

A Brief Summary of my Conceptual Model for Understanding Standard Astrological Theory (SAT)

Christopher Benton, PhD

Many might define astrology as a study of celestial cycles and the terrestrial events that repeat themselves as these cycles repeat. Furthermore, every cycle can be represented geometrically by a circle, and in mathematics there is a natural equivalence between all circles, and I believe that this provides a theoretical framework for understanding techniques such as secondary progressions and solar arc directions. In each system, the natural equivalence between the cycle of a day and that of the year is exploited to establish a resonance between, for example, the position of the Sun after 70 days and how that might affect one after 70 years. When a day and a year are both thought of in terms of cycles represented by circles, then there is a level at which the time difference can be ignored, and a quarter of a way through one cycle, for instance, can correspond to a quarter of a way through another cycle. This is what I believe both explains and justifies all *day-for-a-year* techniques of progression.

There are many ways in which one could divide a circle into equal parts, but the most popular subdivision is clearly into 12 parts of 30° each. Other types of subdivisions form a basis for harmonic astrology, and the root or base harmonic angle sets the tone for all multiples of that angle. For example, the root angle for the 4th harmonic is $\frac{360^\circ}{4} = 90^\circ$, and the 90° angle sets a tone of *discord* for the series of 4th harmonic angles. Similarly, the root angle for the 3rd harmonic is $\frac{360^\circ}{3} = 120^\circ$, and this root angle sets a tone of *harmony* for the series of 3rd harmonic angles. I suspect that most astrologers would identify the 90° angle as the most discordant and the 120° angle as the most harmonious, and the series of 12th harmonic angles is the first that one encounters that incorporates both the square and the trine. Furthermore, the root 12th harmonic angle is $\frac{360^\circ}{12} = 30^\circ$, and I believe a good key word for this series is *relationship*. Hence, I would argue that the 12th harmonic angles describe our relationships with people and other things within our world. Sometimes those relationships are easy (120°), sometimes they are tense (90°), and sometimes they are either just beginning or culminating. Either way, I suspect that this is one reason why ancient astrologers adopted a 12-fold division of the circle of the zodiac. They observed that such a division was sufficient to describe a wide gamut of human experience.

Many people naturally associate the division of the zodiac into 12 astrological signs with 12 constellations, but one could argue that even in the sidereal zodiac of Vedic astrology that there was never a perfect correspondence between signs and constellations. For instance, each astrological sign comprises 30° of arc, but the constellations that these signs are named after are not distributed in such a manner. Some signs occupy far less than 30° of arc in the sky while others occupy much more space than the smaller constellations. Furthermore, in Vedic astrology it is common, for some techniques, to subdivide an astrological sign into 12 parts with each subdivision corresponding by name to one of the astrological signs. Hence, if each sign were literally a constellation, then this would make absolutely no sense at all. This only makes sense if we understand signs as parts of a cycle rather than constellations, and with this perspective we can subdivide each 30° cycle into 12 parts just as readily as we divide the 360° circle of the zodiac into 12 parts. Furthermore, because Vedic astrology uses a sidereal zodiac that is adjusted for the *precession of the equinoxes*, the slow rotation of the constellations, the fact that astrological signs are not constellations may not be immediately apparent to some who use this system. However, since most Western astrologers

use a tropical zodiac where the sign Aries always begins with the spring equinox, the realization that the signs represent 12 phases in a cycle instead of constellations may come more readily.

Clearly, a 12-fold division of a cycle has implications for not only the traditional astrological signs, but also the 12 houses and the 12 aspects associated with the 12th harmonic (conjunction, opposition, and the waxing and waning semisextiles, sextiles, squares, trines, and quincunxes). One of the first astrologers that I'm aware of to try to arrive at a deeper understanding of the division of a cycle into 12 parts was Dane Rudhyar, and he described these 12 parts or phases through the keywords (1) being, (2) focusing, (3) organizing, (4) deciding, (5) expressing, (6) improving, (7) realizing, (8) sharing, (9) understanding, (10) revaluing, (11) reorganizing, and (12) releasing. Later, astrologer Michael Erlewine came up with his own taxonomy and described these phases as (1) impulse, (2) planning, (3) embrace, (4) start, (5) embody, (6) extend, (7) experience, (8) know, (9) conserve, (10) detach, (11) trim, and (12) capsule. Similarly, I, too, have my own particular way of looking at this 12-fold division that I call the *cycle of becoming*, and I use the cycle of a relationship between two people as a metaphor for each stage of this division as I describe them below. Likewise, one could also think of this in terms of the lunation cycle and a romance between the Sun and the Moon.

