

Part One: Interrogating and Interpreting Nodes and Their Squares

This essay takes on the complex topic of the Lunar Nodes: their celestial background, how they have been used over time – especially in the twentieth century – and different possibilities of application.

Many of us astrologers have been confused and frustrated when trying to understand and use the Lunar Nodes for clients. Unless we have a sense of how they fit into astrology's broad landscape, and what their purposes are, they can be difficult to apply confidently. A variety of theories about the Nodes have existed over time, with some of them being more ideological than practical. For those of us who have been uncertain about the Lunar Nodes, this essay may help provide context, loosen preconceptions, fill in some missing information, and show how they can be used with greater confidence.

This essay addresses these questions:

- Since the Lunar Nodes are in opposition, are they a polarity or a continuity?
- The Lunar Nodes are not planets but places in the sky, how were they “seen”?
- How did the modern view of the Lunar Nodes as Fate or Life Mission originate and develop? And what was there before?
- How do planets' manifestations differ between the North and South Nodes, and, in square to the Lunar Nodes, the Northern and Southern Bendings?
- In what ways do the designations of the Dragon's Head and Tail, or Rahu and Ketu contribute to our understanding of the North and South Nodes?

I am particularly interested in how the seven visible planets are affected by the Lunar Nodes – their conjunctions and their squares. According to modern conventions, the Lunar Nodes are important for everybody. Here, if we use a maximum five-degree range between a Node or square (Bending), only about half of the natal charts will have a planet on one of these four positions.¹ When these contacts do occur, however, they

¹ More accurately, 55% of charts will have planetary involvement with the Nodes or Bendings. Forty degrees (five degrees of “orb” on these four positions) is one-ninth of the zodiac. Imagine this being a nine-sided die (plural: dice): what are the chances that in seven tosses (seven planets), a particular number, like 1, will appear? 55%

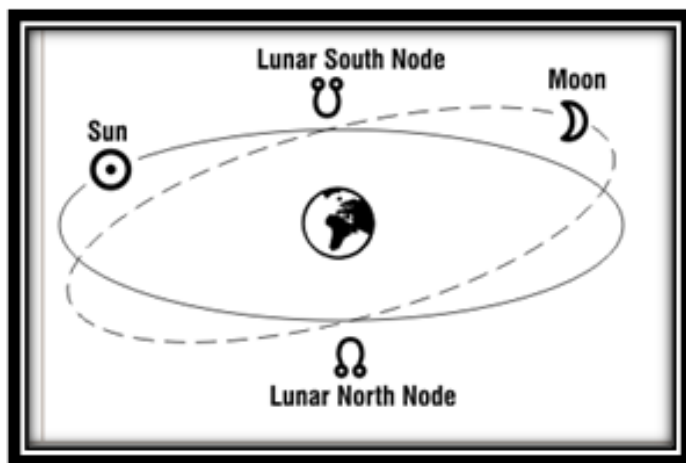
can contribute much to our understanding of a person's astrological chart and how it may manifest in that person's life.

Our Beginning

Once upon a time, maybe as early as our first astrology classes, we learned that the Moon had a North Node and an opposing South Node. Later we learned that when the Sun and Moon were aligned with the Nodes there could be a solar or lunar eclipse, maybe that during an eclipse the Dragon devoured the Sun, and that the Lunar Nodes were also the Dragon's Head and Dragon's Tail.

Later, perhaps, we found out that the sign and house of the North Node was a place of growth or the soul's purpose, and the sign and house of the South Node is where we can get stuck. Since the Nodes were in opposite signs and houses, one could use a sign or house polarity to signal where inertia is and where progress is. This was so simple!

If we stuck around for what's called "astronomy of astrology", we may have learned that the Nodes were at the intersection points of the ecliptic – the seasonal path of the



Sun divided into the twelve signs of the zodiac – and the Moon's orbit around the Earth. But what did that mean?

And, if we went even further, we learned that the Lunar Nodes were part of a "Moon latitude cycle" by which the Moon is conjunct the ecliptic at one of the Nodes and is at maximum distance from the ecliptic

when in square to them. (A planet in square to the Nodes is at a South or North "Bendings", depending on which Node it follows in the zodiac.)

My early learning followed a path like this, and there was more to come for me.

Taking it Personally

Back in the late 1980s, as a promising astrology student, I was very good at interpreting and applying the Lunar Nodes. My first astrology teacher, an admirer of Dane Rudhyar's astrology and a practicing psychotherapist, gave me a keen sense of how to speak about a person's limitations and possibilities by using the natal placement of the Lunar Nodes. I could tell from a natal chart that one's fulfillment lies in becoming more or less emotional or thoughtful, more or less detail-oriented, or more or less introspective or social.

Although this approach was useful for consulting and teaching astrology relatively early in my career, I had become increasingly uncomfortable using the Lunar Nodes in this way. My Saturnian nature began to think I was being arrogant and dishonest (although my Jupiterian nature loves giving advice). I was also becoming disturbed by how "karma" was being discussed: what makes the Nodes "karmic," somehow favored over other factors in the natal chart?

I was also befuddled by planets and their effect on Nodes. It had previously escaped my notice that my own astrological chart contains North Node conjunct Sun with Mercury nearby in the previous sign. Were my Capricorn Sun and Sagittarius Mercury planets alien to me and for me to grow into, as opposed to an over-emotional South Node in Cancer? (Nobody who knows me wants me to be more Saturnine or more mentally Sagittarian.)

My first venture outside my initial training was a different modern approach: the astrology (or should I say "cosmobiology") of Reinhold Ebertin and his followers, and harmonic charts as pioneered by John Addey and David Hamlin. I began to appreciate the Lunar Nodes not as an opposition but as a continuum, an axis that includes both North and South Nodes – but how?

Ebertin's depiction of the nodal polarity (or "Dragon's Head") felt more lunar and practical – he introduced the Nodes as "association or alliance" with features of adaptability, sociability, and fellowship – perhaps in abundance, perhaps in privation. This astrological style emphasizes the Nodes as a member of a planetary pair: e.g.,

Mercury/Node as an exchange of ideas and Mars/Node as collaboration, a desire to cooperate with others, perhaps to quarrel with them.

In the mid-1990s, however, I converted to ancient and medieval astrology – yes, it felt like a religious conversion. I appreciated their systematic ways of gathering information and realistic ways of applying them to real people. In the following years I began to write for publication about traditional astrology and its techniques.

The Lunar Nodes continued to interest me. In the late 1990 I wrote “The Structure of Cycles: Ptolemy and Rudhyar Revisited”, for *The Mountain Astrologer*.² I compared the zodiacal cycle, the Sun-Moon phase cycle, and the Moon's latitude cycle – their Nodes and their Bendings. This third cycle is, I wrote, “about how we place ourselves within our immediate and larger environments. It is about how we receive, use, incorporate, and express the world in which we live.” Just as we divide the quarters of the Moon and the Sun's seasonal places on the ecliptic, one could divide the Nodes and their squares into a similar four-fold sequence.

I moved on. In *Astrological Roots* (2007), I only mention Ptolemy's discussion of Nodes and Bendings in passing. I continued to learn and teach ancient and medieval astrology, but I did not drop the psychological orientation from my first years in astrology. Partly influenced by Aristotle's writings and those of the ancient Stoics, I had become fascinated by applying positive psychology and virtue ethics to astrological practice. I began to consider myself a “post-Jungian” astrologer, and my interest in the Lunar Nodes diminished.

Over time the Nodes completely vanished from my client work and my writing. In my recent *Astrology and the Lives of People* (2023), the Nodes appear in chart examples but without comment. A couple of readers even asked me about this omission. I began to ask traditional astrology colleagues how they used the Lunar Nodes. Some would mention something vague about the Indian Rahu and Ketu; others just shrugged their shoulders as I had been doing.

² Feb/Mar 1998

This brings us here. Partly I want to augment and complete the TMA article of many years ago, and at the same time to add a finishing touch to my recent book.

A First Look

Some astrology teachers intimidate their new students by announcing that their next topic would be the “astronomy” in astrology. They sometimes follow through with heliocentric explanations mingled with the cosmos of our astrology, adding bewilderment to intimidation. Ironically, much of astrology’s factual foundations (and interpretative implications) lie in what we learned in grade school by the time we were twelve years old.



We begin with the globe that was surely in all our elementary school classrooms, a globe that included lines and up and down and across – longitude and latitude respectively. That is, *terrestrial longitude*, the lines across, divide the earth roughly into twenty-four time zones, East and West, and *terrestrial latitude* that tells the distance between a location and the equator, North and South.

If we mentally project this grid onto the sky that surrounds us. Earth’s terrestrial equator parallels the *celestial equator* above us. Up and down from

the celestial equator is called *declination*, corresponding in the sky with terrestrial degrees of latitude on earth.³

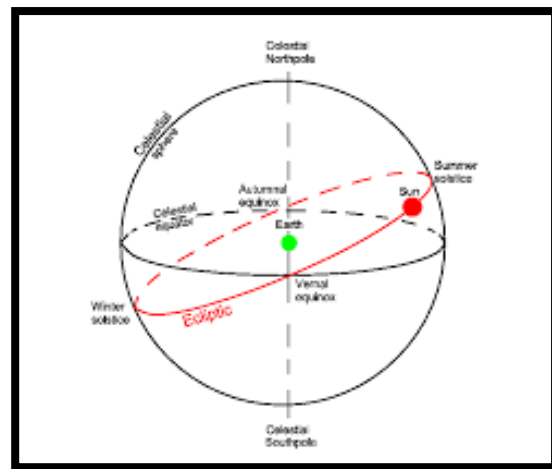
³ Across, correlated with degrees of terrestrial longitude, is *right ascension* that brings together the 24-hour day and the rotation of the planet – this need not bother us here.

Now we come to our familiar Tropical Zodiac, for the Sun's declination path correlates with the Sun's movement through the sky during the four seasons: when the Sun is at the celestial equator it is spring or autumn equinox and on our tropical Aries-Libra axis. The Sun's maximum distance from the celestial equator, 23.4° , is either the summer or winter solstice. This means that during the summer or winter solstice, the Sun is overhead at these degrees of terrestrial latitude, hence the lines for the Tropics of Cancer and Capricorn on your schoolroom globe. ⁴

The Sun's apparent path becomes a line that divides into the twelve signs of the zodiac and 360 degrees, the *ecliptic*.

Measuring *along* the ecliptic is *celestial longitude* that consist of our beloved degrees of the zodiac. Measuring *up and down* from the celestial equator are the degrees of *celestial latitude*. (It's easy to become confused between terrestrial latitude and longitude on this earth, and celestial latitude and celestial longitude that is from the ecliptic. You may have to read this paragraph a couple of times.)

The Sun is always at zero degrees of celestial latitude; other planets will vary up and down – other planets, not just the Moon, will have Nodes that are intersections between the ecliptic and that planet's tilted movement around the Sun. It is the Moon's up-and-down measurement from the ecliptic, the line of the Sun, that constitutes the Moon's "latitude cycle."



⁴ If a planet's declination is greater than the Sun's maximum declination, modern astrologers frequently call this planet "out of bounds," and that planet may have a rogue nature. I'm not sure of the effectiveness of this interpretation but it's symbolically fascinating.

Three Example Charts

Here is the astrological chart of a client of mine with Moon moving to the North Node in the zodiac, a prominent planet on the Northern Bendings and another on the South Node. I will call her "Alice."

At 6 degrees of Cancer along the ecliptic, Alice's Moon is 1 degree and 24 south celestial latitude; the next day, Moon will cross the ecliptic when it is conjunct the North Node.

Moving in the direction of the zodiac, we see Saturn in Libra forming a tight square to the North Node and at the "Northern Bendings".⁵ Venus in Capricorn is close to the South Node. The two planets are in square aspect and in mutual reception, each in the other's ruling zodiac sign.

On the interpretative side, Alice's natal chart says much about the importance of a Venus-Saturn tension (or cooperation) in her life. Even without using the Lunar Nodes there's a wealth of possible manifestations, positive and negative. Do we recommend that she go to art school, or conservatory, or, adding her Mercury/Jupiter aspect, become a poet and write traditional sonnets? Are there aspects of lifestyle that would manifest in her social behavior, sexuality, or is an entertainment career something to talk about? A competent astrologer would have many lines of inquiry, and, based on hearing about her life and astrological factors currently in play, may have some practical suggestions for her.

Venus and Saturn, in contact with and aspect to the Lunar Nodes, would have additional applications. Alongside impacting one's solar identity and sense of purpose,

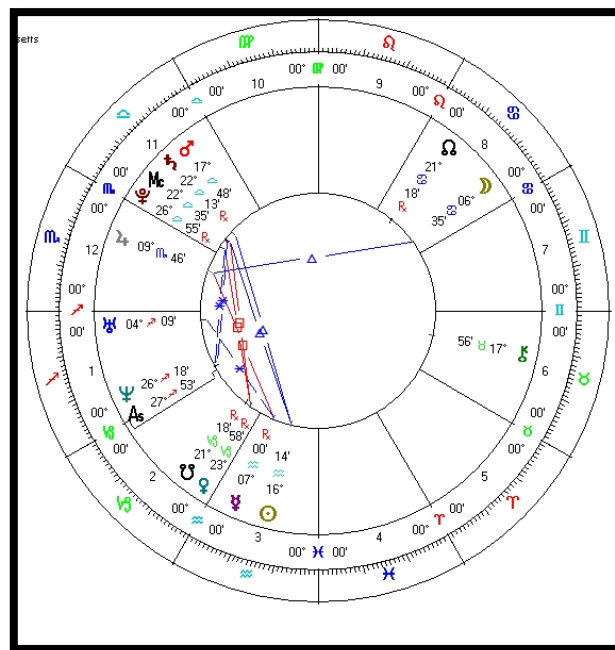


Figure 1 Mars and Saturn at the Northern Bendings, Venus conjunct South Node.

⁵ Remembering that *each planet* has a celestial latitude from the ecliptic, Saturn has its own latitude from the ecliptic. Venus, conjunct the South Node in Capricorn, also has its own latitude from the ecliptic.

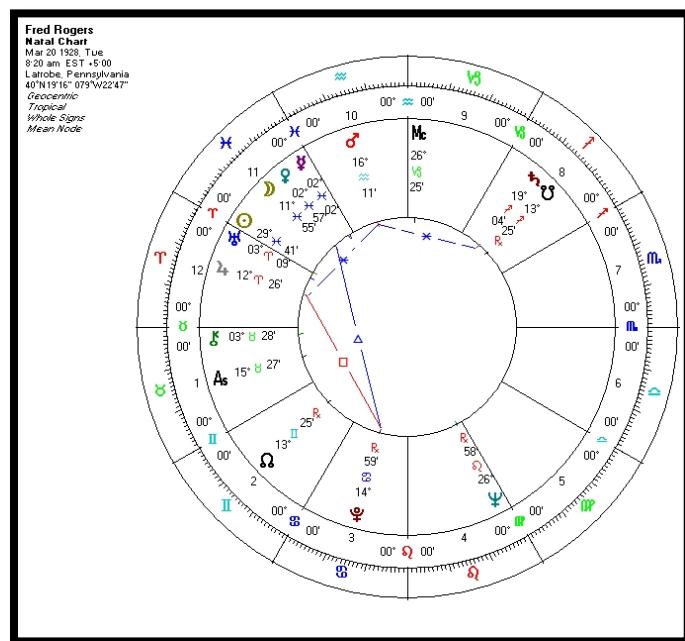
these contacts with the Lunar Nodes also speak the language of the Moon, the other luminary. Venus and Saturn may work to buttress or qualify her Moon in Cancer. How might the strong activity of Venus and Saturn influence (or undermine) her support structures, her sense of physical and emotional well-being, her endeavor for comfort and contentment?

