



INTRODUCTION

Astrology literally means the study (or science, depending on how one translates the Greek word *logos*) of the stars (*astron*). Astrology differs from astronomy by confining its attention to the study of correlations between celestial events and humanly meaningful events. Most people are familiar with only a tiny portion of the science of the stars, namely the 12 signs of the Zodiac as they relate to the personality of individuals and the use of astrology for divinatory purposes.

The Zodiac (literally the “circle of animals” or, in its more primary meaning, the “circle of life” or “circle of living beings”) is the belt constituted by the 12 signs—Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. This “belt” is said to extend 8° or 9° on either side of the ecliptic (the imaginary line drawn against the backdrop of the stars by the orbit of the Earth). The orbits of the various planets in the solar system all lie within approximately the same geometric plane, so that, from a position within the system, all of the heavenly bodies appear to move across the face of the same set of constellations. Several thousand years ago, these constellations gave their names to the Zodiac.

The notion of the Zodiac is very ancient, with roots in the early citted cultures of Mesopotamia. The first 12-sign zodiacs were named after the gods of these cultures. The Greeks adopted astrology from the Babylonians, and the Romans, in turn, adopted astrology from the Greeks. These peoples renamed the signs of the Mesopotamian Zodiac in terms of their own mythologies, which is why the familiar Zodiac of the contemporary West bears names out of Mediterranean mythology. The notion of a 12-fold division derives from the

lunar cycle (the orbital cycle of the Moon around the Earth), which the Moon completes 12 times per year.

From a broad historical perspective, zodiacal symbolism can be found everywhere, and zodiacal expressions are still in use in modern English—e.g., “bull-headed” (an allusion to Taurus), “crabby” (an allusion to Cancer), etc. The popularity of Sun-sign astrology (the kind found in the daily newspaper) has kept these ancient symbols alive in modern society, so that even such prominent artifacts as automobiles have been named after some of the signs (e.g., the Taurus and the Scorpio).

The sign of the Zodiac the Sun is in at the time of a person’s birth is his or her Sun sign (sometimes also called the birth sign). The Sun, as the most important celestial body for Earth-dwellers, is the most important influence in a horoscope (an astrological chart). Consequently, the sign that the Sun is in at birth will usually be the single most important influence on an individual’s personality. Thus when people say that they are a certain sign, they are almost always referring to their Sun sign.

Sun-sign astrology, which is the kind of astrology one finds in newspapers and magazines, has the advantage of simplicity—all one needs to know is one’s birthday to be able to figure out one’s sign—but this simplicity is purchased at the price of ignoring all other astrological influences. The other important celestial bodies, for example, were all located in signs at the moment of birth. Thus, someone with a Scorpio Sun sign might also have a Sagittarius Moon sign, a Virgo Venus sign, a Libra Mercury sign, etc. Each of these other signs has an influence, which is why everyone with the same Sun sign does not have the same personality. The subsidiary influences of the sign positions of the planets is further modified by the angles between them (referred to as aspects), as well as by their house positions (another set of 12 divisions).

These other influences make Sun-sign astrology a hit-or-miss system that works sometimes but fails miserably at others. Professional astrologers tend to dislike Sun-sign astrology because it creates a misconception of the science of the stars (i.e., that astrology is entirely about Sun signs), and because its inaccuracy leads non-astrologers to reject astrology as untrue.

Similar remarks apply to predictions of the future by the 12 signs. Sun-sign prediction, in other words, is also a hit-or-miss system that sometimes works and sometimes misses the mark entirely. The columns found in popular periodicals also tend to create misperceptions about the nature of astrological prediction. In particular, readers can come away with the impression that astrological prediction is a kind of astrological fortune-telling that portrays the stars as if they foretold an irrevocable destiny for the person having her or his fortune told. Modern astrologers, however, tend to distance themselves from

this tradition of predicting specific events. Instead of predicting events, most contemporary astrologers describe upcoming planetary conditions, with the understanding that clients have the free will to respond to planetary influences in different ways. Like a meteorologist, an astrologer can only predict trends and probabilities—not details.

