

ERIS

IN ASTROLOGY

FACETS AND FRAGMENTS OF SELF

by Eric Francis

It's the combination of narcissism and nihilism that really defines postmodernism. —AL GORE

These fragments I have shored against my ruins. —T.S. ELIOT, THE WASTE LAND

To the Fairest. —ERIS

T IS RARE that a newly discovered planet is delineated by the sign it's transiting, or was discovered in. Because sign placement is transient, it's usually seen as playing a background role in conceiving of a new planet's archetype, but no more. Can anyone even name what

astrological signs Pluto and Chiron were discovered in? Pluto's discovery degree is in Cancer. Chiron's discovery degree, perhaps more widely known, is in Taurus. Any thoughts as to how that influences our perception of these planets, or how it's influenced popular interpretations?



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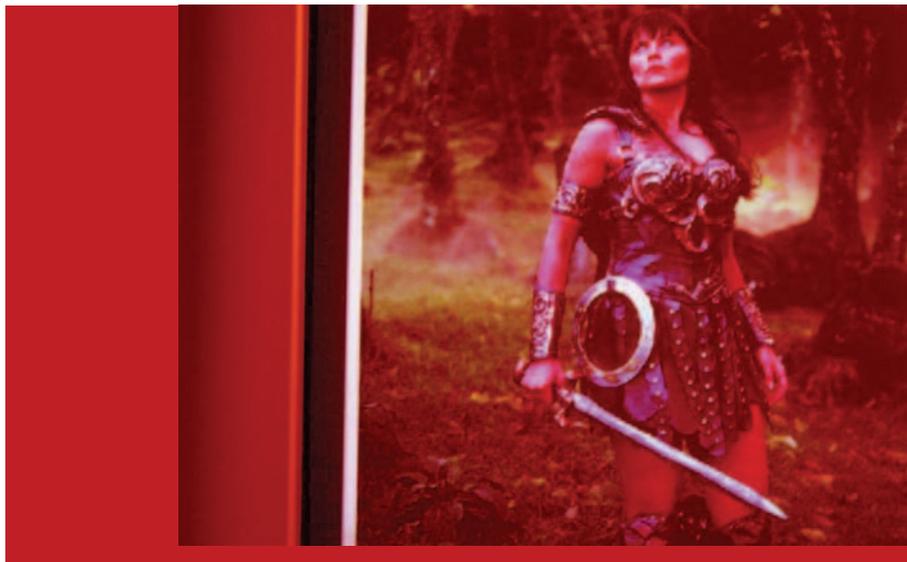


PHOTO: DREXEL NAARLAN

It is also unusual to use a planet's nickname to gain an understanding of its expression, but then, I can only name one planet that's had a culturally accepted moniker, one that got into *The New York Times*: Eris, which was originally widely known as Xena, named for the Warrior Princess of television fame as a temporary measure until its astronomical status could be sorted out.¹ Eris was discovered in 2005 and takes about 557 years to go around the Sun once. It's currently about 10 billion miles from the Sun, a good bit further than Pluto, which by contrast takes 248 years to orbit the Sun and is considerably closer.

Eris, along with older discoveries Pluto and Ceres, was designated a dwarf planet in the summer of 2006. The recognition of Eris and the reorganization of the solar system now confront mainstream astrology with the previously esoteric issue of how astrologers figure out what a new discovery is about, and how to work with it. But the topic has been surprisingly quiet, perhaps because many astrologers are at a loss for where to begin the discussion. This is surprising; one would imagine that naming the equivalent of the 10th planet for the goddess who started the Trojan Wars would get some attention.

But there is a precedent for astrology

taking things excruciatingly slowly with new discoveries. Pluto, though discovered in 1930, was not put on the main longitude tables of *Raphael's Ephemeris* until the mid-1970s; for many years it was included in a little table giving the positions once

longer history of use by astrologers, thus more experience and a longer history of discussion than stuff discovered last week, though this is not necessary to understand the past. The passage of history itself can be tracked with any planet

THE RECOGNITION OF ERIS AND THE REORGANIZATION OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM NOW CONFRONT MAINSTREAM ASTROLOGY WITH THE PREVIOUSLY ESOTERIC ISSUE OF HOW ASTROLOGERS FIGURE OUT WHAT A NEW DISCOVERY IS ABOUT, AND HOW TO WORK WITH IT.

per month, stuck in at the back of the annual edition.

Though they don't usually realize it, astrologers have been engaged in a delimitation process with Uranus, Neptune and Pluto for a long time. What are often called the "modern planets" are not described in the ancient astrological texts, and thus fall outside the Doctrine of Signatures that was so essential to the medieval understanding of astrology. We have, in truth, had to deduce their meaning, which is the essence of a modern planet. Their presence in modern astrology books gives a false idea that they are perfectly understood, and always were. One thing they have going for them is a

whose orbit is known, since all you need to do is calculate an ephemeris and look at the cycle going back as far as you want, and study the results, though it can be surprisingly challenging.

In terms of bodies that have been consciously delineated recently after their discovery, the most openly conducted quest has involved Chiron, discovered in 1977 and originally met with great excitement by astrologers, an unprecedented phenomenon that has not persisted, and has not been seen since. In part this is because the discovery was announced as that of a planet (though it was later re-classified to Centaur planet). But in the late 70s, that sense of discovery, quest and exploration,

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and the desire for tangible self-knowledge, were all very much in the spirit of the times, so it was natural for astrologers to respond assertively.