1. 0° or conjunction of the Sun and the Moon. You begin with just a vision. A desire for relationship, but at this point it is only a seed planted for a future blossoming.
2. 30° or waxing semisextile of the Sun and the Moon. You meet someone. A prospect for a relationship. At this point, though, they are different from you, and slight adjustments on both sides will have to be made if a relationship is to blossom.
3. 60° or waxing sextile of the Sun and the Moon. A first date! Both sides wish for a harmonious night to see if this relationship is one that can be taken further.
4. 90° or waxing square of the Sun and the Moon. Second thoughts. Is this the relationship I really want? Or do I want to go in another direction?
5. 120° or waxing trine of the Sun and the Moon. The relationship deepens! At this point a decision has been made to get closer, and more levels of harmony are experienced as a result.
6. 150° or waxing quincunx of the Sun and the Moon. More adjustments are now pending so that the relationship can proceed to even deeper levels.
7. 180° or opposition of the Sun and the Moon. Illumination! At this point the two partners in the relationship have gone from separate individuality to a "we." The two now have a simultaneous existence as both "two" and "one." The goal at this point is a complete integration of opposites.
8. 210° or waning quincunx of the Sun and the Moon. This is also a waxing semisextile for the "us" as measured from the opposition. Thus, now that the two have become one, more adjustments are often necessary.
9. 240° or waning trine of the Sun and the Moon. This is also a waxing sextile for the "us" as measured from the opposition. The joined couple now experience a grace period that is filled with harmony.

10. 270° or waning square of the Sun and the Moon. This is also a waxing square for the “us” as measured from the opposition. A mid-life crisis. After having gone through courtship and marriage and several years together, again is this what I really want? Is this all there is? There is now an opportunity to separate and pursue something else.
11. 300° or waning sextile of the Sun and the Moon. This is also a waxing trine for the “us” as measured from the opposition. Having survived the mid-life crisis, the relationship arrives at even deeper levels of harmony and oneness.
12. 330° or waning semisextile of the Sun and the Moon. This is also a waxing quincunx for the “us” as measured from the opposition. The relationship has gone from its first date (sextile) to its most intense illumination (opposition), and it is now nearing the end of its cycle. And just as beginnings require adjustments, so do natural endings.

Following the waning semisextile is the final conjunction at 360°, and just as the original conjunction began with a vision, the final conjunction brings everything into absolute oneness and a time for new visions to begin. This journey from vision to absolute oneness is what I call the *cycle of becoming*.

The *cycle of becoming* defines not only the 12th harmonic aspects, but also the twelve signs and the twelve houses. The twelve signs represent twelve modes of expression with each related to their position within the *cycle of becoming*, and the twelve houses represent twelve areas of activity related to the same. There are obvious connections between the signs and the houses among which is the symmetry between cardinal, fixed, and mutable signs and the angular, succedent, and cadent houses. At the end of this appendix is a table showing rather traditional meanings of the houses from three different sources, both Western and Vedic, but I like to look at houses from a deeper perspective that goes beyond mere keywords.

When we are born, our brains are barraged with a multitude of perceptions, and I believe that to help us make sense of these perceptions, we establish four primary reference points. These reference points correspond to the angular houses. The first reference point usually established is ourselves, and this reference point corresponds to the 1st house. Many astrologers might say that the 1st house corresponds to how others see us, but I would say that it first corresponds to how we see ourselves and this perception then extends to become how we are also perceived by others. We next become aware that there are things surrounding us that are different from us, and this leads to an awareness within us of our next point of reference, a personal environment, the 4th house. Additionally, as we explore our environment, our brains set up a hierarchy of things that are most important to notice versus those that are less important. The proof of such a hierarchy is felt every time we walk into a grocery store that we’ve never visited before, and we are momentarily befuddled because we don’t know where things are or what to pay attention to. The next reference point we establish is the existence of “others,” and that corresponds to the 7th house. Hence, after we become aware of our own existence, we eventually also become aware that others exist, too, and this leads to another level of existence which now includes these others. And the fourth and final reference point that we establish is our social environment, and just as we needed to establish a hierarchy of things to pay attention to in our personal environment, we have to do the same within our social environment, and that leads to the traditional association of the 10th house with honors and status within society. And that completes our four reference points – ourselves, our personal environment, others, and our social environment, and these reference points correspond to the 1st, 4th, 7th, and 10th houses.