Understanding the Appeal of Astrology

Astrology occupies a peculiar position in the modern world. Derided by many as medieval superstition, the science of the stars nevertheless continues to exercise a fascination over the human mind. Furthermore, polls indicate that its popularity is growing rather than waning. The abysmal failure of critics to halt the expansion of astrology should be a sign that we have reached a juncture where—rather than continuing simply to dismiss astrology as a superstitious retreat from the modern world—it is appropriate to ask other kinds of questions. Simultaneously, we need to understand why this practice has evoked such passionate criticism.

Since at least the historical period known as the Enlightenment, the Western world has been home to a vocal minority of self-appointed guardians of human rationality who have railed against religion and anything else that dared to suggest that the human being was anything more than a physical-chemical organism. Astrology was lumped into the category of irrational superstition along with anything else that did not fall within a rather narrow definition of science. But just how irrational is astrology?

If you live near a seashore and is attentive to the ebb and flow of the waterline, it is easy to observe that the Sun and the Moon rule the tides. How big a step from this observation is it to assert that celestial bodies influence human beings? We cannot touch, taste, or see astrological forces, but neither can we touch, taste, or see gravity. Gravity is perceived only indirectly, in terms of its effects. It is in this way, astrologers could reply, that astrological forces are perceived—indirectly, in terms of their impact on human beings and other events in the world. Furthermore, so astrologers would assert, astrological claims can be subjected to the methods of empirical, statistical research, as has been done most notably in the work of Michel and Françoise Gauquelin. Thus, astrology is not, in the strict sense, irrational. Astrologers, in other words, do not utilize illogical principles of reasoning. Rather, astrology is labeled irrational because it has not been accepted into the mainstream of academic science.

In earlier historical periods, human beings were not so insulated from their environment as we are today. Human life was ordered according to the seasonal migration of the Sun from north to south and south to north. Also, streetlights and the other lights of a suburban/urban environment did not

obstruct a view of the night sky, so that the starry heavens were a nightly experience. Aware of the relationship between Sun, Moon, and tides, as well as the correlation between such cycles as menstruation and the lunar cycle, it is not difficult to see how the human mind would seek out other kinds of correlations between celestial and terrestrial phenomena.

To shift forward in an effort to understand the attraction of astrology for the typical citizen of an industrialized society, one has to see that, even for many people with a modicum of belief in traditional religion, ordinary, everyday life—the world as it is experienced on a day-to-day basis—appears to be empty of significance. Most people feel themselves to be at the mercy of social, economic, and political forces that they can rarely understand, much less predict. Although to the outsider astrology appears to be unappealing because of its apparent determinism, it allows people to comprehend the events in their lives as part of a meaningful, predictive system over which they can gain a certain amount of control. Furthermore, even the most mundane life acquires a certain amount of cosmic significance when viewed through the lens of astrology, in the sense that the system portrays humans as beings that are basically “at home” in the universe.

Theories of Astrological Influence

Approaches to explaining how astrology “works” move between two poles, one that stresses the study of the stars as a natural science (and that consequently attempts to distance it from occultism), and another that, while often calling astrology by the name of science, emphasizes the spiritual or occult dimension of the study of planetary influences. The former perspective, using the natural science model, tends to conceive of astrological influences in terms of forces, analogous to the forces of gravity and magnetism, that are actually “radiated” by the planets.

The latter perspective, while often speaking in terms of “occult forces,” usually emphasizes that correlations between celestial and mundane spheres result from a kind of “prearranged harmony” that is built into the very structure of the cosmos. In other words, the various correspondences that astrology studies are a result of “synchronicity” (to use Carl Jung’s term) rather than cause and effect. It is worth noting that a large number of astrologers attempt to adhere simultaneously to both a force and a correspondence explanation.

The cosmic interconnectedness that the second approach tends to see as fundamental to understanding astrological influence implies a kind of monistic view of the universe that is related to the worldview held in common by most strands of America’s metaphysical subculture. This link is the primary reason that astrology has come in for such severe criticism from militant secularists as well as from conservative Christians.

