

The Great Conjunction on the Winter Solstice 2020

Prelude

Holistic thinking can find the whole expressed in each of the parts, as well as the parts in the whole. For example, we can extend our experienced four-fold human constitution to the level of the Whole Earth, . Since my talk shall be of world-wide perspectives I wanted to speak first of the Earth Spirit, the I of our planet , whose impression on the outer world can be called the Meaning of the Earth. What is our experience of the meaning of our lives on earth, in the universe, and how does meaning arise in and through us?

I made a pilgrimage in 2012 and set off westwards on foot from Gloucester. After a day or two of terrific rain I got a ride in a car, dried myself at an Inn , explored the town, and met some other travellers. Then a question hit me : am I a pilgrim? , or am I a tourist? Or am I on a walking holiday? You might imagine this was a very small question, but on a pilgrimage everything, becomes magnified in significance. The answer came quickly when I realised it was entirely of my own making: the meaning of my walk rested on my own thinking, my own questions, my own attitude: it came from within me.

I have spent a lot of time in 2020 with my granddaughter who will be three years old just after Christmas. While accompanying her learning to walk, to speak and to think, I saw this whole process as a growth of “meaning”. All of her daily experiences are intensely meaningful to her . Through learning to talk, she learned to express her understanding , and to communicate the meaning of things. The growth of meaning has seemed an integral part of her growing into her own being.

The ideas I shall sketch about the context of this special astronomical moment are only a stimulus for you to find your own meaning in these events, on your path.

I have researched in connection with this year’s conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter the following features:

- The winter solstice
- The synodic rhythms of Saturn and Jupiter
- The triplicity cycles in history .
- The triplicities and the Elements and Ethers
- The constellation background: Capricorn
- The background sign: Aquarius

The Winter Solstice at the beginning of the Egyptian Age

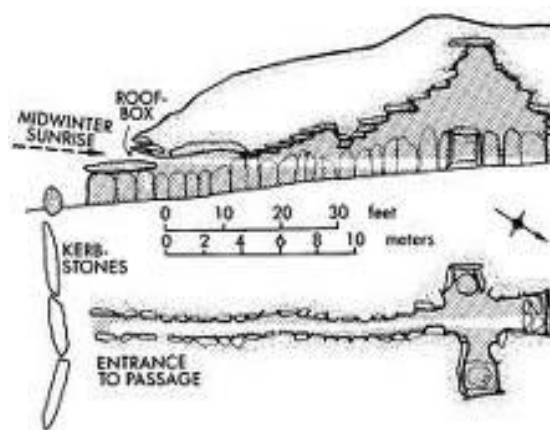
The winter solstice has been of cultural significance for thousands of years, and recent discoveries in Europe have further extended our understanding of this festival in former times.



The Megalithic Chambered Temple in Ireland (<https://www.newgrange.com/>) was reconstructed by archaeologists in 1980 AD . What had been classified as an Ancient Tomb was recognised as a Temple or Mystery Centre again. The restored window above the threshold stone let in the light from the midwinter sunrise, for the first time in five millennia .



Groups of people have been experiencing the illumination in the central chamber over the winter period since about 1985. I was there in 1988.



Cross section and plan view of the passageway into the tumulus

Celtic Sun Crosses of the Eighth or Ninth Century, also found today in Ireland, are a metamorphosis of the chambers in the ancient tumuli as at New Grange. Instead of a hollow cruciform space parallel to the Earth's surface, now there is substantial form raised into the vertical.



Two sun crosses from the ninth century in Ireland photographed by Andreas F Borchert

Graiguenamanach, County Kilkenny, Ireland East side of the High Crosses at Duiske Abbey

Newgrange was built around 3180 BC, in the last one-seventh of the Persian Epoch if we measure according to the 2160 year epochs. We can position that as at the first dawning of the Egyptian Epoch (2907 BC), about 500 years before the Great Pyramids were built.



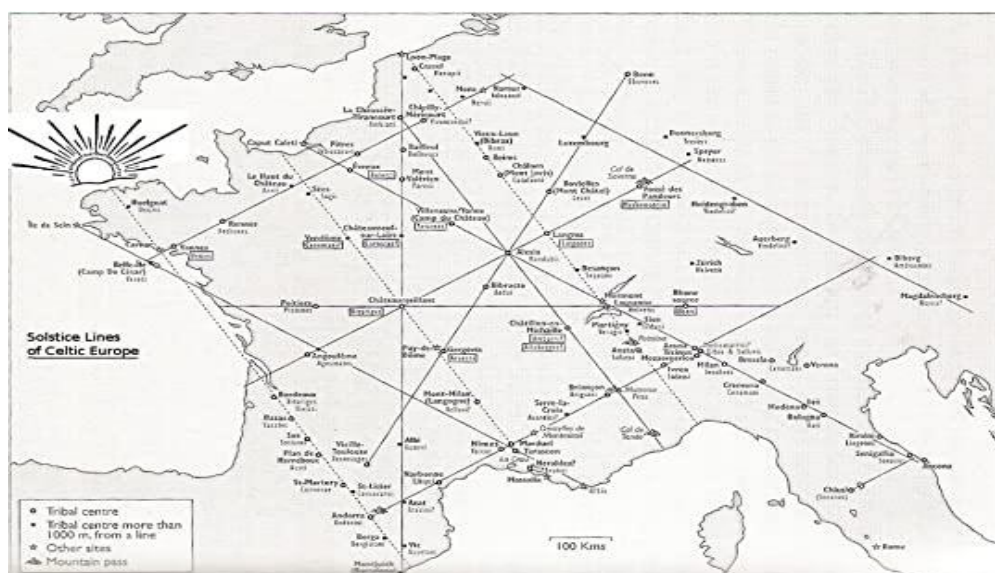
The reconstructed Newgrange Tumulus

We can relate these far distant times also to our more recent history because we are at a similar position today in relation to the previous cultural epoch: 600 years into the Age of Science and Technology and able to look back to the last seventh of the Greek-Roman Age (1107 to 1413 AD) during which the great Cathedrals of Europe were constructed .

Two facts are noteworthy here. Firstly the Great Conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter in the year 1107 was very close in the zodiac to the one we are experiencing now, for the first time in over 900 years, just over the border between Sagittarius and Capricorn. Secondly in the next decade we shall be completing the second seventh of our age in 2030. ¹ So there is a coming together of a great conjunction rhythm and the seven-fold division of cultural ages. This makes the present decade an interesting time.

There was an ancient Chinese curse: “May you live in interesting times!” So perhaps instead of thinking it is special we should just get used to the New Normal.