Though there have been thousands of discoveries of small planets orbiting our

the media. Because the Eris controversy resulted in the supposed demotion of Pluto (originally deemed a planet) from “full planetary status,” it made newspapers worldwide. This came with the “promotion” of Ceres (discovered in 1801 and

recognized *as* a planet, even partly; none so much as started a good debate, much less was responsible for settling one, though this may be a temporary settlement as the issue will be reviewed in three years. Because Varuna and company were all smaller than Pluto, the entire world of minor planets, trans-Neptunians, Kuiper objects, asteroids and Centaurs (such as Chiron and Pholus) seemed doomed to obscurity, discussion lists or private astrology seminars in London.

Yet it is the theme of Eris, not its size, that will guide its fate as an astrological factor, mark a moment of passage or transition, and perhaps help tell the story of our time in history, and we who are living it.

How a Planet Gets its Meaning

A planet possesses what we think of as meaning in a cultural sense, and in an archetypal one. The two are related, but you can think of archetypal meaning as standing somewhat apart from human intention, or perhaps as arising from it on a deep level. But an archetype belongs to nature more than it belongs specifically to humanity. An archetype has a life of its own, and that entity has a relationship with individuals, with society, and with the patterns of history. An archetype’s message has the feeling of being deduced and discovered, rather than being bestowed intellectually. However, working with new planets, we are not inheriting centuries of

experience, along with copious writing in ancient texts. The process is not only conscious, it is contemporaneous. It happens as we do it. The discussion of any new planet will be a metalog: the subject will arise as the discussion progresses.

There are basically two ways for newly discovered planets to have their meaning emerge as an intentional act. They differ, but there are some overlapping methods. One is observation over long periods of time, studying the cycles of history and the lives of cultural figures and astrology clients until the archetype reveals itself. An example of this approach is offered by Richard Tarnas in his long essay *Prometheus the Awakener*.³ In this monograph, he examines the expression of Uranus, discovered in 1781, the first planet discovered by science. In this remarkable book, Tarnas looks closely at the cycles of history, as well as in the charts of people for whom Uranus plays prominently, explaining that it bears a misnomer: it accurately matches the archetype of Prometheus (a rebel and creation deity) and bears only incidental resemblance to Uranus (a sky god who was overthrown).

Another method, more frequently applied to what are called minor planets (particularly a class called Centaurs, and several classes of planets in the region of Pluto) is to use the available data, and come up with a working hypothesis, and then test it. It is this approach that I’m

IT’S ONLY BECAUSE LAST SUMMER’S CATEGORIZATION OF ERIS DISRUPTED THE ESTABLISHED ORDER OF THE SOLAR SYSTEM THAT THIS DISCOVERY IS GETTING ANY RESPECT FROM ASTROLOGERS

Sun in recent years, and several prominent ones the past few years, most have been diligently ignored by mainstream astrology, with only a few astrologers being involved in deciphering their themes, mostly on email lists. Only one mainstream horoscope writer that I know of has regularly informed his readers of some of these discoveries, and has occasionally made an effort to delineate them, Jonathan Cainer of the *Daily Mail*.

It’s only because last summer’s categorization of Eris disrupted the established order of the solar system that the existence of Xena/Eris was even noticed by most astrologers.² Astronomers say Eris is as large as, or larger than, Pluto — and that’s what forced the issue of what a planet is, and made a fairly big splash in

called a planet at the time, but soon after, reclassified as an asteroid). It is surprising that Ceres, though it comprises a third of the mass of the inner asteroid belt and is named for a goddess one of whose themes, *food*, is so central to human survival, has long been treated as if it’s of little consequence to astrology, except by a few people who consider themselves asteroid specialists. Ceres also covers the plight of mothers, an odd archetype to ignore, given that we all came from one.

Yet is Eris any more important astrologically than the smaller objects Varuna, Ixion, Chaos, Quaoar, Sedna or Orcus, or many others found in recent years to be orbiting near or beyond Pluto? In the cultural sense, yes — none of those planets were able to push the door open to being

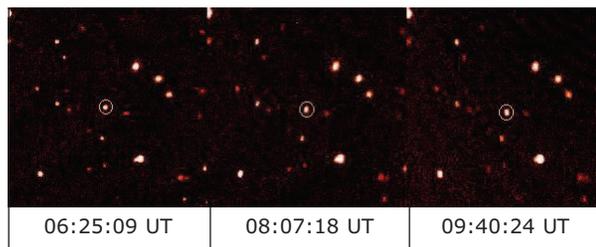
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using here; it is not empirical and it's not based on working with people or with the cycles of history. In this sense, it is an educated proposal rather than the result of anything resembling scientific review. In another article we can experiment with what I'm proposing.

Part of this approach often involves using the name of the planet, and applying certain findings of astronomers, such as the shape and properties of the orbit. Astrology and astronomy typically have a tense relationship, but one does exist. Astronomers for the most part ignore astrology, or hold it in disdain; some, however, have been very helpful over the years. The best of them have a connection to what astrology reaches for — the numinous and the archetypal world that grants them a gift for coming up with strikingly apt names, and indeed for seeing the things in the first place. Eris was discovered by Michael E. Brown, Chad A. Trujillo and David L. Rabinowitz, who have a knack not only for finding quite a few planets, but also for giving them names that are intuitive and apropos of the moment. Trujillo said recently, "It was the obvious choice to name it after the goddess of discord." (Members of this team were also involved in the discovery and naming of Sedna, Varuna and Quaoar.)

