do not seek to under value the importance of the zodiac and of the indications derived from the position of planets and cusps in the zodiac. There can hardly be any astrology at all today if moving celestial bodies or points are not given meaning in terms of the signs and degrees of the zodiac which they occupy. Again, the zodiac symbolizes the field of distribution of the energy of life; without energy, there can be no individual organism, no personality and no experience!

Neither can there be any individualized conscious self without a depth of collective unconscious contents and psychic energies, instincts and drives; nor can there be fish without water. Yet, for modern individuals, the important thing is that we should **actually** become true individuals, out of the sea of the collective unconscious, emerged from the mother. What matters most is our experience as individual persons-to-be — if not as fully individualized, integrated selves. What matters most is the **process of focusing** whereby the cosmic, unformed ocean of solar-zodiacal energy is brought to the clear focus of conscious individualized existence and used accordingly.

The process of focusing — and the great act of spirit which is the "incarnation" — can hardly be understood or assisted by astrologers unless astrological judgment is also brought to a focus by the study of the precise natal chart with an exact ascendant and wheel of houses. The ascendant is not merely a line cutting across a sign of the zodiac — as shown in the typical European-style chart. It is the beginning of the field of conscious individual existence. The natal horizon (from ascendant to descendant) is the most basic factor in the conscious personality.

It is, therefore, right that our most familiar chart arrangement should make of this natal horizon the very foundation of the entire chart's structure. It is right and necessary, that is, according to the "personalistic" approach to astrology — but not so in the "vitalistic" systems of archaic astrology. Here, then, is a choice to make. astrology, in this sense, is at the crossroads.

By tradition, Anglo-American astrology is committed to a more or less clearly understood personalistic approach; and the Anglo-American style of charts has up to recently stressed the meaning of the houses. However, as I stated at the outset, a number of pressures and influences have helped of late to stress the solar and zodiacal factors; whether intentionally or as a matter of mere convenience, the disposition of astrological charts has tended to change and to conform to the type used in most European countries.

What the zodiac-emphasizing type of chart shows is not the pattern of an individual person and the celestial symbols which give answers to this person's needs on his way to self-fulfillment and beyond; it is a sequence of emphasized points in the zodiac — these points being revealed by the zodiacal longitudes of planets (and house cusps if these are calculated at all). Man is portrayed as a bundle of forces, not as an individual person; the

psychological results of such an attitude should be only too well known to us all. The matter of what type of chart is to be used goes indeed that far. It is one of crucial significance.

It would be impossible to end this discussion without referring to the problem posed by the possibility of various methods of house division; but this is, when discussed technically and astronomically, a difficult problem which I do not pretend to be able to solve at the strictly astronomical level. Astrologers who seem well trained in the science of celestial measurements surely keep disagreeing — and violently so, at times!

The reason for some phases at least of the disagreement is, I believe, that few seem to know exactly what it is the houses should represent; it is there that the roots of the confusion lie. According to the type of approach to the birth-chart which I hold, the houses should, I repeat, be regarded actually as a projection on paper of the universal space surrounding the new-born. This house space is the field of individual experience and of growth in personality. The cusps of the houses (or more accurately, the "house circles") divide this space into equal sectors; because of the fact that the ecliptic (or zodiacal belt) is inclined on the earth's equator, the zodiac is not divided evenly (except at the equator), **as it is made to fit into the framework of man-centered space.**

It is the zodiac which is "made to fit" into the houses, not the opposite. As far as the chart's structure is concerned, it is the houses (and particularly the cross of horizon and meridian) which are basic. The zodiacal belt crowds here, spreads out there. Zodiac is substance energy; the houses' framework is formed space. The substance energy is contained within the framework. Much of the trouble comes from wanting the zodiac to be the ruler of the show, to make house cusps happen inside of the zodiac, as it were.

The meridian of the birth-chart passes through the zenith, the nadir, the north and south poles of the earth on which the newborn takes his first breath. It cuts the zodiacal belt at two points, thus establishing the longitudes or zodiacal degrees of the cusps (or "house circles") of the tenth and fourth houses. But these cusps are not to be considered merely as points on the zodiac. They are circles dividing the space of the birth-centered sphere — the mundane sphere.

There is, nevertheless, the problem of determining the most significant and logically consistent method for "projecting", as it were, the zodiac upon or into the structure of the houses so that the longitude of every cusp is ascertained at every moment of the day and at every place on earth. The horizon remains the horizon; the zenith is always overhead in the experience of every man living in one locality. But every day the stars, planets and the zodiacal belt as a whole rotate around this man, filling his surrounding space. The celestial contents of his field of vision change every moment.

The Placidian system of house division — based on the diurnal and nocturnal movement of every degree of the zodiac — is today the system used by all but a very few astrologers, and tables of houses for other systems of house division are not generally available. Yet the Campanus method is more in accord with the type of understanding of the framework of houses which I have attempted to convey, as it is more basically a method of division of the

space itself which surrounds the new-born. The publication of a complete set of Campanus Tables would indeed be most welcome.

The most essential point, at present, is not, however, which method is best to use — though some are, no doubt, far more logical than others. The problem is far deeper and reaches to the very roots of one's conception of astrology; here again, the greatest obstacle to a consistent and really significant approach is the idea that the planets and stars are directly and literally "influencing" **individuals** by mysterious waves or rays of force which strike our bodies as do light or radio beams.

Astrology, in my opinion, is a **system of symbolism** enabling us to get a deeper and broader, richer and more basic understanding of personality and of the rhythm of world events insofar as they affect humanity. Above all, it is a means to find the basic spiritual answer to our problems which is actually implied in these problems, the answer which is given by the whole universe the very moment these problems arise — and the most basic one is the problem of birth as an individual!

1. I have shown, years ago, in **Horoscope** (July, 1943) that it is completely inconsistent to draw a miniature earth-globe at the center of a birth-chart. The birth-horizon does not actually cross the earth's globe. It is a tangent to it. The globe is below the place of birth. This is an essential point, for the line zenith to nadir — the vertical or plumb line, man's erect spine — passes, first, through the center of the earth, before reaching the antipodes and the nadir sky. At the cusp of the fourth house, therefore, man reaches center — potentially, at any rate!