The Winter Solstice in the Celtic Civilisation



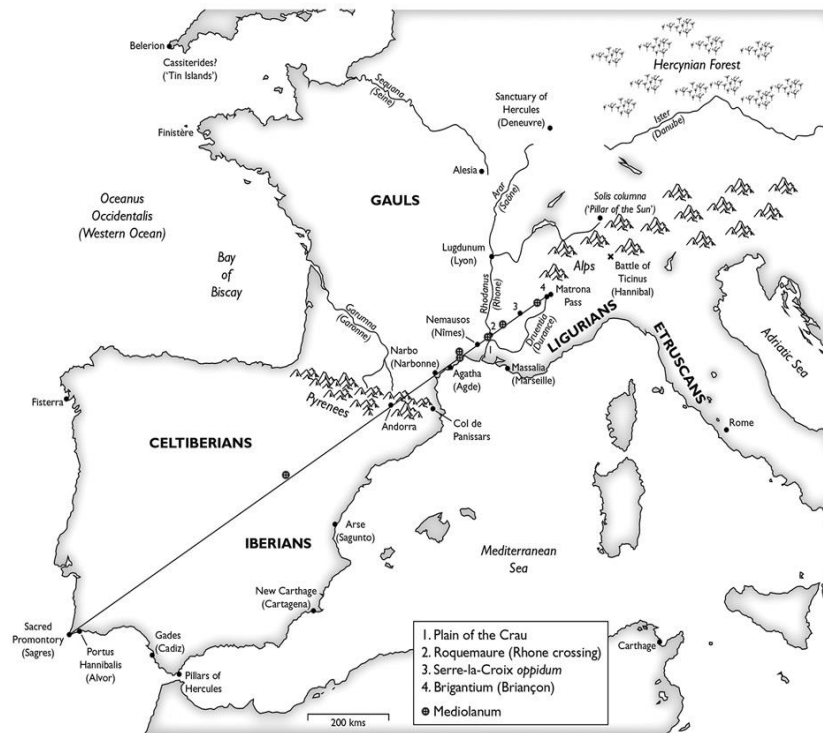
A Reconstruction of the Ancient Solstice Paths of the Celtic People in France circa 300 BC²

Only recently has the full extent of the Celtic network of long distant footpaths been uncovered through the work of Dr Graham Robb first in France and Spain and then in Britain and Ireland.² Many of the key routes for the movement and communication of the Celtic people were aligned to the Solstice or Equinox sun rising or setting positions. One of these, the A417 from Cirencester to Swindon, is near where I live. It is aligned for much of its route to the midwinter sunrise. It was first built over by the Romans and then in the age of the motor car a road was built alongside and parallel to it. Professor Robb has uncovered the alignments of the earlier and far more extensive Celtic path which the Romans took full advantage of when it suited them. Extrapolated beyond where the Roman road turns to the city of Gloucester it leads eventually to a sacred Celtic site in North Wales.



A map of Roman Britain. Most of the road from Calleva to Corinium was built over the Celtic Mid-winter solstice alignment, which can still be traced today on its much longer path across England and into Wales.

The Celtic paths were often very unstrategic from a military standpoint, and the Romans were puzzled by the disadvantages that the Celtic warriors put themselves under by fighting their battles always on the paths so carefully aligned across their lands. The very rapid extermination of the Celtic people by the Romans in France is one of the reasons why the full interconnectedness of the sun path network was not discovered until this century.



A summer solstice route has been traced from a sacred promontory in Southern Portugal and the Celtic legend is that the Sun Hero or the Greek Hercules made his way into Europe along this route. Was he aiming for the Goetheanum, but 2500 years early?

For the Celts, dying on their solstice lines ensured that their journey to the Sun Sphere and subsequent reincarnation would be made easy.



One of the best preserved Celtic monuments from around 2000 years ago has also only recently been excavated at Bibracte in the Morvan Forest area of France. It is a pink granite monumental fountain with a transversal orientation corresponding to the rising sun during the Winter Solstice and to the setting sun during the Summer Solstice. At precisely this geographical latitude, the angle to the Solstices can be calculated within one degree of accuracy with an elegant use of the Pythagorean 3-4-5 triangle. Graham Robb comments: *The fact that this solstice angle produced by the sacred Pythagorean triad of 3, 4, and 5 must have struck the Druid mathematicians of Bibracte as a particularly auspicious coincidence.*

Hercules was sent to pick! I don't know if similar legends are found in the Southern Hemisphere around the South Ecliptic and Celestial Poles or if people there are fortunate to have to create for themselves.

I shall conclude this section with a verse given to the candidates for initiation in the Hibernian Mysteries after they came from their place of meditation and experienced the winter landscape.



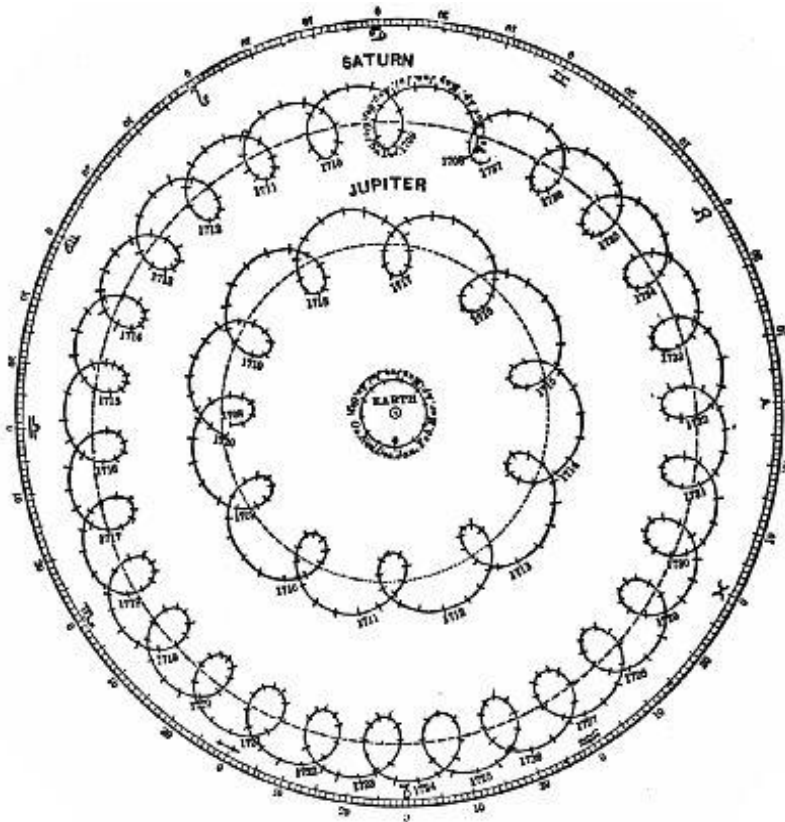
*Learn to Perceive in Spirit
Winter Existence
And You shall behold
The pre-earthly life.*

And after their summer experience:

*Learn to Dream in Spirit
Summer Existence
And you shall experience
The After-Earthly Life.³*

The Synodic Rhythms of Jupiter and Saturn

The most easily experienced rhythms of Jupiter and Saturn are their periodic loops around their opposition to the Sun at intervals of just over a year. Followed over a longer period these oppositions - when the planet is in line with the earth and the sun- move through the calendar. Jupiter progresses just over a month later in each successive year : its synodic period is 398.9 days, 33.65 days longer than our year.



An eighteenth century drawing of the geocentric movement of Jupiter and Saturn. Each notch marks one calendar month

The oppositions of Saturn go more slowly through the calendar taking 2 to 3 years to progress forward from month to month. The synodic period is 378.1 days so 12.85 days later each year.

To follow this observationally needs memory and determination and calendar skills: we mark the passage of one earth-sun cycle and then we have to wait for a further interval of time before the planet reaches its opposition.