Though the findings of astronomers don't entirely guide the minds of astrologers (that is difficult under any cir-

cumstances), the impact of Eris on astronomy itself, and the comparison of Eris and Ceres to Pluto, would seem worth considering. There is no astrologer who doubts the significance of Pluto, even though diverging views over its



Discovery of Eris These discovery images of the dwarf planet Eris, originally called Xena, were taken 1-1/2 hours apart on the night of Oct. 21, 2003. Eris can be seen very slowly moving across the sky over the course of three hours.

Credit: astronomers Mike Brown, Caltech; Chad Trujillo, Gemini Observatory; and David Rabinowitz, Yale University

meaning exist (something true of any planet). For science to say that Eris and Ceres are as astronomically significant as Pluto is a cautionary note, and also an invocation to look at something new. That, however, is a different issue than figuring out what Eris means — though meaning always exists in context, and importance to the culture and to science is part of that context.

In delineating a newly discovered planet, you can't just look it up in the astrology encyclopedia. It's not there yet, and

few are ever mentioned in articles published by the established astrological press, though it does happen occasionally. In truth, it's easier for astrologers to use the planets that are already written about and which we think we understand, and leave it at that, which is why so many astrologers stop there. In a sense, without an authoritative source of information, I think a lot of people feel they are untrustworthy. However, let's remember that new planets take your familiar chart and make you feel like it was your first time reading one, because you can't come up with a pat interpretation for what you see — a special kind of confusion we really need to welcome.

Yet at the same time, using new discoveries has the advantage of giving previously unidentified and unnamed processes in the psyche a point of focus. Just by searching for meaning, we increase the likelihood of finding it. New discoveries offer us a new way of thinking about ourselves astrologically that is based on conscious reflection, inquiry and considering the role of an individual in the larger processes of culture. Moving in the other direction, we get a feeling for how the cosmos relates back to us, and how the

planets describe our lives, and to some extent shape them. That is the essence of astrology, studying the associations between above and below, within and without.

While using the mythological figure a planet is named for is often helpful as a delineation tool, it's too simplistic to adopt the myth for which it's named as the literal delineation, since planets have many other expressions than those covered in the mythology. Sometimes, as in the case of Uranus, the myth bears no resemblance at all to the delineation that eventually emerges. Myths and stories have implications, and can offer some great images and a structure to work with, but the structure underneath the myth is often more significant than the myth itself. Sometimes you need to look at what a story is not saying, or consider an unusual facet or ironic trait, and apply that to the delineation. I have found that a myth can also provoke a question or reveal a paradox, and that becomes the focus.*

Delineation, sketching a planet's meaning and even discovering specifics that apply to it, is a looser concept than definition. It's a complex process that also involves using astronomical data, applying intuition, observation, listening to things people tell you off the cuff, and the study of astrological charts (of both people and events). The myth is used; the discovery charts are used (there are usually several);

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the qualities of the orbit are used. Over time, astrology clients tell their stories to astrologers, and slowly a picture begins to emerge. I suggest that astrology be practiced in the spirit of every discovery being a continuing discovery (in the words of Erminie Lantero), including an ancient planet like Saturn that is in truth constantly revealing new properties.

Figuring out what symbols mean is not a problem restricted to astrologers or new planetary discoveries. The Symbol Grounding Problem, as it's known in other disciplines, "is related to the problem of how words get their meanings, and of what meanings are. The problem of meaning is in turn related to the [question] of consciousness, or how it is that mental states are meaningful." Thus spake the Wiki.⁴ People are trying to ground the meaning of symbols all the time. Many still need to be told what a stop sign is. So it will be a while before we have a full grasp on Eris, but we can begin in earnest and with an open mind and see where that takes us.

Delineating Eris: Some Clues

Clue 1 for Eris (evident before the planet was named, which came later in the summer) emerges from the circumstances of the categorization, and the resulting re-ordering of the solar system for the first time since the 1930s — a remarkable development that has been lost amidst much other news. When Pluto was

included in the fold, the number of accepted planets increased to nine; it stayed that way until 2006.

In delineating a planet, the historical circumstances, including those of the discovery itself, seem to reveal a fair amount.

For example, as if on cue, a mass shadow manifested with the rise of fascism in Europe and South America soon after Pluto's emergence into awareness. The themes of the planet Pluto, officially the Roman god of the dead, are often related

to matters involving power, death and surrender. Shortly after Pluto's emergence, a lot of people went to the underworld, mostly in concentration camps. But the rise of psychology, and the awareness of the soul as a personal experience rather than a religious concept, also followed, along with many sweeping changes in society associated with Pluto's Shiva-like properties. Pluto makes you wonder whether one is possible without the other.

Pluto is also associated with the god Dionysus, which is about revelry and ecstatic surrender, and the use of intoxicating substances and extreme activities to get there — things our current society pushes past all limits.