Here's the natal chart of somebody better known, whose Moon is in aspect to the Lunar Nodes. Some decades ago, Fred ("Mister") Rogers hosted a public television children's television program that skillfully used children's language and cognitive abilities to provide information and comfort to children growing up in a confusing world. His work influenced a generation of children and continues to have a cultural impact.⁶

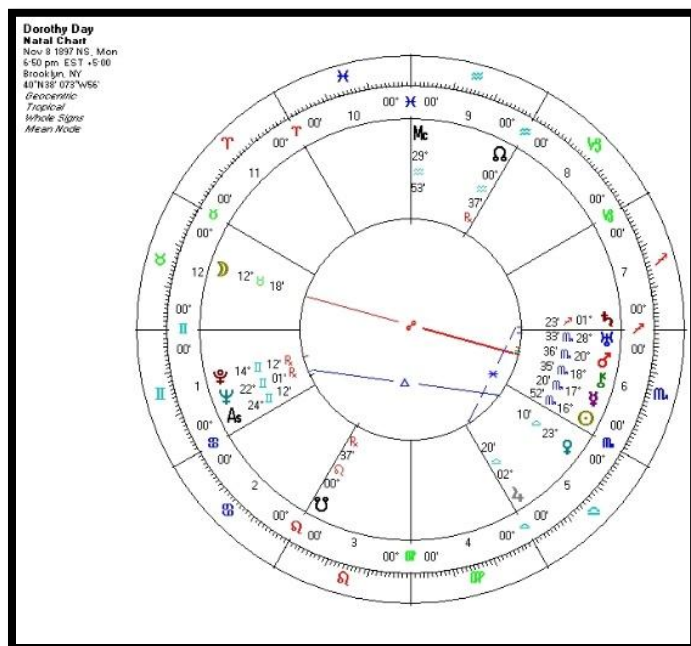
Notice that Rogers's Moon is at the "Southern Bendings" and has a celestial latitude of just over five degrees south latitude.

Noting sign and house placements for his Lunar Nodes, Rogers has no planets in Gemini and its ruler, Mercury, is in the rather contrasting (if not just debilitated) sign Pisces. There is no planetary support for recommending more Gemini in his life; being more Mercurial wouldn't be his path toward the fulfilling life that he had. (Nor would be focusing on second house issues.)

Instead, he used the broad emotional landscape of Moon in Pisces toward specific and well-articulated activity – like a children's program that was realistic about growing up, and that communicated self-value and kindness. Rogers, in his chart and his life, seems to articulate both solar and lunar themes.



⁶ <https://astrologyinstitute.com/articleprofile/profile-2017-2020/2018/fred-rogers-2018s-favorite-person>



Here's the chart of a left-wing political writer and organizer who converted to Catholicism and reconciled the two into the "Catholic Workers" movement in the 1930s. Among other endeavors, Dorothy Day developed "Hospitality Houses" for the homeless and other charities. She became an icon among leftist Catholics and has been considered for sainthood by today's Catholic hierarchy.⁷

What, from an astrological point of view, were Day's superpowers? With the South Node in Leo and the North Node in Aquarius, from the third to the ninth houses, modern astrology texts might talk about her moving from "ego" to "service", and to a greater interest in religious doctrine. This would not work.

Had any astrologer seen Dorothy Day for a session during her confused twenties, would one not first note Neptune and Pluto on her Ascendant and all those Scorpio planets in the sixth house? The capacity and desire for self-sacrifice were *already there* and let's explore ways to develop it further. This route addresses the planets already manifesting for her and does not ask her to become somebody she was not or, in her case, to belabor the obvious.

⁷ <https://astrologyinstitute.com/articleprofile/profile-2017-2020/2018/dorothy-day-untimely-prophet>

Good Sun, Bad Moon

When one studies the history of astrology, it becomes clear that astrology has always blended with the worldview and culture of the time and place where it was practiced. This continues to be the case today.

Although the sources of today's prevailing perspectives on the Lunar Nodes are less than a century old, they have addressed many of today's psychological and spiritual concerns. Now, as we move onwards in the twenty-first century, have these concerns changed? I ask the reader to keep this in mind while reading what follows.

Early in the twentieth century, astrologers paid no particular attention to the Lunar Nodes for psychological or spiritual purposes. In his theosophically influenced *Esoteric Astrology*, Alan Leo states that their only real value was in predicting eclipses, that otherwise they meant little or nothing to the modern esoteric astrologer.⁸ Nor have I seen them emphasized by twentieth century astrologers as diverse as Margaret Hone, Evangeline Adams, Llewelyn Gorge, and C.E.O. Carter.⁹

Mark Edmund Jones, an American astrologer from the first half of the twentieth century, is credited with the first psychological or humanistic interpretation of the Lunar Nodes. Here are excerpts from a talk from the early 1940s that follows up on previous work. He outlined fifteen most important points in horoscope delineation: consideration of the North Lunar Node was number four. (He does not mention the Lunar South Node.) Note the *solar* emphasis in his depiction, and an early justification for a "Draconic Zodiac" that places any North Node at the first degree of Aries and proceeds from there.

"These moon's nodes represent the lunar equinoxes. Where the moon's orbit crosses the earth's orbit you get another "zodiac." The ascending or North Node is always important in the horoscope because it represents the power to do things outwardly in life. The Dragon's Head represents the rising insight of the personal, psychic or

⁸ Leo, Alan, *Esoteric Astrology* (1913/1978) p. 274

⁹ There's an interesting monograph by George White (1927) that connects Dragon's Head with abundance and success in areas of life indicated by the house in which it is placed. He says less about the Dragon's Tail, just that it indicated less success. Closer to our time, Noel Tyl likens the Lunar Nodal axis to a strong maternal influence.

soul ability. The key to the secret of a person's soul is the moon's node because this point of the "rising of the soul" is your power to do things, outwardly, through your capacity for being yourself. *You do not have to apologize for being what you are. The more you compromise with this life the less use life has for you. As you are uncompromising, in remaining what you are, you can "go to town."*[all his italics] The evil man is more prosperous than the good one because he has to work harder, and because he keeps his eye on his business to a greater extent. The Dragon's Head in your chart shows that point where you can best reveal what you are in the real depth of yourself."¹⁰

The North Node represents our capacity for authentic activity, or activity based on a strong sense of who we are. This would fit in well with the value placed on ego psychology and self-actualization that dominated much the twentieth century.

Dane Rudhyar, a younger contemporary of Jones, solidified this depiction in his *Astrology of Personality*, first published in 1936. Rudhyar's emphasis here was not on spiritual but psychological growth. Rudhyar uses the symbolism of the North and South Node as the Dragon's Head and Tail respectively to vividly contrast their functions. As many astrologers have done subsequently, Rudhyar's place of departure is the symbolism of the Dragon swallowing the Sun at a solar eclipse.

"The axis constituted by the Moon Nodes deals most directly with the very process of *individuation*. Here we see at work the forces which try to integrate the particular "I" and the greater Self; the faculty of assimilating new substance of living and reflecting the values which are no longer useful because they have been shorn of all that was of vital necessity for the individual personality. We may even go so far as to say that there we have a line of metabolic action, not unlike that tubular channel which stretches from mouth to anus. At the North Node life is being absorbed, the substance of experience is being ingested and reduced to assimilable material; at the South Node we assimilate the contents of life, automatically, effortlessly, and eliminate the refuse."¹¹

¹⁰ https://sabian.org/horoscope_interpretation.php

¹¹ P. 257

The digestive-system metaphor could describe a solar eclipse whereby the Moon appears to swallow the Sun and let it out on the other side. A problem remains, however: as we all know, solar eclipses occur when the Sun and Moon are together, either with the North Node *or* the South Node. I have not seen solar eclipses on the South and North Nodes interpreted differently by astrologers – to the eye they are identical.

Rudhyar continues, however:

“The *north node* deals with the work to be done, the new accomplishment, the new faculty to be developed; and if we are willing to *exert* ourselves in that direction, from it we will receive power in abundance. The *south node* represents the work that has already been done, the well-known accomplishment, the routine performance already gone through many times, perhaps – the easy way out. Thus the opposition between, on one hand, self-integration, individuation, effort, the line of greatest connection through exertion; and on the other, self-undoing, automatism, inertia, the line of least resistance.”¹²

Rudhyar sets up a contrast between a (solar-like) North Node about individuation and intention and a (lunar-like) South Node about previous accomplishment that can become a place of stasis and sterility. Reflecting the values of astrology for personal development, Rudhyar ignores our complementary need for stability and support.

Later in the century, interpretation of the Nodes expanded from ego psychology to different forms of spirituality: the South Node was for past-life burdens and habits, and the North Node was for spiritual evolution or “evolutionary intent”, often taking place over many lifetimes. This was not uniform, however: Isabela Hickey, whose *Astrology: A Cosmic Science*, uses planetary signs, houses, and aspects to depict spiritual conditions, covers the Lunar Nodes in six pages with mostly psychological interpretations.

As an example of this spiritualizing trend, I turn to Martin Schulman’s work. His four-part series *Karmic Astrology*, published in the late 1970s, was influential during that time. From *The Moon’s Nodes and Reincarnation*¹³, we see the Lunar Nodes joined with

¹² P. 258

¹³ *Karmic Astrology Vol 1*. (1975)

“karma,” as our lifetime is a mere moment in a very long process. Following an approach rooted in the theosophical movement and articulated in Alan Leo’s *Esoteric Astrology*, Schulman distinguished “individuality” – one’s essential spiritual nature that may transcend lifetimes – and “personality”, the outer shell of our being that is karmically burdened but may be recruited as an ally to our essential nature.

“The personality and life of the individual have little meaning if not seen within a larger context. The Nodes place the individual on his stairway to heaven insofar as they define the karmic lessons he has chosen to take on for this life”.¹⁴

Here Schulman gives a depiction of a “soul contract” whereby one takes on an incarnation as an intended stage of spiritual evolution. In discussing the South Node, there is an emphasis on moving from the familiar into the North Node unknown – along spiritual lines. Each lifetime has residual “unfinished business” from previous lifetimes. One need not yield to the comfortable and familiar (South Node) but forge ahead.

“The South Node is symbolic of man’s past. It is not symbolic of one past incarnation but rather a combination of events, ideas, attitudes, and thoughts from every incarnation whose accumulated unresolved effects have created the current life.

“The most deeply ingrained behavior patterns are to be found here at the point of man’s zenith of hundreds or thousands of years of working on himself. There is little he could do in the present life to alter greatly the balance of so many years of training and habits. For this reason man tends to rest on his South Node as the comfortable family of his past in whose ways he is thoroughly familiar. The house he builds for himself in this life can only rest upon the foundation he has created for himself.”¹⁵

On full display is the belief, borrowed from the theosophical movement, that some of us are worldly “young souls” with farther to go, others are “old souls” that bring wisdom

¹⁴ p. 21

¹⁵ p. 22

accumulated through previous lifetimes. (Buddhism tends to assert that we can easily misuse our previous gifts and this could result in lower rebirths.)

Schulmann continues:

"The North Node is the symbol of the future. It represents a new experience as yet untried. For the individual, this is the new cycle to which he is looking forward. Carrying with it all the apprehensions of the unknown and as yet untried experiences, this Nodal position nevertheless has a curious magnetic allure, pulling the soul toward its future growth."¹⁶

"It symbolizes the highest area of expression to be reached in the current life and therefore must be interpreted by the highest qualities of the sign and house in which it is placed...p. 25

Over the past fifty years there's been no paucity of astrology writing that gives general interpretations of the Nodal polarity by sign and house. Some cookbook depictions of the Lunar Nodes are quite elaborate, as in Kevin Burk's *The Complete Node Book* (2003) and Jan Spiller's *Astrology for the Soul* (1997). In many similar published works, sign and house are often they are brought together as the "Twelve Letter Alphabet": Aries and the first house, Taurus and the second house, and so on.¹⁷

It is blatantly unfair to compare generalized "cookbook" descriptions with a real person with an astrological chart: they can be as different from one another as looking at a passport or driver's license photo and having that person in front of you. Returning briefly to Fred Rogers and his North Node in Gemini: Schulman depicted North Node in Gemini as an invitation to join society after past lives of being wilder and more free-living: to learn the art of communication, not just talking at somebody. (Shades of a Sagittarius South Node.) Donna Van Toen (1981) emphasized Gemini sharing its awareness with others and the "yeah but" about a reluctance to spend time explaining things – "what's there to learn from others?", that a Sagittarian South Node might say.

¹⁶ p. 24

¹⁷ <https://astrologyinstitute.com/articleprofile/articles/2016/untying-the-knots-of-the-twelve-letter-alphabet>

Back to Schulman: notice the notions of memory and habit (lunar!) used disparagingly, associated not with what supports us but what hinders us.

“His life takes on new meaning as he experiences possibilities he had never considered. But man does not achieve his North Node until after he rises to the highest karmic levels of his South Node. He must learn to give up gracefully the negative habits and memories which no longer serve a useful purpose in his life.”¹⁸

Within our culture that emphasizes personal accomplishment or spiritual growth, it is easy to see how these lines of interpretation have been embraced by so many astrologers. They reveal habitual “lines of least resistance” and suggest moving in the opposite direction. However, it also diminishes the Moon’s capacity for providing support and homeostasis, for a personal foundation upon which one may fulfill individual purposes and spiritual development.

Since the mid-1990s, coinciding with greater emphasis placed on the psychology of trauma and its role in pathology, Evolutionary Astrology made a strong impression, was widely practiced, and is so to this day. Evolutionary Astrology employs the Lunar Nodes but with one difference: the Nodes work alongside another indicator (usually an outer planet) to disclose past-life traumas and “evolutionary intent.” The dynamic of the South Node being the already accomplished or seduction of comfort is now used to depict not only unfinished business but ontological wounds from past lives: this lifetime becomes one of recovery as well as spiritual progress. One can see its timeliness and limitations in the context of those prevailing trends at that time.

Here’s an example of this approach from *Healing the Soul: Pluto, Uranus, and the Lunar Nodes* (2011) by Mark Jones (no relation to the astrologer cited above). As with Jeff Greene and many others, Pluto and the Nodes together disclose one’s past, present, and future. Jones also includes a positive version of Neptune.

“Pluto represents the deep unconscious material, while the Nodes represent material that is more clearly in one’s conscious awareness.” (p. 97)

¹⁸ p. 25

A few pages later, Jones discusses the Nodes and their relationship to the modern planets Neptune and Pluto. It is common in Evolutionary Astrology to see the Lunar Nodes acting as vehicles for the karmic burdens and spiritual purposes that are indicated by one or two of the outer planets.

“Since the Moon represents the specific lens of identity that allows the film of the unconscious and prior karma (Pluto) to play out in life, then the nodes of the Moon represent the evolutionary potential of the ego. Neptune represents the pure white light of consciousness shining through and animating the story.”

It strikes me as odd that Evolutionary Astrologers present the Lunar Nodes alongside some very nonlunar outer planets. Although there may be an impact of the Lunar Nodes on planets in conjunction or square to Uranus, Neptune, or Pluto, I am reluctant to include them. In my opinion, outer planets, by their natures, *do not care* about the happiness signified by the Moon – that of contentment and normalcy. The modern planets clearly impact the inner planets when they form conjunctions and aspects. (I feel similarly in using sign placements for the modern planets affiliated with certain zodiac signs; instead, it's like the old joke of where a gorilla sits – they sit wherever they want.)

Having addressed current conventional uses of the Lunar Nodes, it is appropriate to reflect on their origin and scope. What features of our human life do they reveal and how can we interpret planets configured with them?