If we look also at the difference between the time intervals of Saturn and Jupiter : $33.65 - 12.85 = 20.8$ days. Rounded off, 13, 21, and 34 are part of the Fibonacci sequence whose successive terms converge on the Golden Ratio Φ .⁴ Using the accurate values gives us a good value for this special mathematical number:

$$20.8 : 12.85 = 1.6187 (\Phi) \text{ and } 12.85 : 20.8 = 0.6178 (\Phi - 1)$$

$$33.65 : 20.8 = 1.6178 (\Phi) \text{ and } 20.8 : 33.65 = 0.6181 (\Phi - 1)$$

$$\text{Almost as accurate: } 33.65 : 12.85 = 2.6198 (\Phi + 1) \text{ and } \sqrt{2.6198} = 1.6186 (\Phi)$$

$$\text{As students of mathematics know, } \Phi^2 = \Phi + 1 \text{ and } 1/\Phi = \Phi - 1$$

So the time relationships of Saturn, Jupiter, Earth and Sun are close to the golden ratio, the most organic relationship, mathematically expressed, of parts to a whole and whole to its parts. I do not know if Johannes Kepler knew of this particular mathematical harmony but I am confident that he would have loved it!

The Golden Ratio is most usually seen as a division in space and in geometry so I wanted to draw attention to this division in Time.

This special relationship must arise because of the ratios of the planetary time periods: approximately 12 years to 30 years or 2:5. There are 3 conjunctions in 2 Saturn years and 5 Jupiter years. Just under 6 years after the conjunction, when Jupiter is exactly $\frac{1}{2}$ way around its orbit, Saturn will have moved through 72 degrees or one fifth of its cycle. Already we see a pentagonal connection and the pentagon is a form which most naturally contains the golden ratio. After a whole Jupiter cycle Saturn is at 144 (2 X 72) degrees, and after 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cycles Saturn is at 216 degrees (3 X 72). The planets then conjunct again at 243 degrees. 3 degrees shorter of this would generate a more geometrically perfect trigon over 60 years but then it would not progress through the zodiac in the way that it does.



The Trignons of the Great Conjunctions from a work by Kepler early in the seventeenth century

Spatial Geometry arises from integer or approximately integer cycles of time. With the Venus-Earth relationship there are 5 conjunctions in almost exactly 8 earth years and 13 Venus years – these numbers are also part of the Fibonacci sequence in which the ratio of successive terms converges on the number Phi Φ , as shown by Kepler!⁵ As a consequence of this temporal relationship the famous five-fold rose formation of the geocentric orbit of Venus can be constructed. With Jupiter and Saturn an equilateral triangle can be drawn linking successive conjunctions at twenty year intervals. This trigon of Jupiter-Saturn Conjunctions is impressive enough and we know it kindled Kepler's imagination and fired up his enthusiasms for world harmonies !

We can take an experimental approach to the significance of this mathematical situation as we shall have some experience of these harmonic time intervals next winter between December 21st 2021, 3rd January 2022, and 24th January 2022. The Planets will on these dates be in the evening sky, in relationship to the Sun very close to where we have seen them together this December. In subsequent years we can in this way become aware of their different speeds of progression through our solar calendar.

The Triplicity Cycles in History

It is worth noting that people through the ages have used historical astrology for political purposes and possibly do that today also.

The two decade interval of the Great Conjunction is a coarse net to catch patterns in historical events, but attempts at correlation have certainly been made. Look at the history of American Presidents over the past two hundred years:

Conjunction Year	President	Misfortune
1842	William Henry Harrison	Died in office (1841)
1861	Abraham Lincoln	Assassinated (1865)
1881	James A. Garfield	Assassinated (1881)
1901	William McKinley	Assassinated (1901)
1921	Warren G. Harding	Died in office (1923)
1941	Franklin D. Roosevelt	Died in office (1945)
1961	John F. Kennedy	Assassinated (1963)
1981	Ronald Reagan	Survived an assassination attempt (1981)
2000	George W. Bush	Nearly choked to death on a pretzel (2002)

I shall leave it to you to decide if this proves the truth of astrology or only the hazardous nature of being President of the United States of America. The 2020 release of an album by Bob Dylan features a long track called Murder Most Foul about the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963. The song is a recollection over almost 60 years, the period of one complete triangle of great conjunctions, by a singer-songwriter deeply connected with the Folk Soul of America.

Since before the ninth century great conjunctions, and their grouping by triplicities, formed the backbone of historical astrology. ⁶ Historical Astrology is where charts of planetary positions are seen as embedded in longer historical processes. Central to these traditions was the idea of a Mean Conjunction, a way of calculating the rhythms of the conjunctions over long periods of time based on the rotation period of each planet in the zodiac. Linking on to the older Ptolemaic astronomy this was the time for the centre of the planet's epicycle to revolve once around the zodiac: 11.86 years for Jupiter and 29.4 years for Saturn. The additional rotation of the cycle upon the epicycles generates the observed loops in their orbits and brings a layer of complexity and variability to the exact calculations of the conjunctions. The Mean conjunction would not necessarily be very close to the actual conjunction as seen from the earth, but it would be a practical way of identifying the year of great conjunctions throughout history. A modern way of seeing this would be to distinguish between the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn from a heliocentric perspective, ie from the position of the Sun, and that seen from the Earth. I calculated the heliocentric conjunction this year to have been around November 1st 2020 so about seven weeks before the conjunction as seen from earth. In the special years when a triple great conjunction occurs, the difference between a Mean, a Heliocentric and an earth-observed conjunction will be minimal.

Dr Benjamin Dykes, an expert on the history of astrology calculated using traditional parameters the dates for Mean Conjunctions over the past 2500 years. I include parts of his tables below – showing the progression through the signs or the tropical zodiac, and the other through the sidereal zodiac based on the constellations. The two diverge because of the Precession of the Equinoxes, and Dr Sykes points out that they coincided in the year 213 AD not long after the time of Ptolemy who wrote as both an astronomer and an astrologer. The sidereal table is more complicated because of the variability in constellation lengths.

Dr Sykes has also highlighted the movement of the conjunction positions over the boundaries of the zodiacal signs or constellations, and named these according to the elements of Earth, Water, Air, and Fire.

♌	Julian Date	Date	Sign	Degree
Shift to watery triplicity				
1	1653973.471	May 1, 185 BC	♌	2.783888
Shift to fiery triplicity				
11	1726507.982	December 3, 14 AD	♌	2.538214
Shift to earthy triplicity				
21	1799042.493	July 5, 213	♌	2.29254
Shift to airy triplicity				
31	1871577.004	February 6, 412	♌	2.046866
Shift to watery triplicity				
41	1944111.515	September 9, 610	♌	1.801192
Shift to fiery triplicity				
51	2016646.026	April 11, 809	♌	1.555518
Shift to earthy triplicity				
61	2089180.537	November 13, 1007	♌	1.309844
Shift to airy triplicity				
71	2161715.048	June 15, 1206	♌	1.06417
Shift to watery triplicity				
81	2234249.559	January 16, 1405	♌	0.818496
Shift to fiery triplicity				
91	2306784.07	August 29, 1603	♌	0.572822
Shift to earthy triplicity				
101	2379318.581	April 3, 1802	♌	0.327148
107	2422839.287	May 29, 1921	♌	18.17974
108	2430092.738	April 8, 1941	♌	21.15518
109	2437346.189	February 15, 1961	♌	24.13061
110	2444599.64	December 26, 1980	♌	27.10604
Shift to airy triplicity				
111	2451853.091	November 4, 2000	♌	0.081474
112	2459106.543	September 14, 2020	♌	3.056907
113	2466359.994	July 24, 2040	♌	6.032339
114	2473613.445	June 2, 2060	♌	9.007772
115	2480866.896	April 12, 2080	♌	11.9832
116	2488120.347	February 20, 2100	♌	14.95864
117	2495373.798	January 1, 2120	♌	17.93407
118	2502627.249	November 10, 2139	♌	20.9095
119	2509880.7	September 20, 2159	♌	23.88493
120	2517134.151	July 30, 2179	♌	26.86037
121	2524387.602	June 9, 2199	♌	29.8358
Shift to watery triplicity				
122	2531641.053	April 19, 2219	♌	2.811233