The phase of history when a planet emerges is like the birth script of the planet. Each new body that's discovered bears some connection to the world climate and cultural circumstances that surround its emergence. To give another example, Chiron surfaced at the height of an era of holistic philosophy, when natural healing and radical self-awareness were becoming more widely accepted. Chiron was discovered in the era of the human potential movement, and is in my mind the guiding star of the ideas of this movement — and also of the kinds of personal developments and crises that get us to consider using holistic means of growth and healing. Of note, Chiron's discovery in Taurus could be a comment on the mind-body nexus so crucial to any holistic

PLANET FILE: ERIS

Discoverers	Michael E. Brown, Chad A. Trujillo, David L. Rabinowitz
Discovery date, + place	January 5, 2005 11:20 am PST, Pasadena, CA
Discovery facility	644 Palomar Mountain/NEAT
Discovered in	Aries
Originally called	Xena
Minor Planet Catalogue No.	136199
Alternate designation	2003 UB313
Type of body	Dwarf planet
Category	Trans-Neptunian object (Scattered disc object)
Average Distance from Sun	67.6681 x Earth-Sun distance
Orbital period (P)	203,500 Earth days (557 Earth years)
Longitude (tropical)	ascending node: 5 Taurus 23 perihelion: 16 Libra 13 aphelion: 14 Aries 09

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PHOTO: DREXCEL NAJARIAN

tic process. Chiron is an intensely mental planet and Taurus is an intensely physical sign.

It is interesting that though Chiron was discovered in 1977, the earliest pre-discovery plate, that is, the first photo ever made (now called a precovery image), was taken in 1895 — the year that D.D. Palmer discovered *chiropractic*, a holistic medical practice named for the same Greek god that the planet Chiron was. After many years of obscurity, by the late 1970s chiropractic was becoming an accepted medical art, in part thanks to a chiropractor named Chester A. Wilk, who led a federal antitrust lawsuit against the

American Medical Association (AMA) to stop its discriminatory practices. Wilk has Chiron prominently placed on the mid-heaven of his natal chart, an angle dealing with both government and profession.

So we can at least propose that the astrological signature of Eris will bear some resemblance to whatever we say is happening now, and when the name was announced many people noticed the stunning archetypal alignment. We could say a lot about the prevailing condition of the world today, but certainly *discord* is one theme that comes to mind, the main subject over which the goddess Eris prevails. She was the one who basically started the

Trojan War. Our time in history is marked by discontinuity, chaos about the meaning of life, and much uncertainty about where an individual fits into it all. We live in a time of what seems like unending war, which shocks many people into numbness and some into radical awareness. And we do have a serious problem involving self-image, insecurity and vanity, all themes of the Eris mythology.

Clue 2 comes from the nickname, Xena, honoring a somewhat kitsch “Warrior Princess” television character. Though I’m not a devotee of this program (new episodes aired between 1995 and 2001), it’s probably a good example for both boys and girls to see a woman in the role of hero, protagonist, adventurer or one who otherwise stands up for what is right, takes no shit from anyone, and

wrestles sea monsters into submission. In the words of the script’s original plot summary, “Xena, a mighty warrior and healer, once led a band of outlaws that terrorized all of Greece. She has come to regret the harm she caused and, with her companion Gabrielle, now travels the countryside seeking adventure and fighting the forces of evil.”

Xena is not a feminist; she’s just well armed, sexually liberated and on a mission (you could call her post-feminist; such a character would have likely shocked the sensibilities of feminists a generation ago). Notably, she is polyamorous and bisexual, breaking the sexual conventions of both the gay and straight world. That a mainstream television character was not bound by conventional sexual norms is pretty amazing in itself, as is the fact that

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there was no moral trip associated with this, as there so often is. The Xena storyline might move from ancient Egypt one week to Bethlehem for the birth of Jesus the next, end up in the Short Hills Mall in New Jersey and then head off to Lesbos for further adventures. In Xena, we have an example of a *postmodern* character; something or someone not defined by linear ideas of what is possible, plausible, or what literature or drama are supposed to be. Time and its supposed rules are unimportant. What happened last week does not exactly matter, since it already happened and is thus of no real consequence. Some would say this is a stupid TV plot device, and others would say it's cool and modern, but really it's postmodern, that is, standing outside the supposedly neat, rational ideas of the (prior) modern world.

The Postmodern Crisis of Self

Whether we may recognize it or not, this quality of Xena speaks to our personal condition in many ways, particularly because our lives, as well as our ideas about life, tend to want for cohesiveness, clear shape and firm definition. Certainly, the way we live must be very confusing to our grandparents, though the noticeable roots of our current situation go back to their generation, at least, when the promise of the progress and the modern world were being belied by the alienation and other problems they were creating.

Identity, in our own times, is clearly slipping and sliding. Many people wonder what to say when someone asks them, "What do you do?" Often any particular response seems a lie. You might give the response that's the most appropriate to the situation, or the most rebellious. You might be embarrassed to say you work at Quickie Mart, but not ready to say you're a musician. Many people have several business cards, and several resumes, ready to use as appropriate. The correct answer to the question is often the correct answer for the situation. Shifting context is a dominant factor in the postmodern world, and it affects how we see and experience ourselves, as well as how we present ourselves to others.

In this respect, we are a product of the intellectual and spiritual chaos of our times — and also responding to the necessity to be diverse in our approach to life. At best, we are able to take advantage of the awesome potential that has been liberated by the lack of imposed definitions, and our freedom to constantly redefine ourselves in whatever context we may find ourselves. You no longer have to walk around telling yourself, "I'm a teacher, I'm a teacher." You might be a teacher by day and shamanic healer by night, and slowly your once rigid ego structure adapts to that diversity of flexible identities or focal points.

We exist in a world where we often need to make the rules up as we go along,

and noticing we have the ability to do just that can be liberating. Like it or not, usually we have little choice in the matter. There was a time when you would choose your career from a book in your guidance counselor's office, and people would actually expect you to stick to it. However, Wal-Mart purchased all those books from schools in 1981 and then promptly burned them in the parking lot of its world headquarters. Because we live in the postmodern world, you might actually believe that happened. Who knows, it may have.