Christianity and Astrology

The Christian church absorbed astrology along with many other aspects of Hellenistic civilization. Some Christian thinkers worried about the tension between free will and the perceived determinism of astrology, but by and large, the science of the stars occupied an honorable position in the Western tradition. Although some of the Biblical prophets disparaged stargazing, the three wise men were clearly astrologers, and in certain other scriptural passages it is evident that God regularly utilized heavenly signs to instruct the faithful.

Despite certain tensions in the marriage, astrology and Christianity did not divorce until the fundamentalist movement emerged in the early twentieth century. For various reasons—but particularly because of astrology's association with metaphysical religion—fundamentalists, and later most other conservative Christians, rejected astrology as a delusion at best and as a tool of Satan at worst.

The Metaphysical Subculture and Astrology

Despite the antagonism from militant secularists and conservative Christians, astrology has been growing steadily the past hundred years. This growth may well have something to do with the decreasing power of astrology's critics. While the number of conservative churches increase, their influence of traditional religion on society has been waning for more than a century. As for secular humanists, because science creates more problems than it solves, the appeal of a quasi-religious secularism tied to mainstream science has also lost its social influence. While both conservative Christianity and secular humanism have been losing ground, the West's metaphysical subculture—which has been friendly to astrology—has been growing in size and influence. Gallup polls have indicated that over one-third of Americans believe in astrology.

The metaphysical community is a loosely knit subculture. Its most distinctive institutions are the metaphysical bookstores and organizations. The largest of these organizations are the many theosophical societies and spiritualist churches, which were formed in the nineteenth century. This metaphysical community was relatively small until the late twentieth century. When the counterculture of the sixties faded away in the early seventies, many former “hippies” found themselves embarking upon spiritual quests, which radically departed from the Judeo-Christian mainstream. These new seekers swelled the ranks of the metaphysical subculture until it became a significant social force.

One important manifestation of this subculture is called the New Age movement. While segments of the metaphysical community have been referring to themselves as New Age for a long time, neither the community nor the term were familiar to the cultural mainstream until the late eighties. In North America, the single most important event prompting general awareness of this

subculture was the broadcast of Shirley MacLaine's *Out on a Limb* in January 1987. The success of this television miniseries stimulated the mass media to begin investigating and, in time, to begin generating articles and programs about the New Age. The media's interest was still high at the time of the Harmonic Convergence gatherings in 1987, causing the Convergence to attract more public attention than any New Age event before or since.

The widespread interest in the New Age, which was intensified by curiosity about the Harmonic Convergence, led, in turn, to the *Time* magazine feature, "New Age Harmonies," in December 1987. This piece was the most significant general article on the movement to appear in a major news magazine. Like many previous treatments in the mainstream media, "New Age Harmonies" focused on the flashier, less substantive aspects of the movement. However, perhaps because of the greater weight of *Time*, this article, unlike earlier, similar pieces, influenced many of the more serious individuals within the movement to back away from the label "New Age."

Despite its continuities with the older metaphysical community, the New Age departed from tradition in certain ways. Of particular importance for the practice of astrology, the New Age blended metaphysics with certain other, distinct movements, such as the human potentials movement and humanistic psychology. As a consequence, the significance of such familiar occult practices as astrology and tarot were altered. Before explaining this alteration, the reader should note that in the same way that the media seized upon the expression "New Age" in the late eighties and transformed it into a term of derision, an earlier wave of media interest in the early seventies seized upon the word "occult" and succeeded in connecting it with such negative phenomena as black magic.

"Occult" comes from a root word meaning "hidden," and the original connotation of the word was that it referred to a body of esoteric beliefs and practices that were in some sense hidden from the person in the street (e.g., practices and knowledge that remain inaccessible until after an initiation). Alternately, it is sometimes said that practices were occult if they dealt with forces that operated by means that were hidden from ordinary perception (e.g., magic, tarot cards, astrology, etc.). Modern astrology is not occult in the sense of secret initiations, but it is occult in the sense that it deals with "hidden" forces.

Under the impact of the human potentials movement and humanistic psychology, astrology, tarot, and so forth were no longer regarded as mere fortune-telling devices, but became tools for self-transformation. The net result of this on the contemporary practice of astrology is that at least two kinds of astrologers can be distinguished: Astrologers who—like Joan Quigley, the astrologer to Ronald and Nancy Reagan—primarily predict events and advise clients on when to perform certain actions in the world, and astrologers who

primarily see themselves as quasi-therapists, leading their clients to deeper understandings of themselves. Most contemporary astrologers would, of course, fall somewhere between these two extremes.