*Table of Tropical Mean (not the observed) Conjunctions
compiled by Dr Benjamin Dykes*

♌	Julian Date	Date	Sign	Degree
1	1653973.471	May 1, 185 BC	♌	8.519541
2	1661226.922	March 11, 165 BC	♌	11.21778
3	1668480.373	January 19, 145 BC	♌	13.91602
4	1675733.824	November 29, 126 BC	♌	16.61426
5	1682987.276	October 8, 106 BC	♌	19.31251
6	1690240.727	August 18, 86 BC	♌	22.01075
7	1697494.178	June 27, 66 BC	♌	24.70899
8	1704747.629	May 7, 46 BC	♌	27.40723
Shift to fiery triplicity				
9	1712001.08	March 16, 26 BC	♌	0.10547
Shift to earthy triplicity				
21	1799042.493	July 5, 213	♌	2.484365
Shift to airy triplicity				
32	1878830.455	December 16, 431	♌	2.165018
Shift to watery triplicity				
43	1958618.417	May 28, 650	♌	1.845671
52	2023899.477	February 18, 829	♌	26.12984
53	2031152.928	December 29, 848	♌	28.82808
Shift to fiery triplicity				
54	2038406.379	November 7, 868	♌	1.526324
Shift to earthy triplicity				
65	2118194.341	April 20, 1087	♌	1.206977
Shift to airy triplicity				
76	2197982.303	September 30, 1305	♌	0.887631
Shift to watery triplicity				
87	2277770.265	March 12, 1524	♌	0.568284
Shift to fiery triplicity				
98	2357558.227	September 3, 1742	♌	0.248937
99	2364811.678	July 14, 1762	♌	2.947178
100	2372065.129	May 23, 1782	♌	5.645419
101	2379318.581	April 3, 1802	♌	8.343661
102	2386572.032	February 10, 1822	♌	11.0419
103	2393825.483	December 20, 1841	♌	13.74014
104	2401078.934	October 30, 1861	♌	16.43838
105	2408332.385	September 8, 1881	♌	19.13663
106	2415585.836	July 20, 1901	♌	21.83487
107	2422839.287	May 29, 1921	♌	24.53311
108	2430092.738	April 8, 1941	♌	27.23135
109	2437346.189	February 15, 1961	♌	29.92959
Shift to earthy triplicity				
110	2444599.64	December 26, 1980	♌	2.627831
111	2451853.091	November 4, 2000	♌	5.326073
112	2459106.543	September 14, 2020	♌	8.024314
113	2466359.994	July 24, 2040	♌	10.72256
114	2473613.445	June 2, 2060	♌	13.4208
115	2480866.896	April 12, 2080	♌	16.11904
116	2488120.347	February 20, 2100	♌	18.81728
117	2495373.798	January 1, 2120	♌	21.51552
118	2502627.249	November 10, 2139	♌	24.21376
119	2509880.7	September 20, 2159	♌	26.912
120	2517134.151	July 30, 2179	♌	29.61024
Shift to airy triplicity				
121	2524387.602	June 9, 2199	♌	2.308485

*Table of Sidereal Mean (not the observed) Conjunctions
compiled by Dr Benjamin Dykes*

Looking through the tables of both sidereal and tropical mean conjunctions, we first meet the two different complete cycle lengths: just short of 800 (794) years for the tropical and around 913 years for the sidereal.

According to the tropical system, there are transitions to the Airy Triplicity in 2000, 1206 and 412.

Sidereally, we have a transition to the Earthly triplicity in 1980 (and completed this year 2020) , 1087(1107 in Capricorn) , and 213.

The sidereal system takes into account the starry circumference as it is today; the tropical is more connected with the Sun-Earth relationship, the positions of the planets within the solar calendar. My own experience of looking at Jupiter and Saturn this week seems to justify a two-fold approach : Saturn looks behind Jupiter like a gateway to the starry surround; Jupiter seems nearer and I have the impression of something sun-like in Jupiter's shining.¹²

The significance of the 800 year cycle, and its subdivision into four periods of 200 years was picked up by the Astronomers Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler. They announced the dawning of a new 800 year cycle around 1603 connected this with the passage of the Great Conjunction Trignons through the Vernal Equinox .

In his book Riddles of Philosophy, which surveys 3000 years of western philosophical development, Rudolf Steiner identifies a natural division in the evolutionary course of the philosophical life of mankind of 7-800 years. He points to the beginnings of the present philosophical phase as around 1600 and names the astronomers Copernicus, Kepler and Galileo as contributors to the beginning of this epoch. Steiner mentions in this work that we are approximately in the middle of this most recent phase of the development of thought life.

400 years marks the period of movement of the great conjunction trigon through the opposite equinox point and at the intervening 200 years the trigon will move through one of the solstices. I am going to give a brief survey of changes in consciousness leading up to our present day and using two, four , and eight hundred year intervals as a general guide . In Anthroposophical terminology the positive trends in modern consciousness are towards what is called the Spiritual or Consciousness Soul and I shall take this as an historical theme.

The three lamps of the Spiritual Soul are: 1) Social Understanding. 2) Freedom of Thought. 3) Knowledge of the Spirit. In what follows you will see how these lights shine successively over long periods of history and how each of them illuminate challenges for our contemporary situation .

We have just passed the 800 year anniversary in England of the signing of the Magna Carta which Rudolf Steiner refers to in his Leading Thoughts. ***"Already in 1215 that way of political thought which can receive its true stamp and character through the Spiritual Soul has begun in England."***⁸ What happened in 1215 was that a circle of barons told the King that his position in authority depended on their agreement, and the behaviour of all people including the King should be governed by one set of agreed laws. Despite huge difficulties and continual corruption, the principle that no-one is above the law whatever their social status, took hold in England over the next 200 years. Certain rights to justice became universal across the land. Social Institutions began to arise whose descendants are recognisable in England today. Legal experts can see what has been inherited from the Magna Carta in contemporary documents like the European Convention of Human Rights (1950).

As England established Civil Society, a free cultural life also began to emerge. In 1392 Chaucer wrote his Canterbury Tales which describe the characters and adventures of a broad spectrum of English society on a pilgrimage. : students, a farmer, a miller, a merchant , sailor, doctor and cook, a priest, a knight and a lady, etc. A pilgrimage can also be a social event as it clearly was in the fourteenth century.(I joined a diverse company on the pilgrim's way from London to Canterbury during my last sabbatical as a Waldorf Teacher on foot all of the way just over 600 years since the one Chaucer described)

Chaucer's work was summarised in a painting by William Blake in 1809 who commented that the *"The characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and nations. As*

one age falls, another rises, different to mortal sight, but to immortals only the same. "The claim to universality is also a quality to which the Consciousness or Spiritual Soul strives.



An illustration of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (1392) by William Blake (1809). Blake in describing this work wrote: "The characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and nations. As one age falls, another rises, different to mortal sight, but to immortals only the same". Only the gender imbalance disturbs our interest in the universality pictured here.