We first go into the Way-Way-Back Machine and visit our ancestral sky-gazers and measurers, then we check out a rather influential philosopher from classical Greece. Then we will take a broader look at the celestial sphere and the place of the Moon's latitude cycle within our human nature.

Developing the Lunar Nodes

For our early ancestors, eclipses were marvels of cosmic nature but also a harbinger of disorder on a political or environmental level. A solar eclipse, when the Moon has swallowed all or some of the Sun, could bode ill for a king and government, indicating vulnerability to outside invasion, rebellion from within, or natural catastrophe.

(Nowadays a total solar eclipse, anticipated years ahead of time for a given location, is a cause for celebration and will raise hotel rates within a hundred-mile radius of totality.)

Our ancestors understood that there were two “eclipse seasons” a year, a little less than six months apart, solar and lunar eclipses occurring about two weeks apart from each other. They were quite good at noting recurrence patterns. However, they also needed to be more accurate than simply noting that at every sixth Full or New Moon, there *might* be a visible eclipse.

Let's step back briefly. How did our sky-gazing ancestors note patterns of celestial appearances? Most straightforward was marking where celestial bodies would rise and set for a specific location. Their accomplishments, unhampered by modern lighting, devices, and other conveniences, are awe-inspiring.



How to measure planetary risings and settings

Determine the directions from where you are right now (maybe your phone has an app):

- If you are facing East, North would be to your left and South is to your right.
- If you are facing West, North would be to your right and South to your left.

If you have a good view of East or West horizon, you could see the Sun, Moon, and the five visible planets rise or set, and could notice their locations when rising or setting.

If we live in the same location for some time, we will notice – not always consciously – how the light of the Sun, at certain times of the day, changes with the seasons. We may also notice how the Sun's path through the daytime sky changes throughout the year, and that the planets, seen at night, are somewhere along the same path. Our ancestors marked the starry backgrounds for the Sun's path – that became the sidereal zodiac. For the tropical zodiac, when the Sun is East, we call it the first degree of Aries or Libra and the equinoxes. From there, the Sun spans left and right, its north or south paths, and are furthest right and left, north and south, at the solstices. The Sun's pattern is

straightforward and invariable for a given location, and it is easy to note planetary declination in this way.¹⁹

When both luminaries are at *almost* the same place on the horizon at a sixth New or Full Moon, you are more likely to get an eclipse. Our ancestors would also note that on most Full or New Moons there would be some deviation across the Sun's path between the two luminaries, and when they were close, there was a greater likelihood of an eclipse. Regardless of where in the zodiac they fall, if at a Full or New Moon the Moon rose or set at its maximum distance across the Sun's path (or 0 degrees celestial latitude), there would be no chance of an eclipse. This would correspond to the luminaries being in square to the Lunar Nodes, at the Northern or Southern Bendings.

Observing this pattern over a long time, we get a place in the sky – envision an invisible Dragon, perhaps – that moves across the heavens, spanning the zodiac in about eighteen and a half years, and, when aligned with the two luminaries, swallows the Sun or Moon. The ancient use of the Lunar Nodes to predict eclipses helped create a sense of underlying order beneath the apparent arbitrariness of the heavens.

The ancient Greeks, later in our history, were slow to come to the astrology that we know and love, but over time they contributed their passion for order, symmetry, and pattern to explain the chaotic world in which we live. Our next step takes us to a cosmology that would be familiar to later astrologers, and should be familiar to us.

Nodes and Great Circles: A Cosmological Argument

We now go to a work attributed to a non-astrologer from the fourth century BCE. Plato's *Timaeus* fashions a cosmology that inspired astrologers and “natural philosophers” for centuries afterwards and is interesting to us now. A commentary on

¹⁹ The Lunar Nodes have a fascinating feature that connects with declination. Our distant ancestors also noted *lunar standstills* when the Moon's maximum declination is widest and is narrowest. If, during this year 2025, when the Moon's declination is furthest North (Gemini, Cancer) or furthest South (Sagittarius, Capricorn), the Moon is always “out of bounds” – beyond the Sun's maximum north or south declination. During 2025 the North Node was in early tropical Aries then late Pisces; when the Moon is at maximum standstill, its widest, the North Node is the first degree of Aries. When it is at minimum or most narrow standstill, the North Node is the first degree of Libra.

this dialogue was the only writing from Plato that circulated in the European Middle Ages, and provided a spiritual organization to the visible sky that is also the structure of Dante's *Paradiso*²⁰



Figure 2 One of William Blake's favorite creations

Plato asks, how do we account for a cosmos that is alive, that contains movement and disorder but also an overarching sublime orderliness? How does one find order and intelligibility from the chaos and confusion in this world in which we all live? Plato, through the Pythagorean Timaeus, fashions a “likely story” about the origin of our world.

We begin with the “Demiurge” or “World Maker,” or “Divine Craftsman.” (Yes, centuries later, Christian thinkers will love this.) Having fashioned the “body of the world” from the four elements relative to each other, it was time to create the “world soul,” a “psyche” of the cosmos.

- The Demiurge began with a material-like version of our most basic categories of understanding: *Being*, *Same*, and *Other*.
- He placed them in different proportions to one another, fashioned from them two bands put together at an oblique angle to each other. (You may suspect where this is going.)

²⁰ See my *Between Fortune and Providence: Astrology and the Universe in Dante's Divine Comedy* (2012)

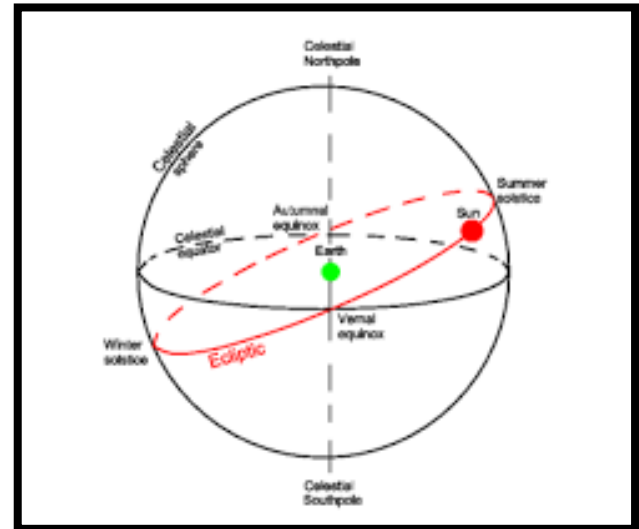
- The outer band, the *Circle of the Same*, is undivided, directed from East to West. The inner band, the *Circle of the Other*, divides into seven parts (planetary spheres) and moves from West to East.

The outer Circle of the Same is the *Celestial Equator* that is our diurnal cycle; the inner Circle of the Other is the *Ecliptic* upon which the luminaries and five visible planets move.

Once again, the angle of the Ecliptic to the Celestial Equator, the “obliquity of the ecliptic” is a very stable 23.4 degrees. Remembering that, when two circles combine, the “nodes” are the two opposing points where they intersect, therefore the *solar* “nodes” are the first degrees of Aries and Libra. The *solar* “bendings” would be the first degree of Cancer and Capricorn.

Along the “Circle of the Other” (here, the Ecliptic), the five starry visible planets speed up, slow down, and change direction, and the Moon displays its characteristic monthly phases of visibility. The Sun is the maestro of the appearing movements of the planetary bodies.²¹

The “primary motion” along the Celestial Equator demonstrates unchangeableness in the cosmos; the “secondary motion” along the Ecliptic carrying the planets, corresponds more to the irregularity and changeability we face in our worlds and our lives. To analogize musically: in medieval and renaissance music, the “cantus firmus” is the stable structure in a musical composition, the base for the other musical lines that have

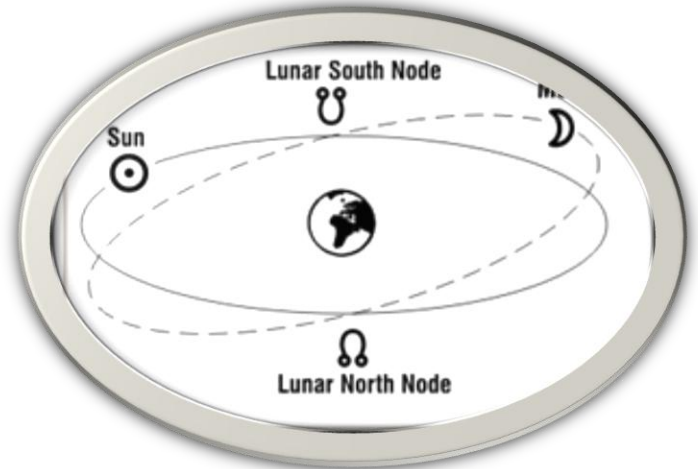
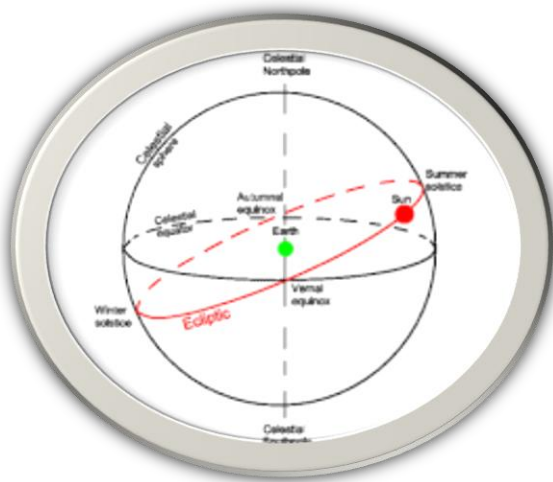


²¹ In Dante's *Paradiso*, Canto 10 depicts Dante and Beatrice reaching the Sphere of the Sun. The poet begins this canto praising the divine ordering of the cosmos and in particular the relationship between the celestial equator and the ecliptic. Here's the passage from a prose translation by Durling and Martinez (2011)
 “See the branching off from there [celestial equator] the oblique circle that carries the planets, so as to satisfy the world that calls for them:
 “for it their path were not twisted, much of the power in the heavens would be in vain, and dead almost every potentiality down here,
 “and if its departure from the straight [celestial equator] were greater or smaller, much would be lacking, both below and above, in the order of the world”

greater variety and energy. The Celestial Equator is the cantus firmus to the Ecliptic's top melody. This gives is a degree of order in the cosmos that we can determine and use for prediction.

Taking Plato Further

If we add the Orbit of the Moon around the Earth, the Ecliptic now becomes the cantus firmus, Plato's Circle of the Same, and the Moon Orbit becomes the Circle of the Other. The seasonal pattern of the Sun's declination, the equinoxes and solstices, is analogous to the monthly pattern of the Moon conjunct the Nodes and at the Bendings, its greatest celestial latitude from the ecliptic.



Measuring the Sun's declination, up and down from the Celestial Equator, is easy. Although the location of the intersection of the celestial equator with the ecliptic (the Aries-Libra line) hardly ever changes, the corresponding intersection of the ecliptic with the Moon's movements is *far more unstable*; the Lunar Nodes are in constantly in motion, traversing the full zodiac in about eighteen and a half years.

Regular patterns of the Moon's Latitude Cycle are difficult (but not impossible) to determine, as the maximum latitude from the ecliptic varies slightly from lunation to lunation. The Sun's maximum angle from the Celestial Equator does not vary.

The rate of change in the movement of the Lunar Nodes is not consistent, hence the difference between the "True" and the "Mean" node positions, the "True Node" being a recent product in the age of computers. The "Mean" node will give an average over time and is always retrograde. Thumbing through an Ephemeris, the True Node changed direction eleven times, direct to retrograde, retrograde to direct, between July 27 and September of this year, 2025.

When we look at the astrological charts of the past, from Hellenistic times to Lilly of the seventeenth century, planetary positions are fairly accurate but that of the Moon is often different from modern calculations. This is because of the complexity of the Moon's orbit and difficulty in ascertaining its exact position.

The Moon's variability is a result of a wobble in its orbit. In modern terms, *all* planetary movement along the ecliptic is a result of that planet's gravitational relationship with the Sun. However, measuring the Moon's movement gives us a "three-body problem": as the Earth-Moon revolves around the Sun, the Earth and Moon also have gravitational interactions with each other.

But this is not chaotic – the Moon's influence on the Earth is far less than that of the Earth on the Moon. In modern times we can track the Moon's movement with accuracy. But it is complicated – like much in our lives.

Conclusion: We Are All Hobbits (Partly)

We know the story. Frodo lives quietly with his fellow hobbits in the Shire, unknowingly possessing the ring that the evil Sauron desires to take over their world. The wizard Gandolf finds this ring, then tasks Frodo with carrying and eventually destroying the ring before Sauron can get to it.

Why would Gandolf choose Frodo? Frodo is a hobbit: a race that lives in small houses, enjoys good food, good drink, and easy company, with no ambition beyond comfort

and contentment for oneself and friends. It is our personal ambition or will to power, hidden or blatant in all of us, that would make us vulnerable if we were carrying this ring. In my view, including hobbits in an otherwise standard solar-hero tale was J.R.R. Tolkien's lunar stroke of genius.

The Moon keeps us functioning on this planet as embodied and interconnected beings whose existence is fragile and temporary: physical health (at least less discomfort), emotional connection, a sense of belonging, caretaking and empathy, imaging and fantasy, intoxicants, whatever it takes to feel better, "whatever gets you through the night."

Moon sensitizes us to and addresses many of our fears. Moon symbolizes that part of us that wants calm or normalcy or homeostasis when things become uncertain or when our awareness of our fragility is just below the surface. The Moon's values address our anxiety and insecurity.

Moon relates to our lives' supports: our surrounding family, culture, and history, obligations we did not ask for and choices we do not have, the burdens and opportunities from the past – personal and cultural/historical. Ultimately, we cannot escape from any of this, but it forms the container, the matrix, out of which our solar identity and creativity may grow. The Moon may represent whatever *supports* our pursuit of a fulfilled life.

In the Moon's realm, we adapt to situations that unexpectedly arrive and challenge us: from a traffic jam on our way to work, to a sudden intolerable physical pain, to a response from another that is very different from what we expected. The Moon, along with Mercury, governs situational and emotional intelligence, not the more conceptual knowledge and wisdom that is implicit in the Sun's symbolism (along with that of Mercury).

Contrasted with the Moon, the Sun symbolizes our steady, intentional, creative, individuating self that may move toward timelessness although it never quite reaches it. The Sun is about focus, vision and courage, where we identify ourselves as singular and irreplaceable. In Hannah Arendt's seminal *The Human Condition*, she discusses "natality", that all of us are unique and irreplaceable, even though we also enter a

world already in place that we will all leave someday, and this world will continue without us.

Neither the solar nor lunar can be neglected for long – if we neglect our lunar qualities, our personal goals and desires can be subverted by all kinds of adverse circumstance – we simply cannot support them. If we neglect the solar side, either our lives are too focused on comfort and safety and we never take chances, or we squander our opportunities and become subject to resentment and depression, or we become greedy and prestige-oriented to make ourselves feel like we fit in – and we are haunted by a life half-lived.

When we realistically think about our lives, the two factors symbolized by the luminaries are never balanced, they need not be integrated, but are in a dynamic disequilibrium with each other, changing in proportion, sometimes being in opposition and sometimes being in harmony.

The Moon's Latitude Cycle, particularly planets at the Nodes and Bendings, should relate to *how we may support and maintain* our unique identity and individual purposes in this life, this body, and this culture. When a planet makes a conjunction or squares the North or South Node, that planet's function needs to be interpreted along lunar lines, not from solar soul intentions and evolutionary intentions. How this happens is the topic of Part Two.