Living in the post-career book world, we also find ourselves in a time when many people attempt to define themselves by their online profiles and personal ad listings, borrowing concepts such as branding, marketing taglines, headshots, and other public relations techniques to establish "who they are." Identity is actually experienced and explored as the "construction" that postmodern philosophers claim it to be, as we consciously assemble our personality presentation, borrowing traits and appearances from this or that idea, this or that celebrity, character, preference, look, and so on. We can "remake" ourselves instantly with a measure of impunity; we expect others to accept our "new self," if they don't, everyone moves on. But this does not exactly go to the core of self.

Within our private universe, we might attempt to define ourselves by getting our

settings right, aligning our playlists perfectly and establishing our supposedly unique cell phone ring tone. (It's disorienting when someone has the same ring tone as you, have you noticed? It's almost like they're taking something from us.) Notably, our relationship to technology is a crucial factor in postmodern existence. As philosopher Marshall McLuhan suggested of broadcast media, we create it, then it creates us. This constant revision, co-creation and constantly morphing relationship to the technology we surround ourselves with, or that is imposed on us, is associated with a sense of self that has no fixed point of reference, and in many ways is experienced as having no solid ground to stand on. But it is this very groundlessness that is the goal or aim of many spiritual or therapeutic paths, and which can be put to excellent use, because it means that an obstacle has been moved out of the way.

But that same obstacle can also function as a useful boundary or point of reference, and with it gone, we can both experience disorientation, and have some interesting opportunities. These, we have today.

We live in a time when many of us have an "online self" and a "real world self" (whether we intended this or not, and whether we notice or not), and we are sometimes more or less successful at constituting an ego identity or even a soul in cyberspace. How we integrate these two

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(or more) identities, and integrating our relationships to the people we know from either of them, is an ongoing challenge, and exciting opportunity for human interrelation, constantly pushing us to redefine what a “self” really is, and to see our-

some astronomers in Spain attempted to steal and take credit for another astronomical discovery by the Eris team prior to the announcement of Eris. The actual discoverers even fell for the scam at first, but their colleagues thought the coinci-

tory of consciousness, we can have no tangible or pre-fabricated definition of self; we can have “multiple selves”; we can “change our self”; we can steal a self, or try to. But none of this tells us who we really are. This, we still need to discover, and Eris feels like the point of focus, crisis or awareness that gets us there, the sense of groundlessness of being, and the portal to eventually finding the true essence of self.

This variability of self-concept corresponds to our having exceedingly few tangible definitions of family, and our choice to often live among family of choice rather than family of origin. After all, family of origin rarely accepts the fact that *people change* and grow. Family ties often tap us right back into our childhood dramas and can be exceedingly difficult for this reason. Along with a vague sense of self, many people have only a vague sense of what partnership is about, or should be about; many people are in crisis in their relationships, because the old models ain’t workin’; and some have a keen awareness of the need for a new kind of relationship that fits the dynamic-self model rather than the static self.⁶

We have no clear culturally sanctioned concept of God, and the sanctity of religious hierarchy is, to put it politely, not what it used to be (though the ego cult prevails effectively in many forms of religion, which lately tends to draw people in by something curiously seductive, known

as hatred). There exists tons of confusion about our relationship to society, and our society’s place in the world, on as far up, down or across as you would like to go. We seem to live in a world where nothing is true, and even if it is true, it doesn’t matter, and even if it matters, it doesn’t actually affect you.

Neither is anybody standing there telling you what a self is with any authority (people have more to say about the “higher self,” but this, too, is ambiguous and indicative of an absence of an actual sense of self, or self-awareness). While we’re at it, is there even such a thing as a self? Are these just decadent rambblings? Do I even know what I’m talking about? Who cares, if you’re having fun reading?

You may hear a lot about what your self is not, which just adds to the unmitigated confusion, which doesn’t matter anyway. Confusion is normal, and you may as well adopt a useful persona or two and surf the chaos. If you get tired of yourself, just open a new Gmail account. Frequently, it’s obvious what a huge game of charades life is, but few people break irony (most, ironically, are comedians). Which brings me to my Eris in Aries theory.

Eris in Aries: 1922-2044

Eris has been in Aries since 1922 (on and off alternating with Pisces until 1927, when it entered Aries to stay). Even if you weren’t born that way (just about everyone alive now was, however), you grew up

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selves from two or more perspectives. It is also possible, for the first time, to conceal our location on the planet, or to credibly claim existing in more than one location. This is another typically postmodern kind of experience.

Some people approach this environment and this potential by doing things like taking several different identities on a discussion board or in a chatroom, or by having many online identities to suit the different facets of who they feel they are. Many people have more than one website for the same reason.

Identity theft is another fact of life today, or at least something else to be paranoid about, and it’s worth noting that

dence of the “simultaneous discovery” of a tiny planet 10 billion miles from the Sun was a bit too much to be credible. The thieves were busted by searching computer logs on a third party server, and matching up IP addresses that had visited the website of the real discoverers to IP addresses in emails from the fraudulent discoverers. The Eris discovery team felt it had no choice but to announce the discovery of Eris before they were ready to do so, in order to prevent the discovery of Eris itself from being stolen. This history of cosmic identity theft crisis gets recorded into the birth script of Eris.⁵

In delineating Eris, this is all another way of hinting that at this point in the his-

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that way; just about everyone currently walking around, unless trying out for the Guinness Book of Records or an Inuit senior tribal elder, has Eris in Aries. Eris was discovered in Aries and still has about 10 degrees of that sign to cover before beginning its transition to Taurus in 2044 and completing it in 2048. That is a long transit.