This is a living polarity: individualism and universality. Watching Saturn and Jupiter come together can be a meditation on such a polarity inside each one of us.

It is widely recognised that Chaucer laid the foundation of English Literature. Rudolf Steiner comments in his Leading Thoughts ⁸ " *We need only remember the great spiritual consequences which took their start in Europe from the founding of this literature, and we shall see that such an event was not able to work itself out freely, but fell into the midst of the confusion of a prolonged war.*"

The foreign policy of England in those times was shockingly destructive to her neighbours and in France spiritual intervention through Joan of Arc 1412-1431 brought a necessary resistance to "adversarial forces in the struggles of the Spiritual Soul." ⁷

Jumping forward 200 years, in 1603 there is a transition to a fiery triplicity period (from the tropical perspective) of a further 200 years and this is distinguished initially by achievements in Astronomy as well as the heralding by Kepler and Tycho Brahe of the beginning of a new 800 year phase of consciousness development. Fairly soon the philosopher Descartes makes his famous assertion: "***I think therefore I am***". This well known formula does not actually mean that by thinking Descartes could give himself being, but rather that he had questioned all aspects of his experience and recognised that his activity of thinking was the one thing he could not doubt.

Steiner interprets the moment in philosophy like this: "**The ego in him conquers the right to recognise its own being through the radical doubt directed against the entire world.**"⁷

As a contrast to this opposition of an individual to a doubtful world the English Poet John Donne wrote in 1621 his famous lines about the interconnectedness of individual and humanity. It is resonant as a humanitarian statement today also because of Brexit and a dangerous global pandemic.

*No man is an island entire of itself; every man
is a piece of the continent, a part of the main;
if a clod be washed away by the sea, Europe is the less,
as well as if a promontory were, as
well as any manor of thy friends or of thine
own were; **any man's death diminishes me,
because I am involved in mankind.**
And therefore never send to know for whom
the bell tolls; it tolls for thee.*

In the leading thoughts⁸ Rudolf Steiner also draws a link between St Augustine, Descartes and the Consciousness Soul. Augustine wrote his autobiography around the great conjunction transition of 412 AD. Just after his death, by the following Great Conjunction in December 431, the centralised Imperial structure of Rome was crumbling and cracking. Civilisation was after this going to depend on quite new steps in consciousness.

After Descartes' "doubt directed against the entire world" there began the enthusiastic and meticulous exploration of the world that we call Natural Science. In the most positive sense this is the search for Universal Truth; in one-sided application it is an exploration of a world conceived as mostly non-human. Without a sense for our spiritual participation in knowledge, the scientist becomes detached, and knowledge eventually becomes only data. The environment and our thinking become increasingly mechanical

Two hundred years later, a call for the renewal of Individualism is made by the Romantic Philosophers and Poets, who were in rebellion against the rising tide of materialism and the dark social consequences of the Machine Age .

Especially in England a cold wind was blowing from industrialisation and this coloured the mood of the Romantic Spirits more than in Germany and later in America. The Great Conjunction Trigon was passing in this age through the Winter solstice.

An example from English Romanticism: Shelley ,writing around 1820, wishes to speak universally and let his dead thinking disperse into the cosmic void:

*Drive my dead thoughts over the universe
Like wither'd leaves to quicken a new birth!
And, by the incantation of this verse,
Scatter, as from an unextinguish'd hearth
Ashes and sparks, my words among mankind!
Be through my lips to unawaken'd earth
The trumpet of a prophecy! O Wind,
If Winter comes, can Spring be far behind?*

Closing lines of Ode to the West Wind by Shelley 1819

This poet's wife Mary Shelley wrote Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus in 1818 in response to the spiritual crisis of materialism. This is resonant today with all the efforts currently being made to put artificial intelligence into robots, and to integrate electronics into human beings.

On September 14th of 1921 the observed great conjunction was just in the constellation of Virgo, and so very close to the autumn equinox point. As the equinox is a time of equilibrium, it is justified also to identify this moment with the Sign of Libra , the Balance.

I imagine Rudolf Steiner would have followed this conjunction with a high level of consciousness.

Born in 1861, he was experiencing the completion in his biography of one trigon of conjunctions : 1861, 1881, and 1901 in the constellations of Leo, Aries and Sagittarius. Saturn was in the Lion constellation on his sixtieth birthday, as it had been at his birth, and later in that year moved just into the Virgo constellation. We are only this year fully establishing the triplicity in the constellations Virgo, Taurus and Capricorn, and so 1921 was the first step into this new triplicity.

In terms of the constellations 1921 was the dawning of the period we are now living through .The transition across the autumn equinox point indicates a half way point, a pivotal moment , in the "New Age " announced by Tycho Brahe and Johannes Kepler.

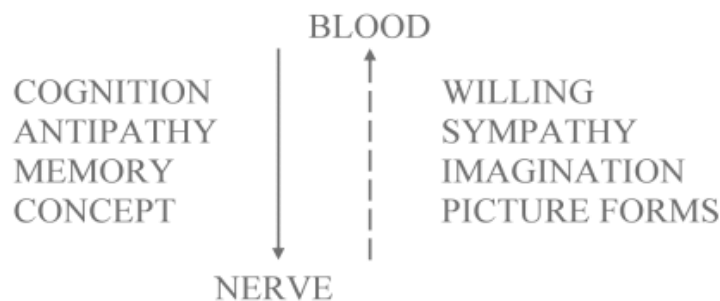
Rudolf Steiner's work at this time was to plant seeds that move beyond the dualisms inherent in Descartes' philosophy : I and World, Mind and Matter, Consciousness and Neurophysiology, Soul and Body, Head and Limbs. In the Leading Thoughts referred to above(1924) Steiner goes on to say in reference to Descartes: **"In this kind of human thought is not the Spirit eliminated from all**

observation that is directed towards the things in the world? The manifestation of the Spirit has withdrawn to the pin-point support in self-consciousness; all else , as it shows itself directly , is void of any revelation of the Spirit.”⁸

Rudolf Steiner’s work was to move the consciousness soul beyond the pinpoint of self-consciousness and to overcome dualism. He had to balance and make fruitful with the revelations of the Spirit the direction of thought which began in Descartes’ time . Anthroposophy as a whole gives us tools to be creative with polarities- not to obliterate oppositions but to relate them, to breathe with them, to recognise the In-Between. The Soul between Spirit and Matter, the I between Heaven and Earth. His concept of the etheric body for example is as a mediator between the psychological and the physical. It is a solution to the Mind-Body problem: the forces building the human physical body in the first seven years of human growth are the same forces which then unfold as picturing forces in consciousness.

Especially in Educational lectures Steiner opposes Descartes strongly, even going so far as to say, “ I think therefore I am not”! ⁹ Exactly the kind of comment to annoy professional philosophers! He means that in Thinking we have only a picture of the world, and that thinking only becomes real being through the activity of the Will. Astrology if it is to have real substance must also be willed. Long ago it used to be an Initiation Science, and it could be again if we can but will it with the strength of our Imaginations and inspirations.