Postscript – The Dragon's Zodiac

No survey of the modern use of the Lunar Nodes would be complete without looking at its most radical expression, the Draconic Zodiac. Here the North Node is always the first degree of Aries, then one proceeds through an entire zodiac, placing each planet in a zodiacal relationship to the North Node. For a few years I was intrigued by possibilities in a Draconic Zodiac but could not find a way to apply it meaningfully.

There were two promising sources that I found. Pam Crane (no relation) fashioned a complete portrait of this zodiac, *The Draconic Chart* (first edition 1987). Together with a New Age-oriented style of Christianity, she gives us not only natal delineations but synastry between people, event, and mundane affairs.

Pam Crane assimilates the Draconic Zodiac to the “individual’s soul and spiritual reality”, and that contact between positions in both zodiacs work to materialize spiritual reality or spiritualize material reality (p. 60-61). Throughout her book, she appears to sharply distinguish between the earthly and spiritual dimensions of our being, expressed by the Tropical and Draconic Zodiacs respectively.

The more recent *Chasing the Dragons* (2022) by Victor Olliver is less elaborate and more secular, yet the book title includes the subtitle “How to find your soul purpose in the horoscope.”²²

In his introductory chapter (p. 6), Olliver states

“The two charts are based on different zodiacs. The tropical is seasonally-based because the Sun starts its annual journey through the horoscope at 0 Aries – the Sun has to do with character, what is known, events. The draconic is Moon-based with the North Node refixed at 0 Aries – the Moon has to do with memory, instinct, past (or past lives), reflexes.”

Olliver and I agree that the North Node is indeed a *lunar* position, although I would broaden his depiction of the Moon’s function to include anything that supports or contains the human body and life processes. However, he quickly aligns the Draconic Zodiac with modern conceptions of the Nodal polarity:

“It is structured to examine what we call the soul since within it the connections between past and future are laid out with greater clarity and priority.”

²² As for the origin of a Draconic Zodiac, Pam Crane and Victor Olliver both reference a passage from Cyril Fagan’s *Zodiacs Old and New* that references a Mesopotamian passage about the (Jupiter-like) god Marduk creating a great dragon whereby its Head is the North Node, Tail across the sky the South Node, and the zodiac surrounding its back and belly. So far, I’ve found no other reference to this occasion except from a Hellenistic source that may be from the Byzantine period. Both modern authors cite articles by Ronald Davidson and Dennis Elwell (both 1977), neither of whom make a Draconic Zodiac their primary concern. Interestingly, the later attributions of the North Node’s exaltation in Gemini and the South Node’s exaltation in Sagittarius remind me more of the Sun’s declination path than a Zodiac proceeding from the North Node. (We will discuss the Nodal polarity and the Dragon’s Head and Tail in Part Two of this essay.)

And a few pages later, we see this joined to modern depictions of the North Node.

“Draconic sets itself the task of identifying higher life purposes in the individual, which we may call ‘soul’ or ‘spiritual’ purposes.”

It will come as no surprise that this depiction has some problems. I have three main reservations.

One reservation is that if the North Node is the first degree of Aries and the South Node is the first degree of Libra, then Libra signifies the past, habits, stuck places, and all that. Yet both authors cast Draconic Libra in wholly spiritual contexts: Olliver states that the Libran project of finding peace through harmonizing moves to a much deeper level than in the tropical Libra.²³

Secondly, there's no particular reason why the Moon's latitude cycle should have the same structure as the twelve signs of the zodiac that are based on, at least in part, the relationship between the Celestial Equator and Ecliptic. As I have stated above, the erratic nature of the Moon's latitude cycle stands in sharp contrast to the orderliness of the Sun's declination cycle that gives us the tropical zodiac.

Thirdly, if the Draconic Zodiac represents spiritual goal or the soul's purpose, then *every* feature of the Draconic Zodiac should be positive and forward-looking. Instead, for both authors, a second zodiac seems superimposed on the standard one. Multiplying factors thus, we can move too easily into the territory of finding anything we're looking for.

Happily, both Pam Crane and Victor Olliver provide many worked-out charts of well-known individuals to illustrate their work.

I would like to illustrate their procedure by using the life and astrological chart of someone from Pam Crane's book who I know well – the nineteenth century German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche. He was a tortured soul whose writings had an enormous influence on twentieth century thought and culture. Nietzsche was afflicted by mental illness, spent the last ten years of his life as a convalescent, and only by the

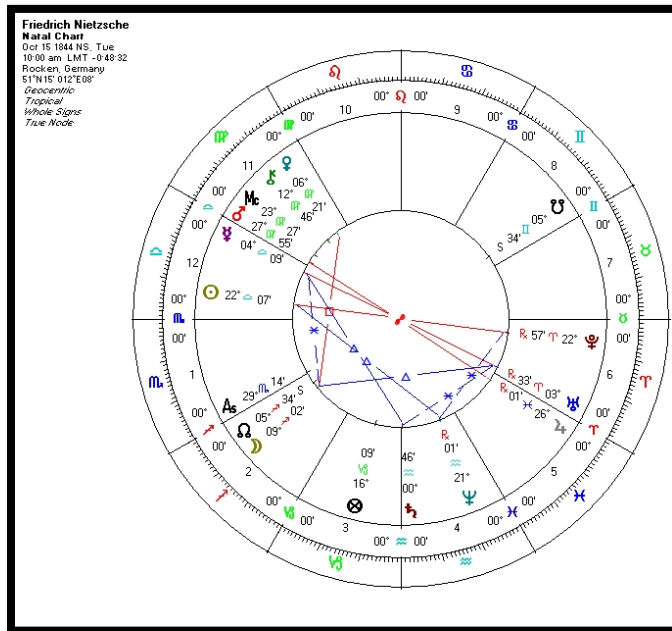
²³ p. 32

time of his death did his work begin to attract attention. (Unfortunately, some of his ideas were unfairly appropriated by the Nazis and today by some right-wing pundits.)

Pam Crane used Nietzsche's natal chart to compare him unfavorably to Christopher Reeve, who was the popular "Superman" movie actor before his tragic accident. (Nietzsche had coined the term "Übermensch" that many have later translated as "Superman".)

Nietzsche's writings were eccentric, often harsh and extreme, but frequently compelling and very quotable. He waged solitary warfare against conventional (unreflective) Christian values, noting envy and resentment underneath surface modesty and humility, and much empathy or pity as a hidden attitude of superiority toward those less fortunate.

From the viewpoint of astrological symbolism, Nietzsche's writings formulate an obsession with solar issues, a dark obsession, with a full-fledged assault on those qualities of life we may call lunar. We'll look first at Nietzsche's tropical chart.



As an iconoclastic philosopher and an excellent but provocative writer, it is hard to miss the opposition between Mercury in Libra and Uranus in Aries; we may also see that Mercury and Jupiter (dignified in Pisces) are antiscia, symmetrical to the Cancer/Capricorn axis. Mercury also has a trine to a dignified angular Saturn. All these add up to indicate his disciplined but provocative intellect. Nietzsche was awarded a full professorship when he was in his mid-twenties.

He also left the university just before he turned thirty, attempting to live off his subsequent writings.

Nietzsche's other notable placement is Sun – in fall in Libra and in the difficult twelfth house, but with a tight opposition from Pluto. One need not go far into his writings to discover a solar emphasis on will, strength, and passionate purposefulness. Befitting a Pluto-Sun opposition, his writings emphasize an ever-present struggle against an unreflective and complacent conformism in his culture. (A hobbit he was not.) We also find Mars conjunct the Midheaven degree, both governed by Mercury – here is somebody who badly wanted his ideas to make an impact. That would take more time than he had.

Pam Crane connects Nietzsche's Tropical and Draconic Zodiacs, theoretically bringing together worldly and other-worldly dimensions. Using the philosopher's Draconic chart, she noted that the Draconic Sun has moved to Aquarius and conjunct Neptune; Draconic Moon is conjunct natal Uranus. Draconic Saturn in Taurus opposed Tropical Ascendant gives, in her words "testimony to his miserable and misanthropic loneliness."

Olliver, who does not use Nietzsche as an example, uses an additional factor: emphasizing planets being promoted or demoted, by dignity or debility, in the Draconic zodiac. For Nietzsche, Mars has moved from Tropical Virgo to Draconic Capricorn, its sign of exaltation. Jupiter comes out on top in both, from domicile Pisces to exaltation Cancer. Saturn, however, is demoted from its domicile Aquarius to Draconic Taurus.

Following either approach, the reader may ask whether Nietzsche's Draconic placements and connections tell us anything we don't know about him already, nor do we get a sense of the philosopher's soul purpose or higher self from this examination.

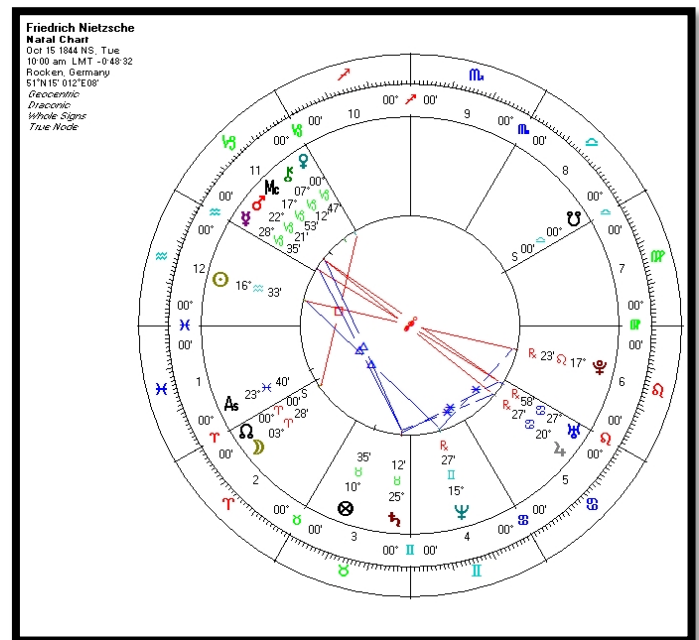


Figure 3 In all Draconic charts, the North Node is always 00 Aries. It's suggested as a supplement to the tropical chart, one may consider changes in planetary condition and connect by synastry.

Although I have many concerns about applying a Draconic Zodiac, it does contain an important ingredient. The Draconic Zodiac implies a parallel between the Moon's Latitude Cycle and the Sun's declination pattern. If the North Node/South Node axis is cast like the equinox positions of Aries-Libra, then the Bendings would conform to the solstice axis of Cancer/Capricorn.

Returning to Nietzsche's Tropical chart, my eye turns to Moon conjunct the North Node, in Sagittarius governed by Jupiter in Pisces, and Venus at the Southern Bendings, also in Virgo. These positions merit close examination.

Addressing Pam Crane's depiction of Nietzsche's loneliness, there was nothing misanthropic about it; part of Nietzsche's life work, his "soul purpose" was to promote the nobility that results from affirming and even rejoicing in our lives in all its glory and confusion and suffering. More on this in the second part of this essay.

Part Two: The Moon's Planets

Having pondered the origins of the Moon's Nodes, the Great Circles and especially the Moon's Latitude Cycle, now we talk about the planets themselves as they relate to the Nodes and Bendings.

In this section we'll discuss...

- How each planet contributes to the range of our lunar responses
- The Lunar Nodes in Hellenistic and Medieval astrology
- The differences between the two Nodes and their Northern and Southern Bendings and apply to a variety of astrological charts.
- We'll review the Dragon symbol as applied to the Nodes and the sky.
- We'll end with a few words about karma and transcendence.

What is the importance of the “lunar” nature of the Lunar Nodes? They help compensate for modern astrology’s tilt toward issues of self-actualization and individuation. They help us bring in more Moon to our astrology.

We can have greater respect for the ground under our feet, these fragile bodies we carry around, and the family and society and culture in which we live. We can celebrate ourselves as a greater totality that, along with our specialness, includes our efforts to survive the day and get through the night. These are all areas of the fragility that we share with others. If the Sun is the aristocrat, the Moon is the commoner.

Why are we confining ourselves to the seven visible planets and not including Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto? Here we are in the realm of earthly concerns and ordinary situations of life – issues that most often bring people to an astrology consultation. The three modern planets – and Chiron, and many others – are significant as they modify the activity of a visible planet or an angle. On their own, they don’t care much about our ordinary efforts at being happy. (Nor am I currently interested in applying the Nodes to predictive work: transits, progressions, directions. I leave that to the investigations of others.)

In days gone by in the United States, if you worked a second job to help pay the bills you were “moonlighting,” i.e., working at night, after the regular daytime “working day.” (Unfortunately, as many now work two or three jobs to pay the bills, this description is now less frequently used.) A planet conjunct or in square to the Nodes *moonlights*: their “second job” is to buttress the Moon’s many functions in the natal chart.

Most astrologers and their students are adept at interpreting planets in a solar context, as avenues of personal expression and experience. Here, we need a slightly different application of planets for their “moonlighting” roles.

One way of doing this is to think of each planet as if it were in the sign Cancer, although there are reasons for not doing this. One difficulty is that the domicile ruler of each sign is but one feature of that sign – Cancer is also cardinal and watery. Secondly, it’s too easy to get wrapped up in zodiacal stereotyping.

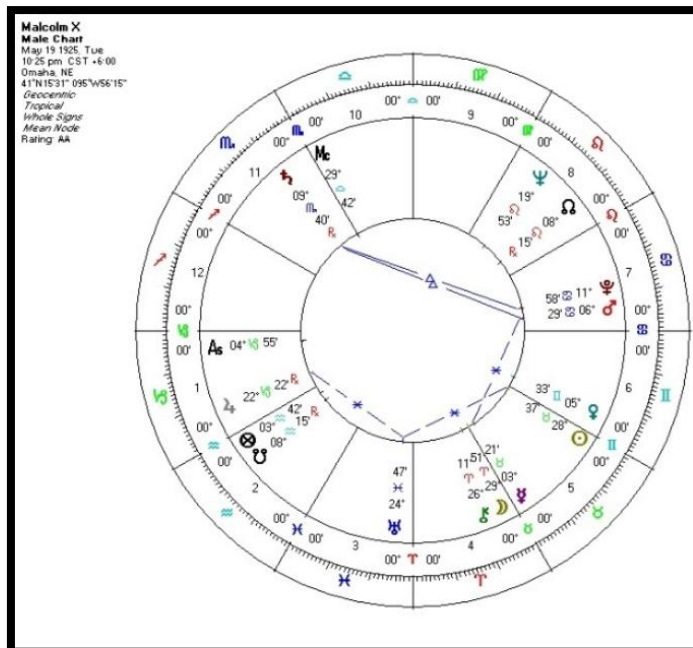
Alternatively, we can see each planet as one half of a planetary pair that includes the Moon. A good place to depart from is Reinhold Ebertin's *Combination of Stellar Influences*. His planetary pairings not only include the Moon but the Lunar Nodes themselves, given an interpersonal dimension.

Saturn to Jupiter to Mars....

Saturn, the “greater malefic” is a fine place to begin, as it signifies much of what we must do when things do not go our way. Depending on the situation, we lower expectations and become more frugal, careful, modest, and tolerant of the suffering and negativity that comes our way. We set limits on ourselves for self-protection. Ebertin emphasizes Saturn's self-control, sense of duty, and conscientiousness. Negative aspects include a controlling response (this only *increases* anxiety over time), and lack of self-confidence. Ebertin continued: combined with the (interpersonal) Node, Saturn gives isolation, social inhibition, and lack of adaptability. Saturn may also make for self-reliance when there are no other means of support.