For our era in history, Eris is an Aries phenomenon: a point where our definition of self is crystallized, or not, as the case may be. The first concept associated with Aries, the first sign of the zodiac, is “I Am.” Aries is the sign of personal initiative, self-concept, identity, and self-awareness. If Aries represents self, self-awareness or self concept, it does so in a time when that self is in crisis — and Eris epitomizes the nature of the crisis, and its opportunities, beautifully.

The other cardinal signs (Cancer, Libra and Capricorn) represent personal initiative in several other vital facets of life (security, relationships and personal mission, respectively). The Aries Point, the first degree of Aries (where the Western tropical zodiac aligns with the Eastern sidereal zodiac), is also the meeting place between the individual and the wider world. Its keynote is “the personal is political.” So Eris in Aries points to a prolonged crisis not only of identity, but also to a chaotic or discordant relationship between the individual and himself or herself, that individual’s community, soci-

ety and the world. There is clearly some tension involved in the statement, I Am.

But that tension is extremely rich with potential, indeed, it’s the place where many paths of therapy, self-discovery and spirituality ultimately strive to reach as a necessary prerequisite to what comes next.

Eris, which for us is synonymous with Eris in Aries, provokes us to become conscious of our ego structures and the faux or false identities we create, and to let go of them the moment they are no longer useful — easier said than done, but eventually done, nonetheless. I’m going to propose here that the aspect relationship of other planets to Eris, and the angles of the natal horoscope, will provide something of a map for how we may do that effectively. But at the least, I propose that Eris in Aries sums up the existential crisis of an individual in the postmodern world, where we strive to identify ourselves in a world where nothing is certain, nothing is known for sure, and the truth seems to always be changing. And we do so in awareness of a prior time, not long ago (the modern age), when our society authentically believed there was objective truth.

Once this groundless condition is seen and felt for what it is, some people will be compelled to go deeper within, and seek contact with core self, in effect beginning a lifetime journey to self-realization. Others will just zone out, and others will

freak out, and others will cling in a reactionary way to the truths of the past. Fortunately, thanks to the chaos of our times, that is, the breakdown of many

For a planet or any other kind of orbiting body to spend a century or more in a sign is indeed unusual, and an extremely new development. It is more reminiscent

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oppressive belief structures (if we are in the right place), we might have the psychic and cultural space to do that. But first we may have to address the structures that surround us, such as family, career, pressure from religion and so forth, any of which can bind us to old self-definitions and self-concepts.

Then there is the issue of peer pressure. To a real extent, when a person becomes self-aware, everyone around them has to deal with it, and that tends to hold down the self-awareness of individuals who are not strong enough to instigate or endure such a collective crisis. Fortunately, because Eris spends so long in one sign, to some real extent everyone is potentially facing the same issues — though some will be aware of this and some will not; some will be willing to acknowledge it and some will not.

of a fixed star, a subject modern astrology knows very little about because it’s practically ignored. Pluto was recently considered the most distant and slowest moving planet; its orbit is about 248 years, and it spends between 14 and 20 years in one astrological sign. So every generation that comes along has Pluto in a new sign, with original challenges, new ideas about what it means to evolve into personhood, and other factors associated with the shades and tones of the world climate that color us, that bind generations by themes and sense of purpose, and to which we all contribute.

Eris is the first planet we’re considering as a potentially major factor where nearly every person alive has the same placement by sign. And the timing of this century-plus transit coincides with the decay of the “modern world” and our sense of the

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“modern self” into something that’s amorphous, confusing, upending, chaotic and potentially liberating, rich with questions and, if you’re into it, extremely interesting and exciting. Assuming you have the time and resources available (and the courage) to stop and wonder, was there ever a better time in history to ask, “Who am I?” Or maybe this is the most pointless question of all, because as long as we’re using old reality frameworks, it has no tangible answer — but the quest seems worth taking.

Redefining the Edge

If astrology and the positions of the planets are a reflection of the psyche, let’s consider what that means today. In 1800, there were seven known planets: Mercury, Earth, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn and Uranus. Uranus was the first planet discovered by science (in 1781), the first planet of what is called the modern era. In 1801, Ceres was discovered, and became the second. By 1807, three additional small planets were discovered (Pallas, Juno and Vesta, respectively), and as a result Ceres and its cohorts were reclassified as asteroids. Asteroid discoveries continued steadily, to the present day.

By 1977, there were nine major planets; Neptune was discovered in 1846 and Pluto in 1930, and nothing after that was counted. Chiron was discovered in 1977, and the next year was given minor planet catalogue number 2,060 (a total mostly

comprised of various kinds of asteroids, all of them located in the inner solar system). Chiron was the first body besides a comet discovered that moved in and out of the inner solar system, crossing the orbit of Saturn and extending nearly out to Uranus. But it’s an exceptionally large comet (known as a proto-comet), believed to have been pulled in from the outer solar system in a region where there are currently many discoveries happening.