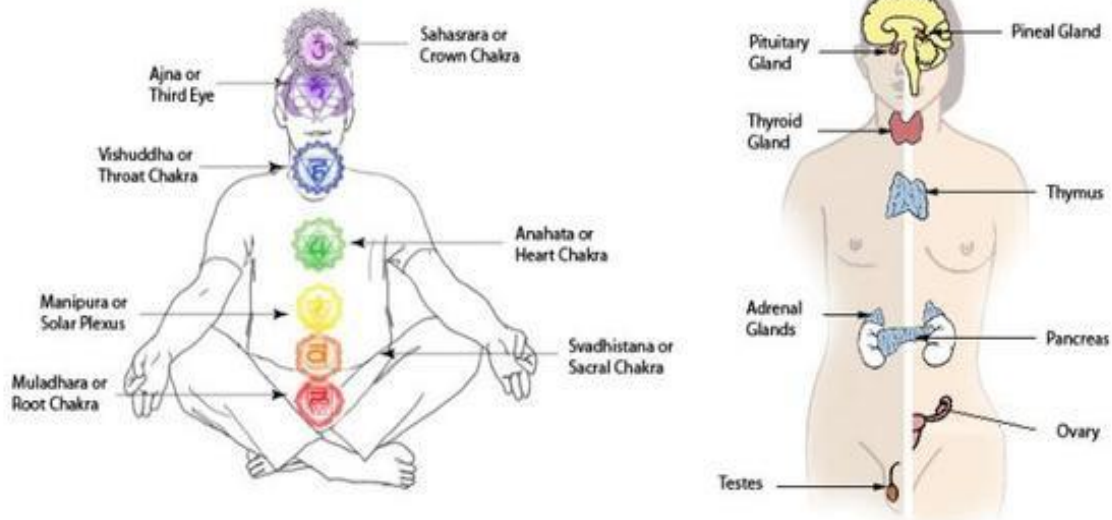
If Imagination is going to come to the aid of modern civilisation then it will be important to provide children with an education that supports their natural pictorial thinking after the age of 7. For this reason Steiner sketched out the fundamental polarity in human psychology between thinking and will, between memory and love.



From the Study of Man (Foundations of Human Experience) Lecture 2.

The polarity of blood and nerve is another living polarity , and as I have been teaching human biology to Class Ten, I can add a few thoughts here. Holistic Science will always find the whole expressed in each of the parts . Every level of our four-fold being from physical to spiritual is expressed in each of the other levels. The Etheric body finds Physical expression in the system of endocrine glands. The top two glands in this system are the Pineal and the Pituitary Glands, sometimes called the Saturn and Jupiter glands respectively. Both are anatomically mediators between blood and nerves, in so far as they are parts of the central nervous system and yet secrete hormones into the blood stream. The Pituitary rules over all the other glands of the body, and directs all internal life processes. It adapts us to our life style choices and the circumstances that shape our bodies inwardly and outwardly, throughout our time on earth. The Pineal gland regulates consciousness and unconsciousness, and the sleep cycle so important to education. The two together have been linked with the process of forgetting and remembering, and the relationship of our inner and outer experiences. ¹⁰

THE LOCATION OF THE ENDOCRINE GLANDS AND CHAKRAS



The endocrine system of glands is often related to the Eastern teaching of Chakras because of the similarity of their positions within the human body. Correlation with the seven planets of antiquity has also been made by several authors. Saturn : the Pineal Gland , Jupiter the Pituitary Gland and Mars the Thyroid Gland and so on. I would certainly be possible to develop these themes further. There is a polarity of inner and outer : consciousness and body in these two pictures.

Here again I suggest that the astronomy we are experiencing this week is an opportunity to integrate two streams within us, like past and future within the present moment.

The asymmetry in the human countenance, especially in the gaze of our right and left eyes, described and illustrated by Wolfgang Held in connection with the Great Conjunction¹¹ is an expression of this drama or dialogue which everyone goes through in themselves. Especially as modern people we need knowledge and independence; and equally we need Imagination and Interconnectedness. Being an individual involves a self-dialogue which accompanies this living polarity throughout our lives.

The Great Conjunction is a world rhythm, it feels to me like a clock chiming the hour, in which we are challenged to bring together and integrate two-foldness. The way we face things, the way our knowledge and memory are integrated with our words and practical will, the weaving together of our head and limbs , these constitute the whole drama of our personality, the truth of our hearts.

Immediately after the great conjunction of 1921, Steiner embarked on a long course of lectures in Cosmosophy, and in October he spoke most positively against dualism : "the further we delve into the mysteries of existence the more do world and human being merge; and we are shown ever more clearly that the separation we envisage existing in our earthly life between world and human existence is actually an illusion; that the human being belongs to the world and the world belongs to the human being, and the human being is to be found in the world and the world in the human being." ⁸ lecture 23 October 1921.

The Triplicities and the Elements and the Ethers

The allocation of the four elements to the zodiacal constellations goes back at least as far as Aristotle. Ptolemy relates the zodiac to geographical wind directions, and this connects with the pairing of polarities : hot - cold, wet - dry . The elements are the intermediate combinations of these, so for example Earth is Cold and Dry, Air is Warm and Wet. Dividing the twelve by four is natural given the four seasons and the four geographical divisions, but I have not understood yet the allocation of the trigons to the particular sequence of Fire Earth Air and Water .

Dr Elisabeth Vreede suggested that we should rename the triplicities with the names of the four-fold division of the Etheric World: Fire – Warmth Ether ; Air-Light Ether; Water- Tone Ether; and Earth-Life Ether. Especially in connection with biodynamic agriculture, I suggest this could be an important research challenge in the next few years.

The Earth Triplicity we are entering this year is then also Life-ether triplicity period. The most condensed of the Elements provides the form to contain the highest organisation of matter in living organisms.

At a consciousness level , the Life ether manifests as Individualised Life Meaning. The Earth Spirit – or the I of the planet earth is the bringer of Meaning to the Earth.

Astrology is traditionally the finding of meaning in the stars, and it sits in opposition to a large part of the contemporary scientific world view. This will change only when Science becomes more of a **reading** of our whole experience and less an attempt to “explain” (literally “lay flat”) or control through technology. At the dawning of our present time Shakespeare (1603) already distanced himself from Astrology in favour of an astronomical reading of Truth and Beauty:

*Not from the stars do I my judgement pluck;
And yet methinks I have Astronomy,
But not to tell of good or evil luck,
Of plagues, of deaths, or seasons' quality;
Nor can I fortune to brief minutes tell,
Pointing to each his thunder, rain and wind,
Or say with princes if it shall go well
By oft predict that I in heaven find:
**But from thine eyes my knowledge I derive,
And, constant stars, in them I read such art
As truth and beauty shall together thrive,
If from thyself, to store thou wouldst convert;
Or else of thee this I prognosticate:
Thy end is truth's and beauty's doom and date.***

Sonnet by William Shakespeare

The Constellation Background: Capricorn

The medieval cosmology mapped the constellations to the human body, rather than to personality and lifestyle. In a similar way Rudolf Steiner led his cosmological work in the direction of embryology, and biological form and functioning. The northern hemisphere winter constellations are all about the legs.

