

*astrological-cultural-spiritual-political
views & commentary...*

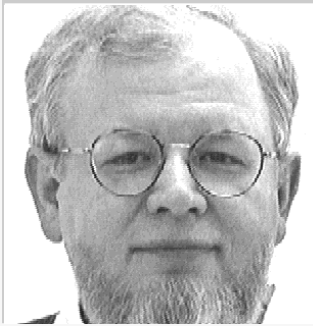
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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



Thoughts, dates, & reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness...

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Dear friends,

This month's newsletter takes on a hot topic in current events, examining the underlying realities through the lens of astrology.

THE DUALITY OF LOVE

The culture wars between religious traditionalism and secular humanism have broken out on yet another front—the issue of gay unions—amplifying what was previously a skirmish line into a full-fledged battle. Aggressive activism by the Massachusetts Supreme Court in ordering the state legislature to enact laws allowing gays to legally marry has led to the civil disobedience of the San Francisco Mayor's office in issuing marriage permits for gays in direct opposition to California law. Predictably, these actions have provoked a reaction in President Bush's endorsement of a proposed Constitutional amendment to restrict the institution of marriage in America to men with women only.

These developments are not especially surprising, given that Pluto's passage through Sagittarius (1995-2008) represents the death of social agreement through the eruption of extreme ideas and polarized beliefs. Just about every issue that might divide us will emerge during this 14-year period, and we still have four more conflict-laden years to go before Pluto moves into Capricorn (which will signal the onset of a new death phase affecting institutions, governments, and monetary economies).

I hold no illusions about being able to change anyone's opinions or beliefs about homosexuality in general or gay marriage in particular. Whichever camp one occupies is likely to be entrenched, so we either speak to those who already agree with us (in essence, preaching to the choir...) or we antagonize those who disagree (which amounts to pissing in the wind...).

Rather than trying to change minds and win converts, however, I'll offer another perspective on love, sex, and intimacy in human experience. In so doing, I hope to provide food for thought.

History and Change

Way back when (and I mean way, way back), Mother Nature selected for our species a bipolar method of reproduction. The change of a single chromosome, from X to Y, biologically differentiates the members of homo sapiens—all of whom begin life as feminine—into half men and half women. In the language of evolution and the earthly environments of the last two million years, this method of sexual reproduction through the coupling of individual men with individual women worked to ensure survival of our species. Unlike human beings, however, Mother Nature is unconcerned with tradition. She cares only about what works. With the advent of science and genetic technologies, however, the day is fast approaching when reproduction can and will be achieved without heterosexual unions.

On moral, ethical, social, pragmatic, and even spiritual levels, we are now debating the relative merits of genetic engineering as a way to make new human beings. In general, traditionalists argue that this method of reproduction is a violation of natural law and therefore spiritually immoral. Secularists respond with the argument that evolutionary change IS the natural order of things, and that clinging to outmoded methods of life is simply an exercise in futility.

Regardless of the debaters' sincerity, however the way ahead is clear: Unless we are willing to roll back 300 years of scientific revolution, nothing will stop this next phase of human reproduction. And yet, we need not throw out the baby with the bathwater (sorry, that's a particularly ripe metaphor). While we cannot say for sure that a given reality is "eternal," some principles are indeed more enduring than others. Heterosexuality is not headed for the trash heap of human experience, but its meanings need to change in human consciousness to keep pace with our earthly and spiritual evolution.

Masculine and Feminine

Astrology holds that each human being is a two-sided creature. One side is masculine, the other feminine. The masculine side is represented symbolically and in our charts by the planet Mars. The feminine side correlates in the same way to the planet Venus.

These essential correspondences were enlarged in popular culture some years ago, at least superficially, with the publication of John Gray's best-selling book and accompanying workshops, entitled "Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus." Significantly, however, Mr. Gray is NOT an astrologer. That is obvious from the book's title itself. From an astrological standpoint, the title should read "Masculinity is from Mars, Femininity is from Venus." Changing two words may seem to the casual eye an inconsequential distinction, but the subtle differences are actually quite profound, and crucial to our evolving understanding of our ourselves as human beings.

Biology is not destiny. It's important, of course, but biology is not the dominant element in our identities as human beings. The fact that we are biologically one sex does not cancel out the other in us. Cultural and psychological factors may cause us to identify much more strongly with our biological type, either male or female, but the other remains part of our psyche. Any pulling away from balance leaves one side illuminated (the front) and the other cloaked in darkness (the back).