Getting Started in Astrology

In addition to being a comprehensive reference work, this updated encyclopedia can be used as a foundational textbook for acquiring a basic understanding of astrology. The elements of the science of the stars are the signs and the planets. The beginning student should start by reading and studying the entries for each of the signs of the Zodiac in their natural order—Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. Read the entry on rulership, and then study the entries for the Sun, the Moon, and the planets. The planets need not be studied in any particular order. However, because the meanings of signs and planets overlap, one should refer each planet to the sign(s) that it rules. Next, you should read the entry on the houses, relating each of the signs to each of the houses. Finish up this course of reading with the entries on the ascendant, the aspects, the asteroids, and Chiron. When studying the aspects, one might also read the entries on the major aspects—conjunctions, sextiles, squares, trines, and oppositions.

To understand the basics of chart casting and chart interpretation, the student of astrology must memorize the glyphs (symbols) for the planets, the signs, and the aspects (which follow this introduction). Do not attempt to learn the symbols for the asteroids until *after* all of the other glyphs have been memorized, and, even at that point, focus on the most commonly utilized planetoids—Ceres, Pallas, Vesta, Juno, and Chiron. Read the balance of this introduction, and then the appendix on understanding your own natal chart. After completing this reading, you will have a basic grasp of natal astrology.

The next course of reading involves the various subdivisions and branches of the science of the stars. Begin this study with the entries on transits, electional astrology, solar returns, progressions, and directions. You can then read the entries on the branches of astrology, such as mundane astrology, horary astrology, medical astrology, heliocentric astrology, and so forth. The two final courses of reading focus on history—Mesopotamian astrology, the history of Western astrology, and the history of astrology in America—and the astrology of other cultures—Mesoamerican astrology, Chinese astrology, and Hindu astrology.

Elements of Astrological Meaning

The basic building blocks of astrological meaning are the signs of the Zodiac and the planets. Beginning students of astrology are usually advised to

study and acquire a good basic sense of the signs before proceeding to more complex studies. Because there is a certain similarity of meaning between particular planets and particular signs (each sign is said to be *ruled* by a particular planet), as well as a link of similar meaning between each successive sign with each successive house, a sound knowledge of the 12 signs of the Zodiac makes it easier to understand the astrological significance of the planets and the houses. A highly popular book is Linda Goodman's *Sun Signs*. While some astrologers have criticized this volume, it is a useful, entertaining book for acquiring basic information about the twelve signs of the Zodiac.

There are various ways of classifying the signs, some more useful than others. Of particular importance are the traditional elements of earth, air, fire, and water. These elements represent certain basic personality orientations: Earth represents practicality, water emotional sensitivity, air a mental orientation, and fire activity. Thus, for people who are comprised primarily of water signs (Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces), feelings are what are most *real* in life; for a predominance of air signs (Gemini, Libra, and Aquarius), ideas are most real; for earth (Taurus, Virgo, and Capricorn), practical concerns; and for fire (Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius), activity.

The other primary system by which the signs are classified is the so-called qualities—cardinal, mutable, and fixed. Each of the 12 signs of the Zodiac is a unique combination of an element and a quality (e.g., Aries is a cardinal fire sign, Taurus is fixed earth, Gemini is mutable air, and so forth). The elemental nature of a sign is said to refer to its basic temperament, while quality is said to refer to its mode of expression. Cardinal signs are portrayed as outgoing signs that initiate new activities; fixed signs, by way of contrast, persist with their established activities; mutable signs adapt to changing circumstances. These two classification systems—elements and qualities—are helpful when one undertakes to memorize sign traits.

The interpretation of a horoscope is built around the influence of the planets as modified by three primary factors—signs, houses, and aspects (the angular relationships between the planets). An oversimplified but nonetheless useful rule of thumb is that planetary sign positions indicate personality tendencies, aspects between planets reflect how various components of one's personality interact with one another, and house positions show how the personality manifests in the world. Aspects are angular relationships between various points in an astrological chart. The term especially refers to a series of named angles, such as trines (120°) and squares (90°).