One chart example is that of Malcolm X, an important leader of the civil rights movement in the United States in the twentieth century and an influential voice for black heritage and culture.²⁴ Clearly his Saturn is important, as the ruler of his Capricorn Ascendant and from its trine to its dispositor Mars.

Saturn in Scorpio is also *at the Northern Bendings*, in close square to the Nodal polarity along the Leo-Aquarius axis. As a young man serving prison time for theft, he converted to Islam,



Aquarius axis. As a young man serving prison time for theft, he converted to Islam,

²⁴ <https://astrologyinstitute.com/articleprofile/profile-2017-2020/2017/malcolm-x-and-the-arc-of-history>

which became his vehicle for personal austerity as well as solar identity. The self-discipline his new religion provided allowed him to access his strong intelligence and rhetorical gifts. Saturn supported his new way of being.

Jupiter, the “greater benefic” may find greater security in expanding one’s frame of reference: one’s personal difficulties extend to appreciating their presence in the lives of many others, or to undergo personal hardship for the sake of a larger goal. Benevolence toward others or taking on a just cause for the benefit of many outweighs self-concern.

Traditionally, a problematic Jupiter does not incline toward over-doing but under-doing. A weakened Jupiter here would shower themselves in multiple affirmations that make one feel better but without taking any real action or find relief in a kind of banal hopefulness. Ebertin will talk of Moon/Jupiter in the context of sociability and generosity; Jupiter/Node makes for harmonious or disharmonious relationships with others.

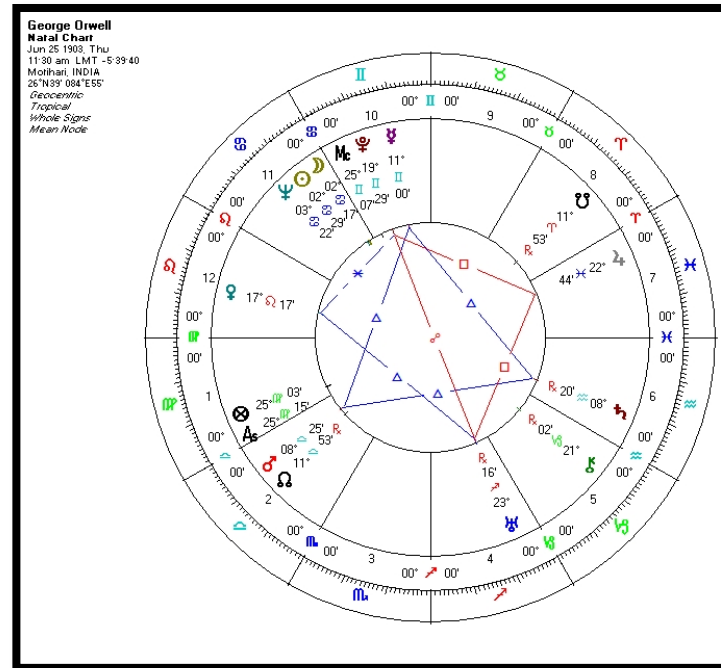
Mars, the “lesser malefic,” also represents situations we do not like, but here we assert ourselves forcefully, even violently, so as not to be taken advantage of by others. This can happen on sports teams, in the military, with street gangs, or in crime-ridden places. We cannot deal with difficulty through self-reduction (Saturn’s terrain) but by striking back and going on the offensive in some way. There are many situations in which it’s best to protect ourselves, to set limits on others. When we have few options to act, Mars may carry a resentment that can become poisonous, *or* we might find a response that is creative.

Mercurial George Orwell with Mars conjunct the North Node, but with a New Moon in Cancer conjunct Neptune, wasn't much of a military person (although he did participate in the Spanish Civil War), but instead placed himself in situations of social or economic oppression or deprivation. From the lower classes in Paris to the mine workers in his own country, Orwell gave testimony to those whose voices were unheard.²⁵ It culminated in his literary campaign against totalitarianism in all its forms. In pursuit of his causes, he also ignored his delicate health.²⁶

In any other culture, one hardly needs to explain **Venus** as a planetary aid for self-soothing and coping with personal difficulty.

The “lesser benefic,” the planet of love, sexuality, and beauty, also of culture and entertainment, gives us temporary happiness and provides our modern entertainment industry many ways to make money. At its best, Venus allows us occasions of joy (e.g., partaking of art or music or a beautiful and delicious chocolate cake or a fine social occasion or promising first date) that help us keep what troubles us at a distance, that may strengthen us or calm us down – and make our struggles worth the effort.

This brings us to **Mercury**, neither benefic or malefic but ever versatile and adaptable. Ebertin will look at thinking influenced by feeling, perceptiveness and an active mind. With the Nodes, he mentions sociableness or group planning based on common interests. (I would add “groupthink,” our inclination to go along with prevalent



²⁵ “What I have most wanted to do throughout the past ten years is to make political writing into an art. My starting point is always a feeling of partisanship, a sense of injustice.

When I sit down to write a book, I do not say to myself, ‘I am going to produce a work of art’. I write it because there is some lie that I want to expose, some fact to which I want to draw attention, and my initial concern is to get a hearing.” From 1946 essay, “Why I Write”

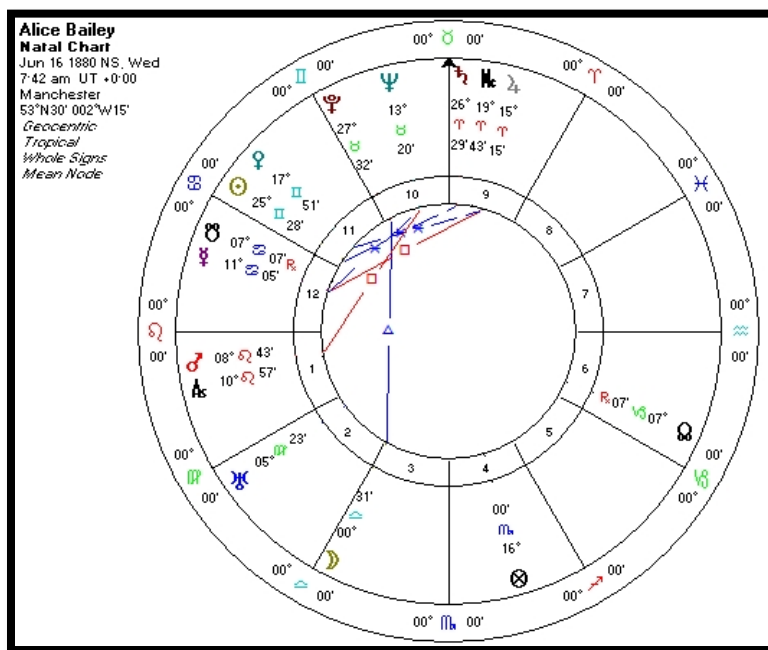
²⁶ <https://astrologyinstitute.com/articleprofile/profile-2017-2020/2017/george-orwell-a-man-for-our-season>

perceptions and opinions because it feels safer.) In a different realm of activity, we can find comfort in intellectual or mental entertainment, puzzles and games of strategy, and the like. We can also drink from a wealth of ideas and perspectives, finding comfort and encouragement from just thinking things through.

I now submit an odd example, Alice Bailey with Mercury conjunct the South Node. To the extent that readers adhere to “New Age” ideas, and to the extent that modern astrology is intertwined with New Age ideas and inclinations, one must acknowledge

Bailey’s influence on them.

Unfortunately, we don’t know a lot about her personality or her personal life – much biographical material is on the hagiographical side. We know that she was born into an upper middle class religiously devout family but lost both parents when she was young and was cared for by relatives.



At the age of 15, she received the first of her many visions. A shadowy spiritual entity told her that she was to do important work in her lifetime. However, she first would have to overcome her angry disposition. (See Mars conjunct Ascendant in Leo.)

Later, as a young adult, having done missionary work in India but now in California, past one divorce and now parenting two children, she happened into a Theosophical Society meeting. It must have been love at first sight. She suddenly found her life purpose and soon became notable within that community.

She received another visitation: the entity now asked her to become a channel for teachings on personal and world redemption. After first refusing she accepted. The first

result was *Initiation, Human and Solar* that the Theosophical Society began to publish and then abruptly stopped, becoming skeptical of her visitations and the authority of her work. She had been married to group treasurer Foster Bailey, both of whom were ousted from the Theosophical community. They moved to New York, from where she published and taught for the remainder of her life.

Looking at her natal chart, we see a strongly placed Sun in Leo that sextiles a debilitated Saturn. This alone wouldn't be enough for her to survive and then flourish. If we look at her Libra Moon and its ruler, Venus in Gemini: we get the picture of somebody with good social skills, maybe a politeness learned from her upper-middle class childhood. Mercury is in Cancer and in the twelfth house, with a strong square to its exaltation ruler Jupiter in the ninth house. This would give her Mercury a religious inclination but in a muted way.

Now we take on Mercury's conjunction with the South Node. Consider her first visitation, when she was counseled to turn down her anger and become more accommodating to others. She clearly succeeded in this, but how? Not by a will power that never works, nor self-discipline (weak Saturn), but through self-reflection and forethought. As Mercury's twelfth-house placement also indicates, this would be primarily a hidden endeavor. This self-reflection may also to have contributed to her teachings on the "glamours," the ways in which spiritual attainment can be subverted by ego. How does one become a New Age prophet and stay right sized?

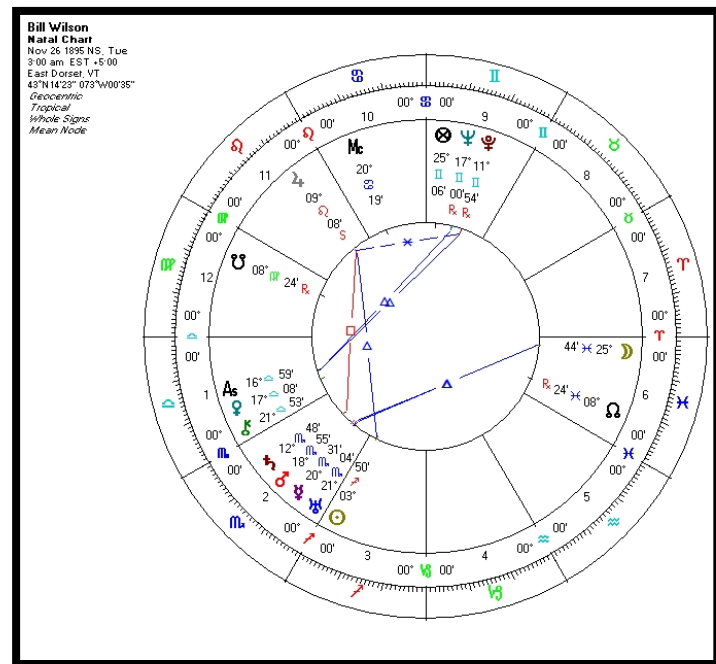
Another Mercury/South Node manifestation may be the channeled nature of (her? his? their?) writings. Many spiritual traditions leave room for teachings inspired or channeled by extra-human beings or even God himself, and I am in no position to judge the authenticity of any of them. For Alice Bailey, however, the channeled nature of her teachings accomplished the purpose of objectifying, not personalizing, their foundations. She resolved self-doubt by being an agent for larger purposes. This may allow the sextile from Neptune to "let go" and be creative but not be fraudulent or grandiose.

We will approach the effect of the Lunar Nodes on the **Sun** by first looking at the life and astrology of Bill Wilson who had Sun in Sagittarius at the Southern Bendings. Although Wilson was an important cultural figure during his lifetime, he was called just “Bill W.” as co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous and its principal writer.

Unlike Alice Bailey, Wilson’s life story is well-documented: he was a brilliant young financial analyst and town-drunk in Manhattan during the 1920s (no mean feat), and he had tried mightily to stop drinking. Based on a conversation he had with one of Carl Jung’s former patients, Wilson tried a group spiritual approach to help him stop drinking, with only modest success. The solution came when, during a time of vulnerability, he found himself across a table with another similarly afflicted person, later known as “Dr. Bob.” Together they found others and used a combination of peer counseling and spirituality; over the years the result was treatment methods used not only with alcoholism but addictions to drugs, food, sex, gambling, and to one’s addicted partner (Al-Anon).

Scanning Wilson’s astrological chart, Venus in Libra on the Ascendant gave him Jimmy-Steward-like handsomeness. More relevant to his addiction would be Moon in Pisces in the sixth house. We might also notice Mercury conjunct Uranus which, together with Mars, could give rise to unconventional thinking that he could pursue passionately – drunk or sober. The Mercury/Uranus combination is bolstered by its contra-antiscion with Jupiter, in its joy in the (whole sign) eleventh house: this configuration can think in a large and novel way.

Wilson’s Sun speaks loudly in his chart. We note the trine of Sun in Sagittarius and Jupiter in Leo in which these two planets are in the others’ domicile signs. Considering the strong placement of his Jupiter, this configuration cries out self-importance, grandiosity, and vanity (add his Venus placement).



In his early life, grandiosity was limited by the humiliation of his drinking and his failures to stop drinking; as a sober person, it was limited by the peer-focus and anonymity of the organization he founded and was spokesperson for. The Sun at the Southern Bendings likely contributed to his many bouts of depression – drinking and sober – but, most importantly, to an active instinct to make himself smaller, to make himself, in his words “right sized”, despite much admiration that surrounded him later in life. The nodal connection allowed him to take on humility as an ongoing practice, as he clearly needed to do.²⁷

Perhaps Wilson’s life-defining grappling with grandiosity and humility seems like an extreme manifestation of Sun at the Bending, recall that my chart contains Sun in Capricorn next to the North Node. Its expression is more Saturnine: whenever I endeavor on some solar project, I instinctively consider time-management, energy-management, and whatever surrounding support network I can gather. Consequently, many of my projects – like much of my teaching and writing – become collaborative or group projects.²⁸

What of the **Moon** in contact with the Nodes or Bendings? It’s a bit of an exclamation point attached to the Moon. Think of the Moon with raised volume, like being placed in an angular house. We also must consider whether the luminary is with the North or South Node or at the Northern or Southern Bendings. We’ll look again at Nietzsche’s chart, with Moon at the North Node, and that of Vincent Van Gogh, with Moon at the South Node. (Both Moons are in Sagittarius.)

²⁷ In *Yesterday’s Sky: Astrology and Reincarnation* (Second Edition 2012), Steven Forrest takes up the karmic life of Bill Wilson (p. 300-309) and naturally comes up with different information. Using Placidus houses, Forrest locates the South Node in the eleventh house. He tends to use the modern depiction of signs as personality traits (e.g., the Virgo South Node indicates a previous lifetime of service, the “symbolic trinity of Pluto, eighth house and Scorpio” and issues of betrayal, broken taboos, and so on). He also relies on the domicile ruler and its condition for past life issues, saying little about the North Node, although with Wilson, with North Node in Pisces (he has fifth house), there’s an appeal to “spiritual ecstasy” or “spiritual joy.” Also using Wilson’s solar placement, Forrest’s analysis yields a result of a past life of an ideological authority figure that resulted in his demise when the pre-Wilson began to rebel. “All I know is that he was part of a hierarchical organization linked to some extreme activity redolent of death and skirting the edge of taboo.” (p. 306)

²⁸ A fine example has been writing this series: Cecilia Bortoluzzi Brocklin, Shellie Crow, and Kelly Talbot have contributed support, feedback, and some really good ideas. They also represent those who I have written for.

Before elaborating further and providing more chart examples, we need to go back into our Wayback Machine and see how Hellenistic and Medieval astrologers used Nodes and Bendings – or at least how they wrote about them. As a modern-day astrologer who desires to preserve the continuity of astrology's traditions, it is important to build from what we know of the past.