Let’s skip ahead a quarter century, remembering that there were 2,060 minor planets in 1977. The discoveries mounted through the 80s and 90s, and Varuna was discovered in 2000 and given minor planet number catalogue 20,000 (a place of honor — it was a major discovery). Two years later, Quaoar was discovered and was given minor planet number 50,000 (another place of honor, as it too was a major discovery). As of the end of 2006, there are about 150,000 planets in the minor planet catalogue, and tens of thousands more pending inclusion in the catalogue once their orbits are firmly established.

Notice that this is an exponential rate of growth, too fast to actually comprehend, too diverse to pin any fixed meaning on, and impossible to assimilate using any prior method of using astrology. You cannot make up an acronym to memorize a hundred thousand or more planets. Most astrologers cope with the problem by working on the assumption that these

things must either be meaningless, or we cannot actually know what they mean. However, regardless of what any individual planet means, if astrology is a picture of the human psyche and its relationship to the cosmos, the first and most basic principle of astrology, then we are being confronted with something that we can’t really comprehend using an old reality framework. Astrology textbooks of the “modern” style — neatly defining each planet in each house and sign, and in aspect to every other planet — would be impossible to write in this climate. Neither would they be “accurate,” because one cannot say definitively what a planet discovered two years ago “means,” particularly in relationship to every other planet. And furthermore, where do you start? (The answer, as with many endeavors, is you start anywhere.)

So, the cosmos itself presents a picture of a psyche in an identity crisis; yet as the music of the spheres is going faster and faster, most practitioners are sitting on the sidelines, occasionally tapping their feet. But here is another image.

Many of these discoveries are on the edges of the solar system, and the archetypal idea we have about the edge is always interesting. In ancient times, it was Saturn: structure, authority, the lord of time, sometimes depicted as the grim reaper. This was the image of a firm edge to reality, outside which existed the firmament. Visitors from outside, comets, were

almost always construed as ill omens. At the beginning of the modern age, the age of science, the edge became Uranus, the planet of invention and technology — and we lived through an era of rapid industrialization and scientific progress that has perhaps exceeded anyone’s expectations. Then for a short while, the edge was characterized by Neptune, when image began to take over; photography, cinema and advertising increased in power radically at this time, with drugs and other chemicals (Neptune themes) becoming increasingly important to individuals and to industry.

Then, beginning in the 1930s, the edge became Pluto: a different kind of death than the individual meeting with the end that Saturn offers — megadeath. While there is more to Pluto than this, much more, we cannot erase from history the rise of Hitler beginning just three years after the discovery, and after his successful defeat by the allies, the rise of Stalin, whose gulag system dwarfed Hitler’s concentration camp system. Indeed, the wars of the 20th century have not ended as we begin to conclude the first decade of the 21st century. The deep cynicism that I can only describe as, “death is all that matters, and death does not matter” has in the age of Pluto defined the edge of consciousness. Or, as my therapist Joe once remarked, “Death works.” One way death worked was as a means of defining the supposedly ultimate fate of a human

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being, and then a personality being constructed in large measure around this concept — known as Thanatos in Freudian psychology — be it through denial, fear or manipulation.

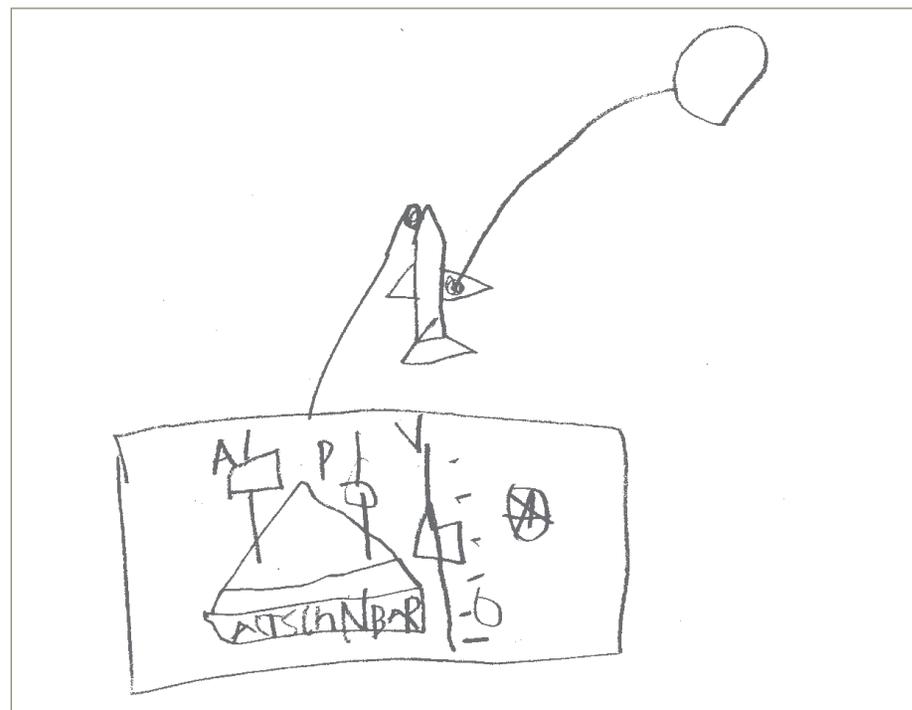
Yet now the unprecedented number of new discoveries at the edge of the solar system defines the edge as a kind of haze, not a tangible barrier, a cliff, bottom line or looming threat. There are now as many ideas about death, and the life of the soul, and about what is beyond this reality, as there are plutinos, cubewanos, other Kuiper objects and scattered disk objects⁷ occupying the region of space in which Pluto was long thought to be the only resident. What this has done, in effect, is blur the boundary between the consciousness of the solar system (our local model of consciousness) and that of the galaxy around it (a more macroscopic model of consciousness). In a typically postmodern way, the clearly defined edge, and the clear definition of what the edge means, is melting.⁸ That, in turn, points to something deep within us opening up. We now have psychic mobility, and a choice of where to park our consciousness at the edge or inner edge, or maybe in the spirit of the Little Prince, we will visit many possibilities.