Visually in an astrological chart, houses are the 12 “pie-pieces” that together form the basic framework of the horoscope. Sign divisions (where signs begin and end) are not represented in a conventional chart. If they were, one would have to draw in another 12 lines, making a total of 24, which

would result in a cluttered, aesthetically unappealing appearance. The numbers and symbols that appear around the outside of the wheel indicate where houses begin and end with respect to the signs of the 360° circle of the Zodiac. Starting at the nine o'clock position (which in most systems of house division corresponds with the eastern horizon) and moving counterclockwise, the houses are numbered from one to twelve. Thus, the first house begins at the nine o'clock position and ends at the eight o'clock position; the second house begins at eight o'clock and ends at seven o'clock; and so forth. The sign at the nine o'clock position on the chart is the rising sign or ascendant.

Let us illustrate sign-house-aspect relationships with a concrete example. The example we will use is an individual with natal Mars in the sign Virgo, that is also in a square (90°) aspect to Saturn and in the eleventh house. In the personality, Mars represents the outgoing, assertive, aggressive energies. This is what we might think of as the *basic* nature of Mars.

1. *Sign*: Individuals born when Mars was in Virgo need to organize to get anything done. They tend to be very patient with detailed work. (Organization and patience with detail are both Virgo traits.)
2. *Aspect*: In contrast to Mars, Saturn is the cautious, security-seeking side of the personality. Square aspects often indicate conflicts, so, in this case, Mars square Saturn shows, among other things, an individual who vacillates between assertiveness and caution, between excitement-seeking and security-seeking.
3. *House*: The eleventh house indicates things about friends, group associations, and ideals. Mars here shows people who have a lot of energy for friendships and ideals. They express their energy best in the context of group activities. In overly aggressive individuals, Mars placed here shows people whose assertiveness brings them into conflict with friends, as well as conflicts related to their ideals.

Understanding and Interpreting a Natal Chart

A birth chart (usually called a natal chart by astrologers) is a symbolic map of the heavens with respect to the Earth at the moment of birth. When one examines a chart for the first time, one tends to be overwhelmed by the mass of numbers and unfamiliar symbols. The “pie-pieces” are the astrological house, and the numbers along the outer rim of the chart indicate where the houses begin and end in the signs of the Zodiac. The symbols along the rim are symbols for the zodiacal signs. Most of the symbols inside the houses are planet symbols. The meanings of some of these (e.g., the crescent moon, which is the symbol for the Moon) are intuitively obvious. The planet symbols also have numbers and sign symbols written alongside them. These indicate the location of a planet in a sign.

The 12 signs of the Zodiac, in addition to being bands of astrological influence, also provide astrologers with a system for locating planets and other points in space. A circle contains 360°, so that, when divided into 12 equal regions for the 12 signs, each sign encompasses an arc of 30°. Hence a planet located near the beginning of Aries, for instance, might be at 1° Aries; in the middle of Aries, at 15° Aries; and near the end of the sign, 29° Aries.

The ascendant, also called the rising sign, is the sign of the Zodiac that was on the eastern horizon at the moment for which a horoscope is cast (calculated and drawn). On a chart wheel, the rising sign is the sign at the nine o'clock position. In a natal chart, the ascendant indicates a significant influence on the personality; only the Sun and Moon exert stronger influences. These three signs—the rising sign, the Sun sign, and the Moon sign—are considered together when someone with a knowledge of astrology beyond Sun signs briefly describes his or her astrological make-up, e.g.: “I’m an Aquarius with Moon in Pisces and Aries rising.” The astrologically informed listener then knows that the speaker, while primarily an Aquarius, is also sensitive and moody like a Pisces. She or he will also come across as an Aries in certain settings.