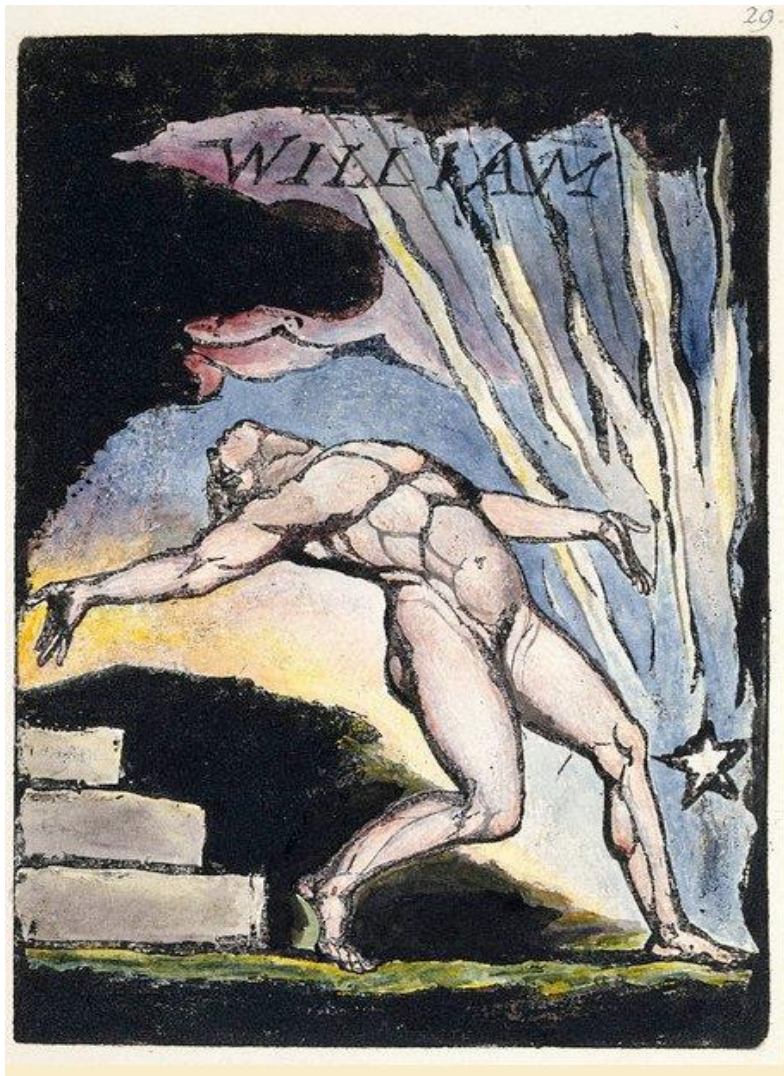


Sagittarius pierces the thighs: quite a striking image in itself. I am reminded of the rider of the white horse in the Book of Revelation with the words Faithful and True written on his thighs. And I am often impressed with the way two year old children walk around, using their thighs in such an integrated way in purposeful movement and play.

Capricorn is indicated at the knees, Aquarius at the calf and shin, and Pisces at the feet. In my country Waldorf Education took up the popular slogan: Education for **Head Heart and Hands**. After hearing this too many times, I began to think: what about the **Feet**?

How do we live in our legs? How do we move from our thighs, and experience our knees? More important than carrying us from place to place is the experience of walking itself, that healing continuity, moving rhythmically in time.

William Blake (*The Book of Milton* 1804-11) shows how the knees can express the opening spiritual experience of death or complete humility.



Contained in the epic *Book of Milton* by William Blake 1808. This page is given the title of his own name. This work contains the patriotic anthem of England sung at many weddings and Women's gatherings to this day: "And did those feet in ancient time,
Walk upon England's mountains green:..."

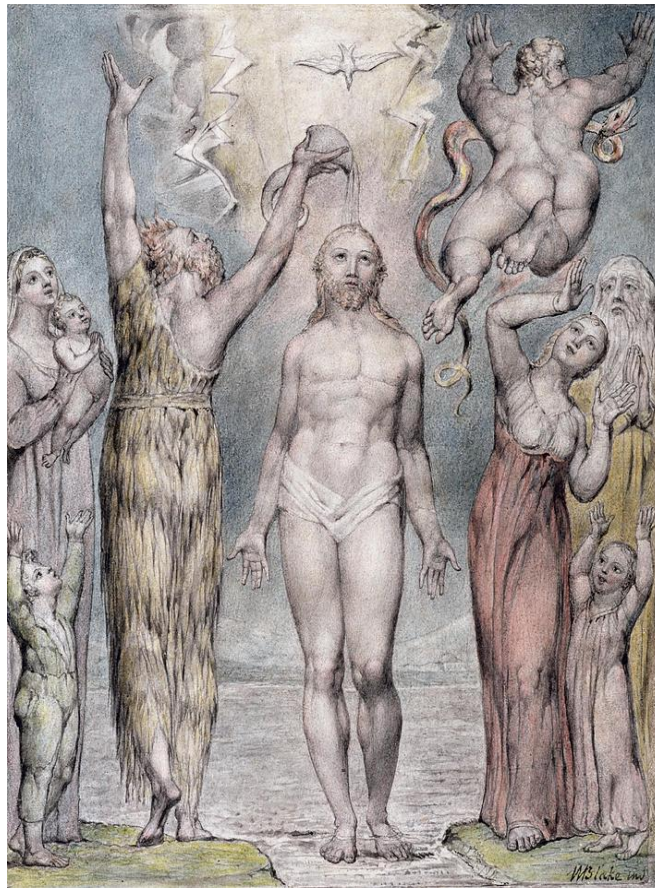


And from the same work, his Brother Robert who died as a young man, and became the source of the poet and painter's inspiration



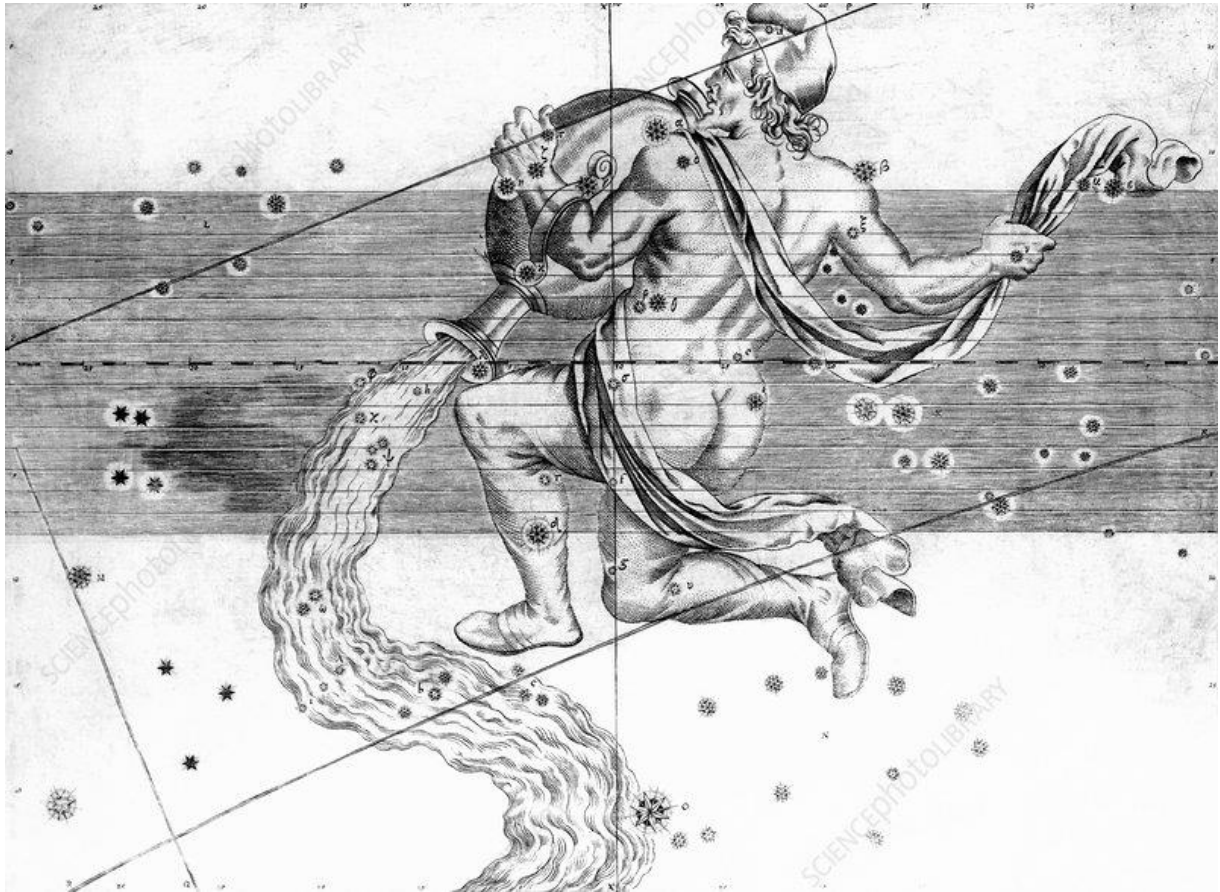
The Knees feature quite strongly in this painting of a shackled Angel in the cover of Blake's book America : A Prophecy. William Blake was disturbed by the reactionary imperialism of Britain in relation to its most progressive colony