The Hellenistic Era: Ascending and Descending Nodes

Making blanket statements about anything in the Hellenistic astrological tradition is risky, for much has been lost, original material is sometimes doctored by subsequent copyists, and often the original text has been corrupted by later additions. We also have complications of language and terminology, since most of us must rely on translations of their primary texts. However, contemplating their language and terminology – mostly in ancient Greek – can reveal their understanding of astrology and its methods.

I have a passable library of Hellenistic astrology but have found no mention of the terms “Dragon's Head” or “Dragon's Tail”.²⁹ Instead we get “Ascending Node” and “Descending Node.” Let's first look at the words they used – very ordinary words.

- “Ascending” is from “*anabibadzō*,” consisting of the normal word for “up” and a verb that means to cause motion; “*katabibazō*” begins with “down” joined to the same verb. “*Bibadzō*”, a derivative of the very common “*bainō*” “to go,” implies some propulsion or being lifted.
- What we call the “node” is “*syndesmos*.” A “desmos” is any bond or whatever fastens, e.g. a cable or a door latch. “Syn” here simply meant together.
- What is a “bending?” Here we have “*epikamnē*” which gives another preposition, “epi,” meaning “upon” and “kamnē” that is a bend or angle, like a bending in the road.

The Ascending/Descending distinction is not as simple as it first seems. Since the Nodes are not visible places in the sky (except at a solar eclipse), they cannot be seen

²⁹ One exception *may be* Dorotheus of Sidon, a first century astrologer whose third-century Persian text was translated by David Pingree (2005). There are so many later additions that the original teachings of Dorotheus are not easy to discern.

ascending or descending. If we think of these positions ascending and descending in the Northern Hemisphere, this becomes even more confusing – what if the North Node is in southerly Capricorn and the South Node in northerly Cancer? (That would be North or South by declination.) Instead, from the viewpoint of the Northern Hemisphere, north is closer and “ascending”; the south is further away and “descending”.

Now to our sources. This depiction is meant not to be exhaustive but suggestive, and I leave it to the scholars to find specific linkages in time and influence.

We begin with Vettius Valens and Ptolemy, both from the second century C.E. Valens is known as a working astrologer who, happy for us, supplied astrological charts with interpretations. Ptolemy was more like the dean of a first-rate graduate school, whose attributed writings include geography, harmonics, astronomy, and more. Ptolemy's astrological *Tetrabiblos* begins with astrology's fundamentals, giving a physical rationale, and then provides specific methods for determining various life conditions.

Both authorities cite circumstances in which nothing good would come from contact with either Node or Bending. In Book Five of his *Anthology*, Valens talks about what we would call “electional astrology.” Referencing the Ascending (North) Node and its opposition and square, *do not begin anything* – not sailing, marrying, building, planting, assembling. For “that which comes about will be judged neither stable nor easily brought to completion, but rather inconstant and incomplete and subject to punishment or painful and not enduring.”³⁰ Considering the general symbolism of the Moon that is about responding and adapting, less about starting things, Valens may have given us a lunar twist to his use of the Lunar Nodes.

Elsewhere, Valens gives a positive outcome when the benefics are on the Ascending Node: one can rise to success even if one is born in difficult or middling circumstances; with the malefics, however, this configuration would produce banishment or accusations. We'll see that the Ascending and Descending Nodes become intertwined with the distinction between benefic or malefic planets, but not in a consistent way.

³⁰ Schmidt translation, p. 8-9

In Book Three of the *Tetrabiblos*, Ptolemy initiates a discussion of injuries and handicaps, not being clear about whether he's discussing the natal chart or predictive indicators. Lameness or paralysis or other difficult events happen when the malefics are carried onto angles, or the other way around, "*and especially when the Moon is upon the nodes or the bendings or upon the blame-worthy zoidia [there are five of them].*"³¹

Ptolemy's next mention of the Nodes and Bendings is worth savoring upon. Again, the third book of the *Tetrabiblos*, we see an extended discussion of the planet or planets governing one's personality or character, at the end of which he discusses the influence of the Moon on the Nodes or Bendings:

"These things being so, the condition of the Moon herself nevertheless makes a contribution, for when chancing to be *in the bendings of her southern and northern limit*, she cooperates toward the *more versatile and resourceful and the more changeable*. Upon the nodes, she cooperates toward the *keener and more active and readily changeable.*"³²

Note many similar comparative adjectives (Instead of Schmidt's "more", Robbins uses "greater"). Some of us may recognize the Greek word translated as "versatile" or "greater versatility", *polytropos*: the Muse in the *Odyssey* sings of this [πολύτροπον](#) man, versatility ("many turns") being the distinctive quality of its hero Odysseus. Again, we get lunar indications for Nodes and Bendings and here with a fine allusion: Odysseus must survive much hardship and find a way to return home and rescue his wife and land. For this to occur, our classical hero is deprived of all the solar trappings of exalted position and famous deeds; instead, he must become adaptable and resourceful – and a "nobody".

We skip a few centuries from Valens and Ptolemy, and we begin to encounter confusion. Rhetorius of Thebes, from the sixth or seventh centuries, practiced astrology within the Byzantine era. He tells us that when the Ascending Node is with Jupiter or Venus or Sun, it makes exiles. It may also make for a disreputable mother if the Moon is with the Ascending Node, but then he says:

³¹ Schmidt translation, p. 54

³² See Schmidt translation, p. 64, Robbins (1940/1994), p. 361

“The Ascending Node is good with the benefics, while the Descending Node is good with the malefics.”³³

Scribal error? Corrupted text? Happily, Rhetorius sorts this out for us by some specific determinations: in the tenth house with Moon, Venus, and Jupiter one is fortunate and distinguished, but not so much with South Node in the fourth house or in aspect: the native may experience difficulties when young but things get better over time, although they may also get their way through violence and domination. Here we see an association of the North Node with the do-gooder benefics Jupiter and Venus.

Medieval Period: Dragon's Head and Tail, Increase and Decrease

This era gives us the affiliation of the North Node and South Node, now the Dragon's Head and Tail, with increase and diminution respectively. From the ninth century we get Abu 'Ali al-Kayyat, although the text itself is a few hundred years later translated from the Latin. I will highlight two examples from his use of astrological aphorisms. He tells us that, for example, if the Dragon's Head is in the (third) house of brothers, the brothers will have a better condition and status than the native; if the Dragon's Tail in there instead, it is a happier status for the native than the brothers.³⁴ If the Dragon's Tail is in the sixth house of slaves and subordinates, it signifies fewer slaves.

A little afterwards, in the tenth century, is Ali al-Qabi'si, and the idea of increase and decrease has taken over the benefic/malefic guideline.³⁵ The result is a change in interpretation.

- The Dragon's Head is like a benefic star, its nature is Venus and Jupiter, and is associated with *increase*, including increasing the harm of Mars and Saturn.
- The Dragon's Tail, the nature of Mars and Saturn, has a *diminutive* nature and reduces the benefit of the benefics but also decreases the evil of the malefics.

³³ Translated J. Holden, *Rhetorius the Egyptian*, p. 38-39

³⁴ Translated J. Holden, Abu'Ali Al-Khayyat, *The Judgement of Nativities*, p. 45, 59

³⁵ Translated B. Dyles, *Introductions to Traditional Astrology: Abu Ma'shar & al-Qabisi* (2010), p. 205

Is the South Node like evil-doer malefic Mars or Saturn, and so make them more prominent, or does the South Node decrease their potential harm?

Al-Burini, an eleventh-century polymath and major figure in the “Islamic Golden Age”, also wrote about astrology and discussed the Lunar Nodes.

“Many astrologers attribute a definite nature to the ascending and descending nodes, saying that the *former is warm and beneficent and denotes an increase in all things, and the latter cold, maleficent, and accompanied by a diminution of influences*. It is related that the Babylonians held that the ascending node increases the effects of both beneficent and maleficent planets, but it is not everyone who will accept these statements, for the analogy seems to be rather far-fetched.”³⁶

Skeptical Al-Biruni adds warmth to the Ascending Node and cold to the Descending Node. What if we looked at the difference between the Ascending/Descending Nodes or Dragon's Head/Tail using the qualities of increase and diminution, without the distinction of benefic and malefic?

We find the same increase/decrease distinction in the twelfth century from Ibn Ezra, a Jewish European who was one of the luminaries of his time. In the *Beginning of Wisdom*, he outlines positions of planetary weakness and places both the Dragon's Head and Tail. He then quotes the “ancients” and the Hindu astrologers who use of the idea increase and decrease, noting that the Head is good with the benefics and bad with the malefics and vice versa for the Tail.³⁷

I end this partial examination with William Lilly, who, although he was from the seventeenth century, used mostly medieval sources and gave us an astrology that was medieval in character. He adds a masculine/feminine distinction but confesses confusion and has his doubts as well.³⁸

³⁶ Translated R. R. Wright, (1934), p. 233-234. #383 “Effect of the Moon's Nodes”

³⁷ Translated by Meira Epstein, *Beginning of Wisdom*, p. 108

³⁸ Lilly, *Christian Astrology* facsimile edition, p. 83

“The Head of the Dragon is Masculine, of the nature of Jupiter and Venus, and of himself a Fortune; yet the Ancients do say that being in conjunction with the good he is good, and in conjunction with the evil Planets they account him evil.

“The Tail of the Dragon is Feminine by nature, and ... contrary to the Head; for he is evil when joined with good Planets, and good when in conjunction with the malignant Planets. This is the confident opinion of the Ancients, but upon which reason I know not...”

Tradition gives us common themes that help differentiate the two Nodes of the Moon, alongside some confusion. The notion of increase and decrease seems to be a product of the medieval period and was likely influenced by Rahu and Ketu from the Indian astrological tradition. This gets entangled with the benefic/malefic distinction. At the North Node, do Saturn and Mars become more evil because their effects are increased or less evil because of the general goodness of the North Node?

Taking Tradition Further

If we bracket off the benefic/malefic distinction, we are left with the correlation of the North Node with Jupiter and Venus and the South Node with Saturn and Mars. We are also left with increase and decrease.

What makes Jupiter and Venus such planetary-do-gooders, and what makes Saturn and Mars such doers of bad things? How is it that Jupiter and Venus accompany positive events; how do Mars and Saturn, at their best, allow us to navigate our lives' darker and more stormy waters?

This takes us into the *four qualities* of the planets. Beginning with the wetter Jupiter and Venus, their moisture supports the beginnings and the growth of all manners of life. Wet also brings about connection.

Jupiter is famously between the “spheres” of Mars and Saturn, moderating the hot of Mars and the cold of Saturn, yielding a gentler warmth. Jupiter is also moist or wet, a quality easily discerned by its astrological symbolism. The quality of wet congeals, brings together into one unit – place water on sand and you get a clump of mud. Bring

different people together under Jupiter and they find common attributes and common purposes – they become a social or cultural unit. Jupiter builds the macro-economics of national and global economies from countless (Mercurial) micro-economic transactions. At its best expression, Jupiter expands understanding and sympathy from those you know to those you will never meet.

Is the planet Venus warm or cold? Ancient astrologers thought of her as warm and medieval astrologers thought of her as cold. (I'll go with the older tradition.) Everybody agrees that she is wet. At its most earth-shattering, of course, is sexual/romantic love where we ecstatically join with somebody who is different from us. If Jupiter is like the all-inclusiveness of the musical concert or sports event, Venus is the conviviality of the social occasion where we blend joy and self-forgetfulness.

A planet in conjunction to the North Node would add not only the intrinsic nature of the planet but a further quality of wetness – extending to include and synthesize and assimilate, multiply possibilities, and incline toward abundance.

Mars and Saturn, well-known for their extremes of hot and cold respectively, have dry in common. The clump of mud that wet created returns to separate pieces of sand. Saturn helps us define, slow down, and respond to situations where we must reduce our range of activity. Mars narrows its focus to setting up an adversary (a person or planet) and thrives on overcoming obstacles forcefully. Saturn reduces involvement or separates oneself from what is perceived as adversary. Saturn is also the lord of the last phases of our human lives when our world narrows, our activities reduce, and our bodies shrivel.

A planet in conjunction with the South Node would provide support through the dry activities of breaking down or analyzing, reducing and simplifying, aiming to focus more keenly on what is presently at hand. Some astrologers, influenced by the Rahu/Ketu distinction in Indian Astrology, give the North Node spiritual qualities and the South Node an emphasis on the worldly or material. However, either the spiritual and the worldly, or sublime and mundane, may include the same wet/dry distinction: the North Node's moisture can manifest as greed or have a transpersonal orientation, and the South Node's dryness can manifest as miserliness or spiritual austerity.

What of the factors of increase and decrease? Increase, of knowledge or body weight, joins and assimilates. Wet Jupiter and Venus do this. Dry Saturn and Mars decrease complexity in their respective worlds: Saturn through isolation and “circling the wagons,” and Mars through focusing aggressively on perceived opponents or obstacles.

We Go on a Bending (or Two)

If there is a wet and dry distinction between the North Node and the South Node, what do we do with the Northern and Southern Bendings? The hot/cold polarity falls neatly into place here. Ninety degrees ahead in the zodiac from the North Node, the Northern Bendings, is the nature of hot. Ahead the same amount from the South Node, the Southern Bendings is the nature of cold.³⁹ If wet and dry differentiate through bringing together and separating, hot and cold differentiate through amount and range of involvement.

The sequence of wet-hot-dry-cold shows up in all kinds of places. We can liken a sequence of wet-hot-dry-cold to the life cycle that we experience. Paulus from Alexandria in the fourth century CE gives us a detailed image of this sequence that he likens to the quadrants of the natal chart, if we go clockwise from rising, culminating, setting, and anti-culminating.⁴⁰ We have the sequence of the seasons from the Northern Hemisphere, whereby the Sun's declination path, the four seasons in the Northern Hemisphere, and the life span of humans, have been likened to this sequence of qualities.

³⁹ I cannot specifically rely on Ptolemy, for he calls the Moon conjuncting the Nodes “keener and more active and readily changeable” while the Bendings, you may recall, are more versatile, resourceful, and changeable.” One can extend these descriptions to modify the effects of planets upon these positions, but they say nothing about how to differentiate them. (The Robbins and Schmidt translations are very close here.)

⁴⁰ Paulus Alexandrinus, “Concerning the Quadrants” p. 15, translation D. Greenbaum. ARHAT Publications

Elements and Qualities: Not a Digression

The modern astrologer and astrology student will be far more familiar with the elements of fire, air, earth, and water than these traditional qualities of hot, cold, wet, and dry. It will surprise some that for most of astrology's history it was the modes of the signs of the zodiac, not their elements, that were emphasized. Stephen Arroyo's influential book on the four elements subsumed traditional qualities of hot, cold, wet, and dry, and the four traditional humors under the four elements, and in so doing ignored some important distinctions.⁴¹

According to tradition, the four elements themselves were composed of two qualities each: fire is hot and dry, earth is cold and dry, air is hot and wet, water is cold and wet. This could be applied to the signs of the zodiac. Here's an experiment: if one begins not with equinoctial Aries but instead the mutable Pisces and then proceeds through the zodiac, a clear pattern falls into place.