The planets represent various facets of one’s psychological makeup. Thus Mercury represents the mind, particularly that part of the mind involved in communication and day-to-day problem solving; Venus indicates how we relate to others, especially in romance; and so forth. The sign positions of the planets—particularly the signs of the inner planets—indicate how we communicate, how we relate, etc. These positions modify the basic personality indicated by the Sun sign. Thus, for example, a person born under the sign Scorpio might have been born when Mercury was in Libra and Venus was in Sagittarius. Having natal Mercury in gentle, tactful Libra would modify this individual’s communications so that they would be far less critical and sarcastic than that of a typical Scorpio, though a certain subdued tendency toward critical sarcasm would still be part of her or his makeup. Venus in idealistic Sagittarius would make this individual more romantic than a typical Scorpio, without eliminating her or his sexual intensity. As one can see from this example, the variety of influences at work in a natal chart can sometimes indicate contrary, if not actually contradictory, traits. The distinguishing mark of an experienced astrologer is her or his ability to synthesize these often competing influences into a coherent interpretation.

The “pie piece” in which a planet is found in a chart indicates its house position. Aspects are indicated in one of two ways: Traditionally, charts contained a grid that was a bit like the mileage grids one sometimes finds on maps. If two planets had an aspect between them, the aspect symbol would be drawn on the grid where one would find—to continue the map analogy—the mileage between two locations on a map. The modern tendency is to actually

draw a line directly on the chart that connects the two planets in aspect. The symbol for the aspect is then drawn on or near the line.

Going Further

If you are fascinated by astrology and want to do more than just read about the science of the stars, you do not have to commit yourself to becoming a full-time professional before exploring this field further. Astrology can be a fascinating hobby. Moreover, astrology can be a vehicle for learning more about yourself and others. Additionally, you might find yourself earning a little extra money on the side doing readings every once and a while.

Although this point should be obvious, it is important to realize that no governmental agency regulates the science of the stars. And although many of the larger astrological associations issue certifications testifying to one's astrological competence, you do not need to possess any kind of certificate to practice astrology. Consequently, if you know the basics and can tell someone else what a certain planet means in a certain house in their natal chart—even if you are doing it as a hobby and not charging money—then you can wear the title “astrologer” as legitimately as someone who has practiced astrology for 30 years and written a dozen books on the subject. It's a bit like riding a bicycle—once you know the basics, you are automatically a “cyclist” even if you've been riding a bike for less than a week.

People love to be told about themselves. If word gets around in your circle of acquaintances that you are learning astrology and can “read their horoscope,” even at a very basic level, everyone and their brother will be beating down your door for a reading. This is a good thing, because the best way to develop your skills is to do free readings for friends and relatives. This gives you a chance to see how the interpretations you find in astrology books apply—or fail to apply—in the lives of flesh-and-blood human beings. And, because you're doing it for free, you can ask questions and risk being wrong (e.g., “Your Saturn conjuncts your Mercury. Do you sometimes think about things so seriously that you get depressed?”) In this way, you learn some of the nuances of astrology while having meaningful, and usually enjoyable, interactions with other people.

You will definitely want to pick up at least a couple of astrological “cookbooks”—books that provide interpretations for the meanings of the planets by signs, houses, and aspects. These kinds of books are used when you take your first stabs at interpreting natal charts. If you browse through the appropriate section of a large metaphysical bookstore, you should be able to find several. If you are nowhere near such a store, you might contact the Astrology Center of America (<http://www.astroamerica.com>) bookstore for recommendations. Another option is your local public library, which might

contain one of the older cookbooks, such as Llewellyn George's *A to Z Horoscope Maker and Delineator* or one of Grant Lewi's books. Another good source is Max Heindel's *The Message of the Stars*, an online version of which is available at <http://www.rosicrucian.com/mos/moseng01.htm>. A particular favorite of mine when I was learning astrology in the early 1970s was Isabel Hickey's *Astrology: A Cosmic Science*.

The astrologer's craft consists of two very different kinds of skills: (1) casting charts, meaning the mathematical construction of an astrological chart; and (2) delineation, which refers to chart interpretation. Although delineation is the very core of what astrology is all about, an accurate interpretation obviously depends on initially erecting the horoscope correctly. It used to be that the math involved with constructing an astrological chart was tedious and lengthy, which meant not only that people who hated math tended to steer away from becoming astrologers, but also that, even for people willing to do the calculations, it was easy for errors to creep in—errors that skewed the meaning of the entire chart. The personal computer revolution changed all of that.