In his painting of the baptism of Christ the legs are positioned so carefully in the composition of the picture that we see the true nature of the Human Being is to stand between Earth and Heaven.



The Baptism of Christ by William Blake. The Painter is standing at Front Left, and his inspired self is at front right

The Background Sign : Aquarius



The constellation of Aquarius from 1603 in the collection of the Royal Astronomical Society

The trouble with Astrology in the present scientific age is that it is all too easy to associate a list of qualities with a set of events. The following is my own original response to an ancient Astrological tradition and my attempt to make it meaningful in the modern world.

At a time when Agriculture was the mother of all the Arts, Ancient people born with the sun in Capricorn were guided into the life tasks of animal farming. Sagittarians became hunters, Aquarians became earth cultivators, and Pisceans were traders. We can look at these traditions today from the perspective of global humanity.

The Age of Pisces (the Spring Equinox in the constellation of Pisces) has seen a culmination in World Trade which has had dire consequences for the environment. Every supermarket is evidence of the catastrophic desire culture that is destroying Nature.

There seems little doubt that the contemporary issue behind the present global pandemic has a lot to do with the way we care for and interact with farm animals. A new strain of Covid 19 suddenly springs up from Minks being farmed in Denmark! I did not even know that Minks were farmed in Denmark and then I am told that twenty million of them will have to be killed.

Even Free Range Organic chickens in England now have to go into "lock down" .

Aquarius , the water bearer, the gardener, is now the sign for our collective need to tend the environment. Conservation will not be enough, we shall have to recreate natural habitats, and for that we shall need to understand the interconnectedness and the holiness of everything that lives. We need living thinking. Spiritually we need a science that forms in our consciousness a deeper connection to Nature than that provided by detached instrumental observations and machine type model thinking. We need a self-reflective, holistic and participatory science.

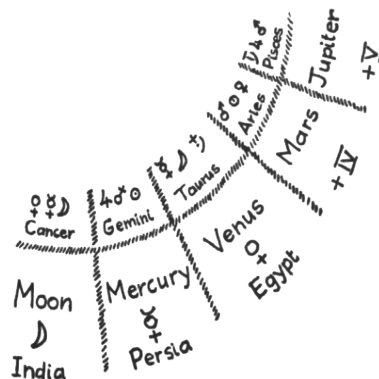
When I approach nature to get to know her, and spend a morning practicing plant observation, I have the feeling that at least on this day I have done no environmental harm.

I am happy to close with some words of Rudolf Steiner which speak to our epoch and also to the present day chiming of the world clock marking the decades of our advancing humanity. They resonate I hope with several of the ideas I have tried to express in this article. They accompanied my writing, although I have not referred to them directly.

"But in the outer planets, Saturn, Jupiter, Mars you see what is connected with the human head, the human countenance, the human word-formation. Thus all that is connected with spirituality for this life between birth and death — we will speak next time of the other life between death and a new birth — is especially serviceable in this epoch. This epoch therefore is the one containing the greatest spiritual possibilities. In no age was it granted to men to do so much wrong as in this, since in none could one sin more deeply against the inner mission of the time. For if one lives with the age, then through the Jupiter force one transforms the force coming from the earth into a spiritually free humanity. And at one's disposal are the best, the finest powers of man which he develops between birth and death: the Saturn- Jupiter- and Mars-forces.

The World-Clock, my dear friends, stands favourably for this epoch, but this must give no occasion for fatalism.

*This must not cause people to say: Well let's leave ourselves to World-destiny, everything is sure to be all right... rather is it to be the cause, if a man will — but he must will — of his finding endless possibilities just in our age. Only, meanwhile, men do not as yet will."*¹³



An illustration from the above lecture in which our age (V) is related to the spiritual impulses of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, and especially Jupiter, Ages VI and VII will be linked with the constellations of Aquarius and then Capricorn, as well as with Saturn and the Sun.

Notes.

1. The division of the cultural epochs into seven is not often discussed. It is a shorter period of time than the 354 year periods allocated to the ruling Archangels 354 years is based on a Moon rhythm: the sidereal moon year is 354 days so one day is taken as one year in this context. The seventh division of a cultural age is a solar calculation.

Rudolf Steiner speaks in one lecture (GA190 the lecture of 5th April 1919) about the loosening of the etheric heart and mentions in this connection the year 1721 which is 308 years since the beginning of the present cultural age in 1413. $308 \approx 2160 / 7$. Is there a connection here with the first seven years of the human developmental phase which leads to a loosening of the etheric forces from their task of building up the child's physical body? Would the completion of the second seventh of the Consciousness Soul epoch in 2029 bring with it the turbulence of liberated human desires analogous to the beginning of teenage years?

2. The Ancient Paths: Discovering the Lost Map of Celtic Europe by Graham Robb
3. From Mystery Knowledge and Mystery Centres Lectures by Rudolf Steiner 23.11.1923 to 23.12 . 1923
4. The discovery was attributed to Richard Heath by John Martineau in his excellent book A Little Book of Coincidence in the Solar System.

5. The Fibonacci sequence grows from within itself by adding two previous terms to find the next one: 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, 21, 34.....etc. The convergence of ratios to Phi is attributed to Kepler in Tattersall, James Joseph (2005). *Elementary number theory in nine chapters* (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press, p. 28. .
6. http://www.skyscript.co.uk/mean_conjunctions.html
7. Rudolf Steiner : Riddles of Philosophy
8. Rudolf Steiner : Leading Thoughts 30.11.1924
9. Study of Man lecture course 1919 Rudolf Steiner
10. Discussed more fully in Professor Rohen's book, Functional Morphology p330-332
11. Wolfgang Held. See for example his article in the Sternkalendar 2020-2021.
12. In Anthroposophical Cosmology the Jupiter planet marks the boundary of the former embodiment of the solar system which Rudolf Steiner calls Old Sun.
13. Rudolf Steiner: Lecture 8th January 1918.