The next four houses (2, 5, 8, and 11) perform the functions necessary for maintaining the primary reference points. The 2nd house maintains the 1st, oneself, and to do this it generally needs resources. Thus, the 2nd house has an association with money and whatever other things are needed to maintain one’s life. The 5th

house is traditionally associated with pleasure and recreation, personal creativity, and a good question is how does this maintain the personal environment? The answer becomes clear when we realize that our perception of our environment along with the hierarchy of things to notice is primarily a mental construct, and when we are overstressed, this construct can break down. Hence, recreation helps us re-create our personal space. The 8th house is traditionally associated with both death and the resources needed for the relationship with another that is signified by the 7th house. It is easy to see how money and other resources for the relationship can help maintain the relationship, but how does death maintain the relationship? The answer is that the real death that must occur is the death of the ego. In other words, for the relationship to thrive, the sense of "I" must die and be transformed into "we," and I believe this necessary transformation is the deeper meaning of the association of the 8th house with death. And this brings us now to the 11th house which is traditionally associated with friends, hopes, and wishes. At this point it might be worthwhile to note that each of the final six houses is a social counterpart to the first six. Thus, if the 5th house represents personal recreation and creativity, then the 11th house should represent social recreation and group creativity, and this is what maintains the social environment. Through our friendly interactions and collaborations with colleagues and groups of friends, we maintain and reinforce the social hierarchy and our group perception of what the social environment should be.

The final four houses, the cadent houses, are feedback houses that let us know how well the maintenance of each of the primary reference points is progressing, and they analyze information and nudge us to make adjustments as needed. Hence, in its role as an analyst, the 3rd house is associated with mental activities and communication. The 6th house is traditionally associated with health and occupation, and it is a feedback house not only for the maintenance of the 4th but for all the other houses that precede it. And if we are out of balance in some way with ourselves and our environment, then the result is often illness and a need to do work on the physical level to correct things. The 6th house isn't always so overtly associated with mental activities in the way that the 3rd house is, but Virgo, the sign that is naturally associated with the 6th house, is associated with mental activities as well as service and healing. However, a difference between the 3rd sign Gemini and the 6th sign Virgo is that Gemini is thought to be related more to abstract thought and intelligence while Virgo is more often associated with practical, real-world intelligence. This suggests that the 3rd house only needs to make adjustments at the mental or abstract level while the 6th house requires adjustments to things that have worked their way down to the physical level. The next cadent house is the 9th (the 3rd house for relationships), and as the social counterpart to the 3rd, the 9th house represents the social or group mind, and this usually manifests itself in terms of activities such as religion, philosophy, and higher education. And since long distance traveling expands one's horizons, this traditional association with the 9th house is easily understandable. The final cadent house, the 12th house, is not only a feedback house for the 10th, it is also a feedback house for all of those that have come before it and it represents the end of a 12-part cycle. And as is the case with the 6th house, the feedback seen in the 12th house can manifest on a physical level, and this accounts for traditional 12th house associations with chronic illness, self-undoing, and hidden enemies. But since it is also the end of our cycle of twelve, it additionally represents a completion, an assimilation, and a withdrawal from all that came before. Hence, a strong 12th house influence can also lead one to isolation and withdrawal from the world of activity. And that's how I view the essence of each of the twelve houses!

As others before me have concluded, each of the planets used in astrology represents a different psychological drive within us. The Sun represents the drive to establish a sense of individual self, a personal ego. The Moon represents a drive to establish a persona, a mask for interacting with the world outside of us, and since our physical body is literally our interface with the external reality, the Moon is also associated with health and various body problems. Mercury is the drive to provide a verbal analysis of things, and as such it is associated with the left brain. Venus, on the other hand, corresponds exactly to what Freud called