Pisces – wettest of the water signs

Aries – wettest of the fire signs

Taurus – wettest of the earth signs

Gemini – hottest of the air signs

Cancer – hottest of the water signs

Leo – hottest of the fire signs

Virgo – driest of the earth signs

Libra – driest of the air signs

Scorpio – driest of the water signs

Sagittarius – coldest of the fire signs

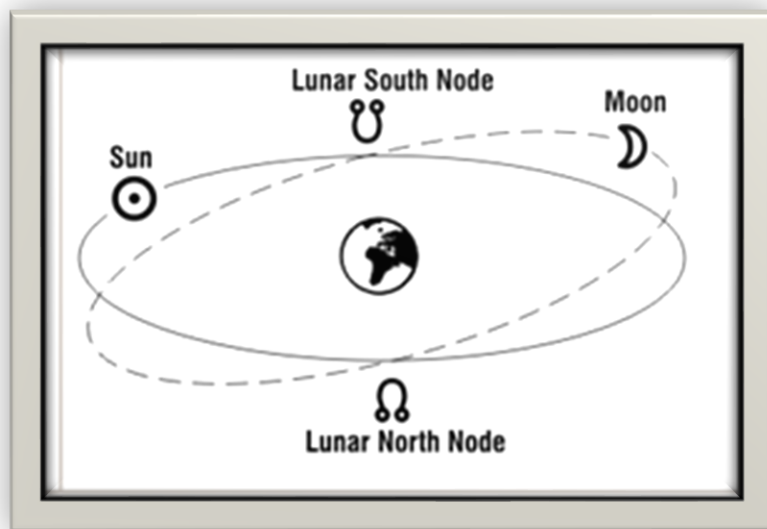
Capricorn – coldest of the earth signs

Aquarius – coldest of the air signs

⁴¹ William Lilly did focus on the element of the sign of a planetary significator of a misplaced item.

Here is an example: Is Mars-governed Aries really the wettest of the fire signs? Aries is known for its spontaneity (leap before you look), and this impulsiveness is often fueled more by intuition than deliberation. Leo and Sagittarius tend to have specific agendas. Aries action may leave chaos in its wake, chaos that can become creative opportunity. However, if what appears as spontaneity is simply impulsiveness, such person may be just lowering stress. Try out the others, if you'd like; it may add to your understanding of the signs of the zodiac. Remember that you're comparing a sign with its co-elemental companion.

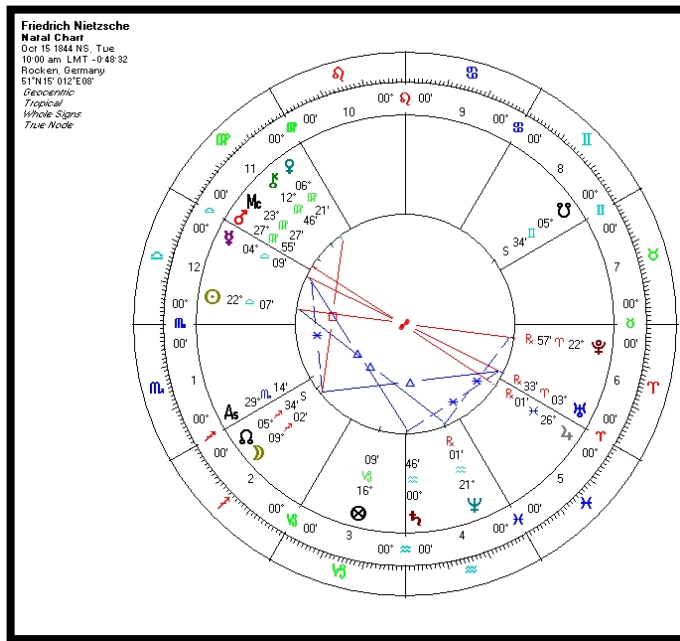
Simply put, planets conjunct the North Node increase wet; planets conjunct the



Northern Bendings increase hot; planets conjunct the South Node increase dry; planets conjunct the Southern Bendings increase cold.⁴²

How do these distinctions help us interpret the natal astrological chart? We begin by returning to our tortured but brilliant German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, here focused on planets on the Nodes and Bendings.

⁴² For a contrasting view, I cite Steven Forrest who discusses squares to the Lunar Nodes in *Yesterday's Sky* (2012). The South Node symbolizes leftover karma from a past lifetime that must be cleared before North Node potentials can be attained. "A planet square the south node represents a person, circumstance, or issue that crossed, vexed, afflicted, or undercut the intentions or needs of the person in the previous lifetime. It is therefore an issue left unresolved from the past, which presses for resolution again in the present." (p. 62-63) Elsewhere in his book Forrest discusses other aspects to the Lunar Nodes.



Our German philosopher doesn't disappoint, for here we see a Sagittarian Moon prominently conjunct the North Node; in close square from Virgo is Venus, here at the Southern Bendings.

At first glance, the values we associate with the Moon – adaptability and responsiveness, empathy, awareness of interconnection, kinship and our common vulnerability – are notoriously missing in his writings. Indeed, much of his writing

disparages these qualities and promotes whoever questions assumptions and values, whoever and thinks and acts independently of these conditioning factors.

Further examination of Nietzsche's Moon/Node placement brings us to its domicile Jupiter that is in its other domicile in Pisces and is related to Mercury by antiscia. Nietzsche's lunar being expressed itself ironically through an ambitious heroic stance that allowed him to endure much physical and mental suffering but also set a standard for himself that was impossible for him to meet.

This tension shows itself in many of his writings, but most prominently in a famous thought experiment on "eternal recurrence" – what if one had to live the same life over and over again – would this be cause for joy or for anger and gnashing of teeth? Nietzsche would have one say "yes" to all one's experience, including all one's suffering. His vision was his way of coping with a life full of difficulty. Here's a "New Years resolution":

"I want to learn more and more to see what's necessary in things as the beautiful in them – thus I shall become one of those who make things beautiful. *Amor fati*: may that be my life from now on! I want to wage no war against the ugly, I do

not want to accuse, I do not want even to accuse the accusers. May *looking away* be my only form of "negation! And, all in all: I want to be at all times hereafter only an affirmer!"⁴³

Here the "wet" quality of his Moon conjunct the North Node is that attitude of bringing together, at least in aspiration, *all* features of human experience, joyfully (Jupiter's contribution) – a sustaining strategy if not an attainable one for him.

Contrasting is Nietzsche's Venus in Virgo at the Southern Bendings, in the cold part of the cycle. On the positive side was his strong aesthetic sensitivity; his writings betray a passionate but discerning involvement with all things artistic. His antipathy toward Richard Wagner's "decadent" operas makes it difficult to watch or listen to them after reading what he has to say about them. Nietzsche also considered most other contemporary artistic ventures to reflect the mediocrity of his culture.

However, when it comes to Nietzsche's sexuality and his relationships with women, things become bewildering. We know that his mother and sister had few or no boundaries when it came to being part of his life. A case can be made for Nietzsche being a closeted homosexual or at least bisexual and he tended to idealize all he might consider male. We know that at some point he contemplated marriage – but only to a wealthy woman who would support him – and made two marriage proposals to women who were his intellectual peers but never took him seriously as a romantic partner or husband. There is much bitter anti-feminism in Nietzsche's writings, although it is sometimes difficult to discern their seriousness.

The result of all these factors? They led him to a more isolated life over time. His was not a "misanthropic" loneliness, as Pam Crane asserted, but a painful and productive one. Some of Nietzsche's most distinctive work came from this loneliness, but alongside there were signs of increasing mental illness, the cause of which has not been conclusively established. (The prevalent theory has been that it was a result of syphilis contracted in his early adulthood.)

What if, instead, Nietzsche had Venus at the Northern Bendings? Now from this place of abundance, our philosopher may have become an artist, albeit a rebellious one; as for

⁴³ From *The Gay Science*. Trans. Hollingdale, *A Nietzsche Reader*, 1977, p. 249-250

his sexuality and all that, I envision him becoming more like Lord Byron, the rebellious playboy poet Nietzsche admired.

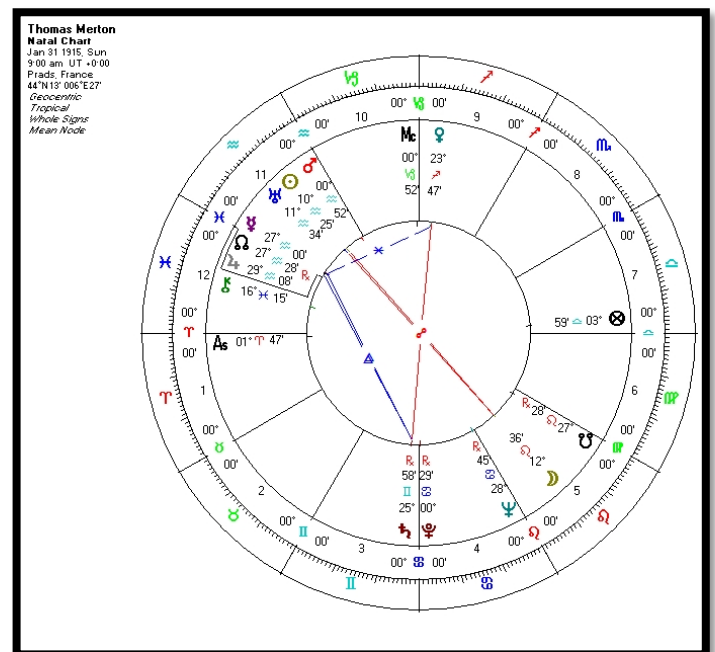
More Factuals and Counterfactuals

Conjunctions to the North Node can express themselves in ways less extreme than for Nietzsche. For example, Thomas Merton was a well-known monastic who wrote classics like *The Seven Storey Mountain* and *Seeds of Contemplation*. He was a celebrity in some quarters while alive, and his influence today extends throughout many contemplative spiritual traditions. His natal chart is a thing of beauty, especially when we look at North Node involvement.

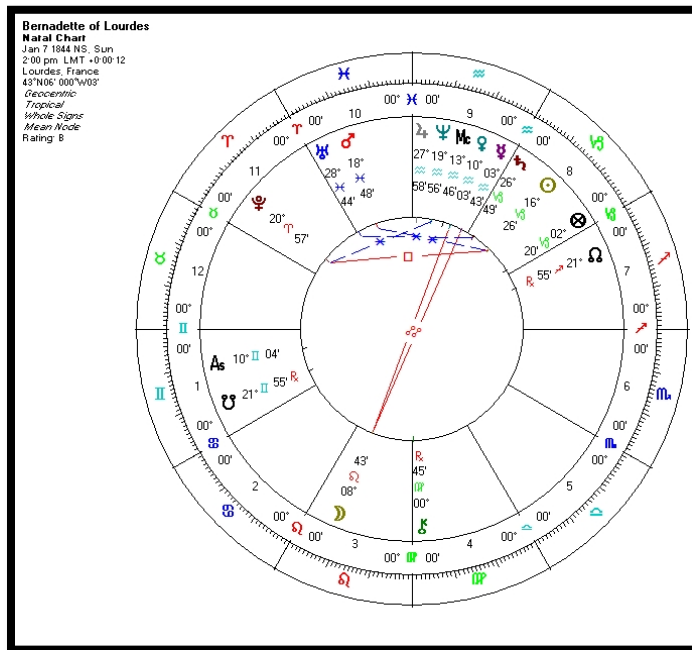
A quick look is sufficient. Mercury and Jupiter conjunct the North Node, both planets in trine to their dispositor Saturn. We see not only his strong intellect and writing talent but an outlook that embraced many contemplative traditions and practices. All this happened *without* reducing commitment to his faith.

What is the lunar quality of this configuration? Despite his less orthodox Sun conjunct Uranus opposing showy Moon in Leo, Merton was successful at managing his life through an intellect that continuously engaged in introspection and disciplined self-examination. And if his Jupiter and Mercury were in conjunction to the South Node, the dry part of the cycle? There would be a greater tendency to judge from differences, to enjoy a simpler life and a more fixed set of principles; instead, Merton became a creative ecumenical monastic celebrity.

To illustrate a planet at the Northern Bendings, in this case Mars, here's somebody born the same year as Friedrich Nietzsche but with an entirely different life path: Bernadette



Soubirous (of Lourdes). As a teenager from an ordinary family, while visiting a nearby grotto, she received visions of a “small young lady” (later thought to be the Virgin Mary). Soon enough these visions led to her uncovering a spring whose waters had healing qualities. This created quite the sensation and Bernadette became famous, and she fled from fame by becoming a nun and entering a convent. Bernadette died at the age of thirty-four, later her body was declared incorruptible, and she was declared a saint by the Catholic Church in 1921.



Superficially her natal chart resembles Merton's – many planets in Aquarius accompanied by Moon in Leo. We see a heavier Saturn influence, as Sun and Lot of Fortune are in Capricorn along with Saturn itself. One would think she would fit into the place the world had given to her.

Bernadette displayed a personal stubbornness, even a tenacity, throughout her life. When she was called by the vision to repeatedly return to the grotto, she defied her

parents and friends and continued her visits there, eventually finding water and having a chapel built there– to the mixed reception of the townspeople, some of whom saw great financial opportunities. When she entered a religious order as a nun, this was just as much to escape her fame or notoriety as it was a decision based on devotion. Further emphasizing the importance of her Mars placement, her Lot of Spirit, symmetrical to Lot of Fortune, is in Capricorn in a trine relationship to Mars.⁴⁴

If Mars were not in the hot but cold part of the cycle, if instead at the Southern Bendings, she would have more likely discounted her visions and obeyed those who

⁴⁴ Although the Church fully appropriated the vision as the Virgin Mary and sanctified its beholder, doubts as to the person envisioned continue.

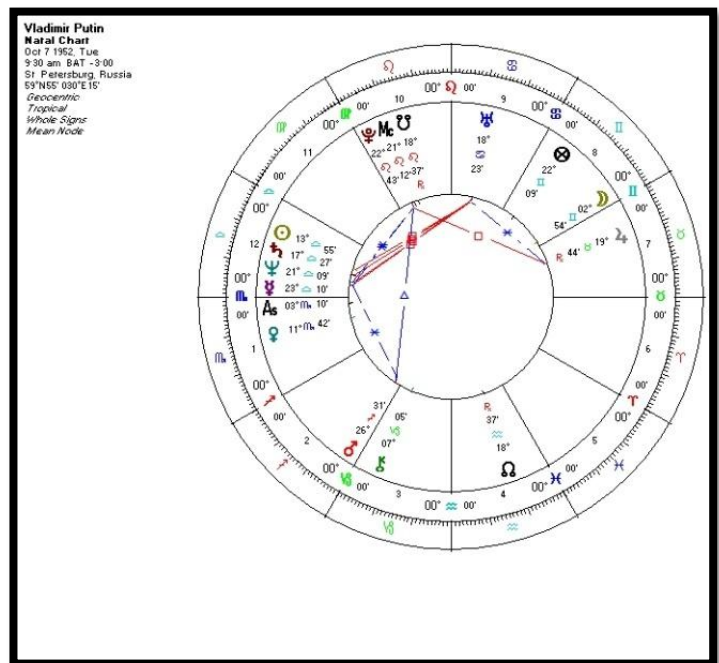
told her to stay away. Bernadette might have considered her visions delusional – why would a divine entity ever visit *her*?

We continue with the Northern Bendings but with Jupiter and Vladimir Putin, whose loyalty to a re-united Russian empire is *not* from grandiose solar identification: for him it's personal and existential.

Consider Putin's family background: his grandfather cooked for Lenin and Stalin; various relatives were killed by the Nazis or disappeared in battle, his father served in the Soviet Navy, and his mother worked in a factory to help support all this. Putin had two brothers much older than himself who had previously died, one from disease and starvation during the siege of Leningrad.

As an adult working for the KGB, the Soviet spy agency, Putin was assigned to Berlin during the time of the fall of the Wall in 1989. What was a cause for rejoicing worldwide was a personal catastrophe for him, as was the breakup of the Soviet Union a few years later.