To get started in computer chart casting, you do not need a top-end astrological calculation program (such programs currently run about \$300). There are a variety of good freeware programs that can be downloaded from the Internet that accurately cast basic natal charts. At the time of this writing, Halloran Software (the maker of *Astrology for Windows*, which can be downloaded from <http://www.halloran.com>) and Cosmic Patterns (the maker of *Starlite*, which can be downloaded from <http://www.patterns.com/freeware.htm>) were both offering downloads of basic chart-casting programs for Windows. A widely available freeware program not associated with any software company is *Astrolog* (type “astrolog” into any search engine). Other programmers have adapted *Astrolog* to work with both Mac and Linux.

Astrolog offers more options, but I find it more awkward to use than the others, and the charts produced by the *Astrolog* program are unattractive. In addition to natal charts, *Starlite* will generate progressed charts; *Astrology for Windows* will do natal charts plus provide transits for your first chart (and for subsequent charts, but only after you send Halloran a modest registration fee). None of these programs contain an atlas, meaning you will need to look up the longitude and latitude of cities and towns where people were born. Doing an Internet search using the name of the birthplace along with the state or province plus the words “longitude” and “latitude” almost always provides this information. You also need to find out if daylight savings time was in effect on the individual's birth date (important, but not difficult to find, in most cases). Be aware of the common mistake of calculating A.M. births as P.M. births and vice versa. Also, do not charge forward with an approximate time of birth (“I think I was born sometime between midnight and 3:00 in the morning”) if it is

possible for your client to obtain a more precise time—a birth certificate usually includes one’s time of birth. Armed with these three programs, anyone with access to a personal computer and the Internet has the basic tools necessary to handle the mathematical component of astrology.

Nevertheless, if you work with freeware programs for a while and then decide you want a more powerful program, most of the major astrological software companies offer no-frills versions of their top-end calculation programs. Top-of-the-line programs are selling for around \$300; in contrast, entry-level programs are going for about \$100. To encourage consumers to stay with their product line, most of these companies also offer to put all or most of the price of one’s entry-level program toward the purchase of a top-end program—in the event one later decides to seek an upgrade.

As of 2002, all of the major software companies except Esoteric Technologies (the creators of Solar Fire, which is distributed outside of Australia by Astrolabe) and Time Cycles Research (the creators of Io for Macs) market no-frills programs in the \$100 range. Not including Jyotish (Vedic astrology) companies, these astrological software companies are Matrix, Cosmic Patterns, Halloran, and A.I.R. Software. I have had an opportunity to examine the entry-level programs of everyone except A.I.R. All of these programs—WinStar Express (Matrix), Pegasus (Cosmic Patterns), and AstrolDeluxe for Windows (Halloran)—are absolutely excellent. Additionally and very importantly, all three companies provide excellent support. Although Time Cycles Research does not market a low-end program, their professional program for Macs is priced in the mid-range.

It is difficult to recommend one program over another, partly because the ongoing competition between astrological software companies will outdate my remarks in a very short time. With this caveat, I will nevertheless say that the WinStar Express program is easier to use (the interface is more user-friendly) than the others, but the current version of the Pegasus program contains more features. I particularly like the fact that Pegasus has a complete atlas for birthplaces in North America and Europe—although both AstrolDeluxe for Windows and WinStar Express contain good basic atlases. Alternately, if I was seriously considering Halloran’s program, I would skip AstrolDeluxe for Windows and jump immediately to their high-end program, AstrolDeluxe ReportWriter, which sells for a good deal less than either Matrix’s or Cosmic Pattern’s corresponding high-end calculation programs, and comes bundled with a basic report program as well as with an atlas for 250,000 cities. For reviews of these and other major calculation programs, refer to Hank Friedman’s software review appendix.

To return to the distinction between chart casting and delineation, one of the more problematic aspects of the application of computer methods to

astrology has been the emergence of report programs that provide delineations of horoscopes. The building blocks of chart interpretation are the meanings of each particular sign position, house position, and aspect. Computer programs are perfectly capable of storing such information and generating a list of interpretations for the various components, tailored to the positions of any given person's chart. No professional astrologer, however, would simply list interpretations of each component of a horoscope. In fact, the very mark of an experienced astrologer is the ability to meaningfully synthesize such information into a coherent whole. This is especially important when two or more elements of a horoscope give contrary indications.