the pleasure principle, the drive to reduce tension, and as such, it is also associated with things that give us pleasure. However, we often tend to associate things that give us pleasure with those things that we consider to be good and that we wind up valuing, and the activity of this drive, thus, naturally leads to a non-verbal map of what we consider good versus what we don't consider good, what we value and what we don't value, and this non-verbal mapping of our reality is what many might understand as the activity of the right brain. Also, whereas Freud correctly identified the existence of a pleasure principle, he missed that we also have within us an activity principle that urges us to increase tension and physical activity. The existence of such a principle is, in my opinion, obvious because if such a drive did not exist, then we would never get out of bed in the morning! And in astrology this drive to increase muscular tension and activity is represented by the planet Mars. The next planet is Jupiter, and it represents our drive to grow and to keep learning and expanding our horizons. Unfortunately, this drive often appears to have atrophied in many older adults who at some point in their lives quit learning and growing. And this brings us next to Saturn which represents our drive to control, discipline, and regulate ourselves, and as usual the proof of the existence of such a drive is in the pudding. In other words, if such a drive did not exist, then we would never try to control ourselves in order to learn to walk or to master other motor or mental skills. Again, as I say, the proof is in the pudding. Next, in between Saturn and Uranus, is a small planetoid named Chiron that was discovered in 1977 by astronomer Charles Kowal. Chiron sometimes lies within the orbit of Saturn and sometimes beyond the orbit of Uranus, and this symbolizes its role as a bridge between these two planets and between what can be seen with the naked eye and what can't. I don't consider Chiron to currently be part of SAT, but as a result of my personal experience with it and my historical research on its transits, I include it in my own practice of astrology. To me the main impetus of Chiron is to nudge us toward transcendence, but to do so it must often first break the hard shell that Saturn has erected, and, hence, many people experience Chiron first as a wounding that must then be followed by healing before it can express itself as transcendence. As I often say, you can't make a cosmic omelet without first cracking a few cosmic eggs! Nonetheless, while the activity of Chiron often results in wounding, I also keep in mind that its ultimate goal is to help us to transcend and go beyond our current reality, and, thus, Chiron can bring some wonderful things into our lives. Once we start to transcend, we can then undertake a process of more radical change represented by the planets Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. Uranus is a drive that begins this process of radical change by first completely breaking up the existing pattern. To do this, however, it must put the brain into hyperdrive, and this can result in either genius or a manic state of consciousness that produces nothing beneficial. Thus it is that Uranus has a reputation for ruling both genius and eccentricity. Once the old pattern is disrupted, then the next step is to dissolve the edges and boundaries that define that pattern, and that is what the drive symbolized by Neptune does. Hence, Neptune is associated with anything that lacks clearly defined boundaries, and this involves liquids, mystical states of consciousness, delusional states, and many alcohol and drug induced states regardless of whether they are harmful or beneficial. Neptune might also be associated with a kind of forgetfulness that can be part of a healing process, and it is this type of forgetfulness that can enable us to move beyond past traumas and live in a way in which those traumas no longer dictate our response to life. And lastly, we come to Pluto which is traditionally thought of as the planet of death and transformation, and it is through this planetary drive that we can experience a complete renewal and be reborn as something entirely different from what we began as. However, true transformation requires intense power, and the power of Pluto, as with many things, can manifest in either positive or negative ways. At its most positive, Pluto brings to us a type of resurrection through which we are psychologically purified and transformed, but at its worst, a person might manifest this drive in ways that take one to the very depths of darkness and cruelty to both oneself and others. Drama indeed! However, as with everything in astrology, the choice is ours. As expressed by a more literal translation of the Hebrew in Genesis 4:7, "*Missing the mark lies at the threshold, but you can rule over it!*"

Again, the twelve traditional signs of the zodiac represent different modes of expression with each sign having a characterization as cardinal, fixed, or mutable and as either fire, earth, air, or water. Cardinal signs have modes of expression that facilitate the initiation of actions, fixed signs seek to preserve the status quo, and mutable signs facilitate analysis and making adjustments. Additionally, fire and water signs tend to be feeling-oriented signs while earth and air signs are more thinking-oriented, and fire and air tend to be more extraverted while earth and water are more introverted, at least in my understanding and experience of astrology. Hence, each sign can be characterized as either thinking-introverted (earth), thinking-extroverted (air), feeling-introverted (water), or feeling-extroverted (fire). Furthermore, these days I tend to experience each planet, aspect, sign, and house as a specific note, and all the notes within one's horoscope come together to form a specific chord, and likewise, every person we know is also sounding their own chord, and some of those chords we harmonize with and some we don't. Additionally, every transit brings a new note into my symphony, and by listening internally to that note, I better understand what that transit can teach me, and I wonder if this is also how the first astrologers might have divined this art. The bottom line, though, is that all of the above is just a brief synopsis of how I understand and practice astrology in my own life, and this is the part of my practice that is uniquely personal and highly subjective. The other part that is much more objective involves the use of statistical and other tools to both verify and clarify how astrology works in the world around us, and I also develop mathematical and explanatory models such as the one presented here to guide me, and these models, in turn, generate more predictions and hypotheses to test.