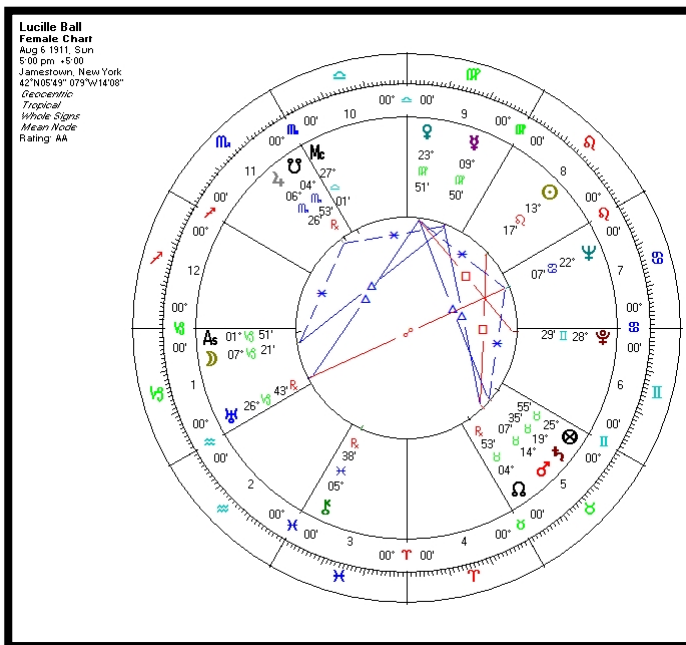
A quick glance at his natal chart shows a strong twelfth house (befitting a spy?) and with a prominent Saturn placed there; Mars, the ruler of his Ascendant, is in Sagittarius with sextiles to Mercury and Neptune and a rather important trine aspect from Pluto in the tenth house.



What does Jupiter in Taurus at the Northern Bendings tell us? The planet itself attests to ambition and the desire to be important by vigorously promoting a cause larger than himself, and of course Taurus is famous for its ability to hold on – augmented by its dispositor, Venus, in the first house also in a fixed sign. The Northern Bendings reveal the ultimately *defensive* personal nature of his ambitions. There's a resentful part of the Russian psyche about being betrayed, invaded, underestimated, and humiliated on the world stage, and Putin's individual character falls in line with this perception.

How would a Jupiter on the Southern Bendings affect Putin's life path? Less a cult of personality, fewer oligarch friends and a life of privilege, maybe an austere lifestyle – but with the same drive and goals.

We stay with Jupiter, but now placed at the South Node, in the astrological chart of Lucille Ball, a woman who sanctified but by a rather different group. Having grown up watching network television when "I Love Lucy" reruns were prominent, later I was shocked and gratified to see her astrological chart, for it shows how much of her comic television image was just "show business."



Noting her strong Capricorn and Virgo placements, we see a savvy and determined businesswoman who followed an early career as a "Grade B" movie actress to become not only an entertainment celebrity but a prominent studio executive.

What is the role of Jupiter in Scorpio, conjunct the South Node? It is in its "house joy" in the eleventh and is strongly configured with Moon and Mercury, both in earth signs, and is governed by Mars, also in an earth sign. These aspecting planets attest to being pragmatic and

careful, but Jupiter here offers a different dimension, that of *restrained* creativity and vision.

After beginning a new career in a comedy act with her Cuban American husband Ricky Ricardo, and at the risk of a major career opportunity, she insisted that Ricardo play her husband on television. Later she insisted that her pregnancy and childbirth also be part of the television sitcom content. She and Ricardo also conceived the idea of syndication, and they owned first the rights to the re-runs of their television programs.

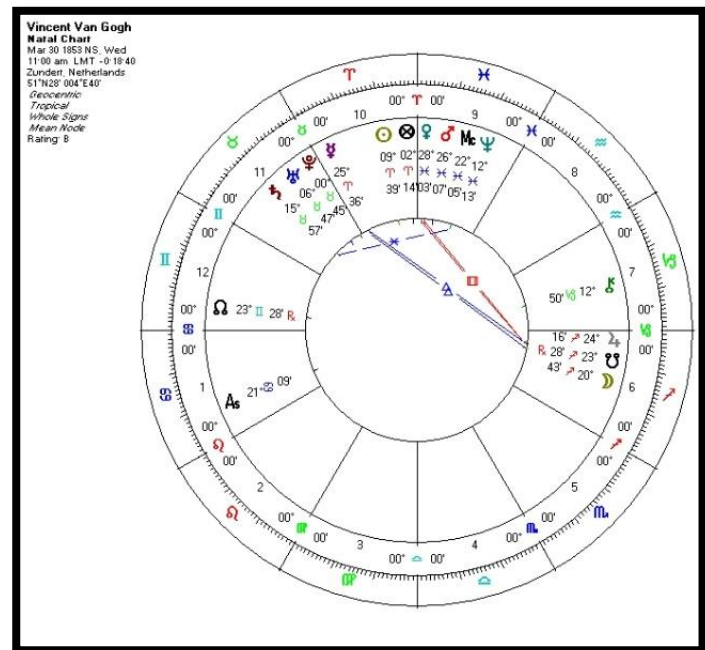
In conformity with the dry nature of planet in conjunction with the South Node, Ball was not ideological or political by nature but chose her battles carefully and seemed to have prevailed by exhausting those who resisted. If Jupiter was on her North Node,

however, we may have seen a more forceful political and cultural agenda, and Ball may not have approved the indignity of being cast on television as an impulsive and shallow redhead.

Later, as studio executive, Lucille Ball gambled on two television series that would eventually become entertainment franchises. One was *Mission Impossible*. The other was the original *Star Trek*; one could say that she “discovered” Gene Roddenberry. Ball lobbied for this strange new (and very expensive) project, having to put up a lot of studio money to begin and then to sustain this show that was popular but was losing money. Resulting financial losses eventually contributed to Desilu studios having to be sold to Paramount – who later made a ton of money on syndication for both television series.

I end with Vincent Van Gogh, who, like Nietzsche, had planetary placements at a Node and Bending. Here we need to look at not two but four planets simultaneously: Moon and Jupiter in Sagittarius conjunct the South Node and Venus and Mars at the Southern Bendings, corresponding to dry and cold parts of the Moon's Latitude Cycle.

The South Node/Jupiter connection reveals itself in Van Gogh's tendency toward a monomaniacal devotion to one thing at a time, *if* that one thing was sufficiently grand and impactful. Leaving conventional employment at an art gallery, Van Gogh tried his hands at being a minister to the poor – he was so intense and consumed by his chosen vocation that he was fired after a short time. Then it was to Paris to become a professional painter and later to Southern France to fulfill this calling. We combine the grandiosity of Jupiter and Moon in Sagittarius with the austerity connected with their presence with the South Node. Like his brother Theo, Vincent could have settled for something safer, like a family and steady income, but Vincent was haunted by grander possibilities.



We arrive at Venus and Mars in Pisces at the Southern Bendings. Like Nietzsche, Van Gogh also had bad luck with women – no woman seeking a conventional marriage would have looked long in his direction. Van Gogh's interest in particular women began with overwhelming passion (a Venus/Mars contribution?) that ended in despondency. But he had his art.

If we factor in the brevity of his career, Van Gogh's artistic output was enormous – and easily recognizable. At first this doesn't appear to match the coldness of this place in the Moon's Latitude Cycle, yet closer examination reveals a few things. One is the characteristically individual quality of his work – his use of line and color easily reveals the artist. Second, of course, is the melancholic nature of much of his painting and of his disposition in general, a side that co-existed with his famously irascible Mars-like personality.

If, instead, Vincent Van Gogh had Moon and Jupiter at the North Node and Venus and Mars at the Northern Bendings, we might have found somebody who could make money within the artistic fashions of his time. Another possibility would be to be a talented self-promoter and prophet of a new kind of artistic expression. Instead, his life, especially his career, was quieter, more contemplative, and he wasn't commercially successful – until after he died.

*Liberating the Dragon*⁴⁵

We continue at the mythic origin of our symbols of Dragon's Head and Tail in the Indian cycle of teachings. Once, a long time ago, in the intermittent warfare between the Gods (devas) and Jealous or Anti-Gods (asuras), the nectar of immortality, amrita, was lost to the gods and had to be re-administered to them. Svarbhanu, an asura, disguised himself and was able to drink the potion and thus achieve immortality and be godlike, and this deception was witnessed by the Sun and Moon. In retaliation for stealing amrita, Vishnu severed Svarbhanu's head and later cut off his tail, the result of which was Rahu and Ketu, the Dragon's Head and Tail at the North and South Nodes.

⁴⁵ For much of the information in this section, I am indebted to Tania Daniels who provided me with a draft chapter from her book in progress, *Astrological Origins: Latitude, Declination, the Nodes, and the Forgotten Knowledge of our Ancestors*.

As the enemy of the Sun and Moon, this Dragon has the power to eclipse the luminaries.

From here we get the depictions of Rahu and Ketu both having malefic influences. I found this pithy summary by Ronnie Gale Dreyer:

“Rahu and Kethu are considered to be difficult points, and create problems in the areas of life represented by the houses they occupy. Rahu indicates excesses of all types and Kethu represents hardships and isolation. Both Nodes also represent dissatisfaction, aimless travels and dishonesty. If they are well-placed and well-aspected, however, they can enhance the houses in which they are placed. Rahu will give power and material success, while Kethu may bring a spiritual and meditative influence to the chart.”⁴⁶

Does this imply a necessary opposition between what is spiritual and what is worldly? Again, no. It does depend on how one defines spirituality. It seems entirely possible that either placement could have a positive outcome, perhaps joining worldly achievement with personal spiritual progress.

Throughout time and many cultures, the symbol of the Dragon has represented different aspects of the sky and the earth – and within or under the earth.

In the sky there's much of the dragon besides the Lunar Nodes. There's the circumpolar constellation Draco, visible only in the Northern Hemisphere, the North Pole of the ecliptic. Further to the south is the constellation Hydra. We also have comets with tails. Hovering from the sky is the galaxy itself, the Milky Way that also has dragon-like features.

In the Chinese tradition, the dragon is a symbol of countless transformations in our world, moving from under the earth to the sky, to account for the changes of the seasons and being responsible for thunderclouds and pouring rain.

There's also the image of the *entire zodiac* being shaped like a dragon, with six signs of the zodiac on its back and the other six underneath its belly. The six signs on its back are the “straight” or signs of long ascension – from the last degree of Gemini to the last

⁴⁶ Dreyer, R.G. *Indian Astrology: A Western Approach to the ancient Hindu Art*. (1990) p. 95

degree of Sagittarius. The six signs on the belly are the “crooked” or signs of short ascension, from the last degree of Sagittarius back to the last degree of Gemini.

For a given location, the “straight” signs all take longer to rise than two hours (or thirty degrees on the MC) and the “crooked” signs take less than two hours (or thirty degrees on the MC).⁴⁷ Differences between the signs’ “ascensional times” are more pronounced at higher latitudes and are reversed in the Southern Hemisphere.⁴⁸

This may also relate to the traditional exaltations of the Nodes, the North Node being exalted at the third degree of Gemini, the South Node’s exaltation its opposite position in Sagittarius. (This doctrine does not show up in the West until the medieval era, and I have never seen it used by anybody, past or present.) May this unused doctrine relate to the differences in ascensional times between these two halves of the zodiac?



One image stays with me and that’s the Ouroboros, the serpent or dragon that eats its own tail.

This alchemical symbol, here from an engraving from the eighteenth century, gives us one dragon with wings and another without wings. Here the dragon represents the cyclic nature of time and the universe that gives rise to the four elements that we see outside the self-consuming circle.

In sum: one need not restrict the ubiquitous symbol of the dragon and our sky to the Lunar Nodes – there are many other possibilities.

⁴⁷ The difference between the signs of long and short ascension may also reflect in the ancient doctrine of the signs that “command” – on the Dragon’s back – and those that “obey” under his belly.

⁴⁸ If you live in London at 50deg 30 terrestrial latitude, for Aries and Pisces, approximately 14 degrees would pass the Midheaven for these each sign to rise completely; for Virgo and Libra, it would be 43 degrees. Ascensions are mostly used in predictive work, notably for Primary Directions and to direct the Ascendant by Secondary Progressions.

*Conclusion: Astrology, Karma, and Transformation*⁴⁹

Several years ago, while reading a series of articles for a book review, one page caught my eye and stayed with me. At the end of a presentation on Indian Astrology, Ronnie Gale Dreyer mentions three kinds of karma:

- *Sanchita* or “accumulative karma” from previous lifetimes that cannot be changed,
- *Prarabdha* or “operational karma” includes what we do and experience now in this lifetime,
- *Agami* karma projects action to the future and may include the insights we’ve attained on our life’s journey.

Accumulative karma seems Moon-like, operational karma seems like the Sun and Moon together, and the third is potentially solar.

(A two-step Buddhist version of this breakdown is speculatively attributed to Padmasambhava, credited with helping bring Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century: “if you want to know about past lives, note the *conditions* of your life now; if you want to know about future lifetimes, consider what you are *doing* now.” There would be no need to tell stories about past lives and speculate about future ones – the information is already present in our lives right now, when we look properly.)

Dreyer discusses the astrological chart within a karmic framework.

“The horoscope, if properly understood in terms of character strengths and weaknesses, destiny, and planetary cycles, will show how we absolve negative past karma, and create new positive karma, allowing us to fulfill our *dharma*. The concept of *dharma* encompasses the duties we need to perform through family, community, work, and ultimately God, in order to lead a righteous life.”⁵⁰

The final sentence speaks not of personal actualization or individuation but fulfilling our responsibilities to this world. These responsibilities also connect us with those around us and our larger environments, providing what supports us or does not support us adequately. They also bring about situations that disclose our range of

⁴⁹ This is the title of an influential work of psychological/spiritual astrology by Stephen Arroyo (second edition 1992). Arroyo writes of the modern planets as agents of psychological and spiritual change.

⁵⁰ NCGR Research Journal, Summer 2010. p. 27

choices and how we are in the world. Helping to clarify these situations and choices is the calling of the consulting natal astrologer.

One need not privilege the Lunar Nodes or Pluto or any position in the natal chart to find one's karma – the *entire* astrological chart is what we joined when we were born and what accompanies us through our lives.

The Lunar Nodes and Bendings, and planets that happen to be upon those positions, allow us to work creatively with the conditions of our lives. They do not tell stories about how we became who we are, but, combined with other chart factors, they help tell us how we can become who we already are.

Decades ago, some of my astrology students noted that my two least favorite words in astrology were “evolved” and “transcending”. I haven't changed much since then.

“Evolved” implies some kind of clear boundary between “lower” and “higher” manifestations of who we are. Being realistic, either alternative may appear, depending on circumstances or how freaked out or inspired we are, or if we've gotten enough sleep. How often, when experiencing some kind of upheaval, have we said to ourselves, “I thought I got over this one years ago.”? For most of us not yet spiritually accomplished, this implies a need to continually work on oneself.

We certainly want to cultivate the better versions of ourselves, and the astrological chart can give us a great deal of guidance. How do we, as irreplaceable individuals, make the best of situations that we experience in this body, within our network of familiars, and within our current culture and historical epoch? Our life work is not to somehow transcend (to rise above) the conditions of our lives and situations but to affirm them, and certainly not to become somebody we are not.

In a culture that overvalues petty indications of individual success, we often feel hassled by the details of life, including participating in our *dharma* or our everyday “duties”, as Dreyer calls them. Yet the details of these duties, often lunar in nature, are not sidetracks from something better, but reveal much of who we are within the world we inhabit. We can appreciate these hassles, even celebrate them, as part of this glorious life we've been given.