For example, a Capricorn moon in a natal chart usually indicates someone who is not emotionally sensitive to others. If, however, this same individual's natal moon is also in the first house, conjunct both the ascendant and Neptune, she or he will be extremely sensitive—probably overly sensitive—to other people. Experienced astrologers would immediately recognize this and avoid the mistake of telling this particular client that she or he was emotionally insensitive.

Report programs, no matter how sophisticated, cannot do much more than list the meanings of each element of a horoscope. No existing program would avoid, for instance, the error of informing Capricorn moon natives about their insensitivity. Thus, while computer readings may have a certain place as a preliminary step in astrological science, they will have to become far more sophisticated before they begin to approximate the skill of an experienced astrologer.

On the other side of the coin, report programs have developed to the point where good programs can generate better readings than those provided by inept astrologers. Based on personal experience, I would even go so far as to say that some computer reports can be more useful and more insightful than readings from even well-known, highly experienced astrologers. A lot depends on a chart's complexity and on the quality of the report program. Someone with a natal chart containing a large number of strong aspects that pull the person in opposite directions is much less likely to get satisfactory results from a computer interpretation than someone with a more straightforward chart. Also, sophisticated, well-written report programs like Cosmic Patterns' short "Major Life Themes" (which is an integral part of both their high-end Kepler and their entry-level Pegasus calculation programs) or Matrix's "The Sky Within" and "Woman to Woman" (which are freestanding programs) are going to be far more insightful than certain other report programs.

I have been less impressed by predictive programs (progressions, transits, returns, etc.), though even the best astrologer can only rarely do more than predict general trends. On the other hand, I have been thoroughly

impressed by the insightfulness of compatibility (synastry) reports, which I have found to offer surprisingly accurate insights into the dynamics of relationships between two people. Again, well-written programs like Cosmic Patterns' "Compatibility Report" and Matrix's "Friends & Lovers" will give you a lot more than certain other synastry reports. And there are yet other kinds of programs, such as reports on career possibilities and delineations of children's charts, that I have not worked with enough to comment on.

Report programs offer novice astrologers a number of possibilities. On the one hand, even someone with a minimum understanding of astrology can sell computer-generated reports. On the other hand, the beginning astrologer who owns an array of different report programs can generate one or more reports about a client to study beforehand as a way of preparing for a face-to-face reading. Many professional astrologers—particularly astrologers who are critical of all report programs to begin with—will be upset by this latter bit of advice, but it is nevertheless extremely useful for the novice.

Most of the major astrological software manufacturers offer a wide variety of report programs. This may change, but at present A.I.R. Software offers the fewest report programs. At the opposite end of the spectrum, Cosmic Patterns offers the most. Many high-end calculation programs (e.g., Solar Fire, Kepler, Janus, and AstrolDeluxe ReportWriter) include report modules as an integral part of their program. Additional add-on or freestanding report programs can range from \$100 to \$300. Matrix takes the approach of selling "hobbyist" versions (meaning that one is not licensed to sell reports) of most of their delineation software for significantly less than their professional versions. If you are not focused on making money from astrology, but just want to share astrology with friends and relatives, hobbyist report programs are a great way to go. There are also a couple of "talking" programs (e.g., one is an integral part of Kepler, and another is a free-standing program, Astro*Talk Audio, from Matrix) which, although less useful for professional astrologers, are fun for small parties and other kinds of informal gatherings.

After you have been dabbling in astrology for awhile, and particularly if the little bit of money you have been making on the side doing readings has been expanding, you may wish to consider turning your astrology hobby into a full-time job. I do not intend to go into the details of running an astrology practice here. There have been a number of good books written on this subject that you can look at, such as the Organization for Professional Astrology's *How to Start, Maintain, and Expand an Astrological Practice*, Wendy Hawks's *Nuts & Bolts of Running an Astrology Practice*, and Donna Cunningham's *The Consulting Astrologer's Guidebook* (a manual on how to give professional readings). At the time of this writing, all of these were available through Halloran.

—James R. Lewis