A critical aspect of spiritual growth on the long path toward maturity is our willingness to explore the inner shadow, those parts of ourselves that are normally kept hidden from others or even from ourselves, so that we reintegrate into our awareness the previously unconscious and dispossessed elements of self. For some of us, this road is so natural as to be inevitable; for others, it is difficult and even dangerous, since erasing the line between light and shadow in oneself can cause at least temporary chaos and confusion.

This is one reason why fundamentalist religions often forbid such inward explorations. Faith based on hard-and-fast rules, trust in authority, and adherence to the norm attracts devotees who are spiritually much "younger" and more insecure, satisfying their psychological need for the artificial clarity of absolute certainty. On the other side of this social divide are those who feel a greater tolerance for ambiguity and

paradox. Many of the political, cultural, and spiritual conflicts in our country have their roots in this basic difference in temperament. About half of us in America need to see the world in black-and-white terms. By contrast, the other half interprets reality as infinite shades of gray. Where does astrology stand relative to these conflicting points of view?

The Astrological View of Intimacy

Since astrology teaches that each of us has a masculine side AND a feminine side, the extension of that duality leads to an insight that is initially provocative—namely, that all intimate relationships are inherently heterosexual. Let me write that again with emphasis:

ALL intimate relationships are INHERENTLY heterosexual.

That sounds almost like fundamentalist religion, right? Ah, but here's the rub: The actual workings of this universal heterosexuality have less to do with biological types than with the chemistry of our dual nature. In other words, the masculine in each of us always seeks out the feminine in others, and vice versa—the feminine in each of us is always responsive to the masculine in others.

When any two people feel stirred toward intimacy in relationship, it's as if FOUR different people were present. And though the image may seem comic at first, the best metaphor for that connection is a DOUBLE DATE. When you and I come together, two separate couples exist—a pair of masculine-feminine beloveds. Your masculine side with my feminine side, and your female side with my male side.

What's difficult for some people to accept is that this two-way masculine-feminine double-date pairing occurs regardless of the biological types involved. The chemical structure of attraction is the same for a man and a woman together, two men together, or two women together. Our biological types do not alter the chemical equations of intimacy.

Revealing the secrets of passion and romance is endlessly compelling, and astrology offers more in this regard than most other languages. What first drew me to technical astrology 34 years ago was its ability not only to describe the specific and usually different characters of the man and woman in each of us (through the placements of Mars and Venus in natal charts by sign, house, and aspects), but also to predict accurately how these dual sides would connect to the masculine and feminine sides of others.

The permutations are fascinating. Let's say that you and I embark upon an intimate relationship, with our "double date" of two couples. Your male may be chemically enthralled by my femme in ways that are hot and passionate, while my male and your femme may be gentler and more romantic together. One couple in us may be more emotional, the other more pragmatic, or one couple could be dominant and visible, while the other is shy and retiring. We could even have a chemistry where one of our paired sides is profoundly connected, while the other pair are essentially strangers to each other, unresponsive or indifferent.

In my work with clients, I've devised a system of 28 categories of Mars-Venus/Venus-Mars connections between any two people. These categories are ranked for "compatibility," though I have misgivings about using that buzzword. No system in astrology is failsafe for predicting intimate potential, but this one does suggest that a blend of connections works best: heat and conflict (eros) on one side, with flow and harmony (agape) characterizing the other.

Balance is important. If too much heat exists in the dual coupling between two individuals, the relationship tends to burn itself out in discord and passion, like an itch that won't go away no matter how much it's scratched, so that the individuals eventually rub each other raw, turning attraction to repulsion. When too much easy harmony is present in the shared chemistry, the relationship leans away from deep intimacy toward the cooler sharing of social friendship. And when the Mars-Venus pairs are not chemically connected at all, people may still create love affairs, but they tend to discover over time that whatever drew them together was superficial or otherwise not enduring, so that each person looks back later on the courtship and wonders how he or she could ever have been drawn to the other.

The interactions of Mars and Venus in our charts represent only one combination among many others in our charts. In fact, seemingly endless factors influence human attraction, the total of which goes far beyond astrology. After thousands of years, we have not yet plumbed the depths of intimacy, which remains fascinating and ultimately mysterious. Human coupling cannot be reduced to a formula, and no amount of restrictive social legislation will prevent people from coming together.

Sex and romance are often disturbed in human affairs, but their compelling power is unquestioned. Laws will not stop people from following their hearts.



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