Certainly, we have that option, and the opportunity to reach beyond any previously thought of idea of what a self is, into something far beyond, and rich with the potential for discovery of a more

encompassing experience of self. Who will take that opportunity and who will basically just do their best to survive in the fertile chaos that defines our era? It may be a matter of will, initiative, chance or having the guts to follow a calling: in short, the same things that have always led certain people to self-actualize regardless of the times they were living in.

Considering for a moment the sexual aspect of Pluto, it is clear that while sexual instinct was considered in the later modern period (from Freud onward) a kind of indelible parallel bottom line to death, many people are now reluctant to admit this, or even experiment with it. Therapy traditions, which at one time did effective work leveraging off of sexual instincts, are developing techniques that look at the numinous or indefinable nature of that bottom line, rather than working with something considered by many to be so crude and basic. This offers a degree of freedom — and yet as we shall see in the next section, resisting or denying the deeply instinctual and primal nature of human consciousness has serious risks.

Yet interestingly, despite all these advances in astronomy, no one discovery since Pluto had compelled planetary scientists to deal squarely with the issue of planetary definition, a controversy that most astrologers avoided by pretending it wasn't really a question. Presumably, as astronomers (ones who "name the stars"), this type of naming and



DRAWING: LUKAS TANTON OPPENHEIMER

IN A TYPICALLY POSTMODERN WAY, THE CLEAR EDGE, AND THE CLEAR DEFINITION OR BOUNDARY OF WHAT THE EDGE MEANS, IS MELTING. WE NOW HAVE A CHOICE OF WHERE TO PARK OUR CONSCIOUSNESS AT THE EDGE, OR MAYBE IN THE SPIRIT OF THE LITTLE PRINCE, WE WILL VISIT MANY POSSIBILITIES.

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categorization is their primary function. Since the 1992 discovery that Pluto was not alone in its region of space (this was the year another planet, called 1992 QB1, was discovered, proving the existence of the Kuiper Belt), the question had been quietly brewing. Finally, Eris popped the cork.

Astronomy officially entered the post-modern era. The third of what are called the “modern planets,” specifically, Pluto, was reclassified as a new type of planet, a dwarf, and it became the first postmodern planet. Ceres was resurrected from two centuries of obscurity and added to the mix; and the first postmodern discovery was given a name and a clear place in a newly ordered solar system. This, in turn, has opened the door for many other dwarf planets to be recognized, and it will be interesting to see what will be the next planet included. But one thing is certain: Eris disrupted the established order sufficiently to compel astronomy to catch up with itself. It remains to be seen at what rate astrology will begin to take the cues, or embark on the adventure. Surely, many astrologers are personally involved in the kinds of spiritual and mystical advances that Eris portends, as well as the quest for a new concept of identity and its relationship to the larger world. Whether they are able or willing to apply their craft to this is another question.

The Shadow of Eris

In Greek mythology, Eris was the goddess of discord, who, because of her

troublemaking tendencies, was not welcome at a big wedding party to which all the other gods and goddesses had been invited. There is plenty of interesting background, but the upshot is that Eris retaliated to being snubbed in a clever and exploitative way.

She inscribed a golden apple with the phrase, “To the Fairest,” and rolled it into the door of the soiree. In this gesture, she is revealed to be something of a master psychologist, if a sinister one. Seeing the golden apple, the assembled gods and goddesses, in their vanity, held a pageant to determine who the fairest would be. But the three contestants who were competing (Athena, Aphrodite and Hera) offered the hapless judge, Paris, different bribes. Aphrodite, one of the contestants, tempted Paris with the most beautiful woman in the world. That turned out to be the Helen of Troy, who was married at the time, among other issues. The result of Eris’s retaliatory prank was the Trojan War, the equivalent of an all-encompassing world war by today’s standards.

Here, the personal became political in the most catastrophic kind of way: Eris

felt hurt that she was not invited to the party, which we might count as vanity or just a touch of humanity. That hurt transposed to vengeance. She then took advantage of the vanity of her fellow gods and goddesses, anticipating what they would do. Knowing she would be able to wreak some chaos, perhaps she underestimated just how much. She then stood by as her seemingly small gesture escalated into unmitigated world war, as thousands died and indeed as the world descended into darkness and discord.

The Greek myths offer a clever explanation for just about everything. But what, exactly, are we explaining? How the war started, or how humans came to be this way? In the first instance, is Eris to blame, or is vanity at fault? Well, the two support one another. Someone intent on getting revenge and inciting chaos exploits what you might call a *narcissism wound*, which exists on both an individual and cultural level as a real vulnerability.



COLLAGE: DEIRDRE TANTON; PHOTO: DREXCEL NAJARIANI; HELEN OF TROY BY EVELYN DE MORGAN; 1898

This vulnerability seems to be so inherent in the current version of the human personality that it’s difficult to see, even being so ubiquitous that it’s fully transparent — but then, the Greek mythmakers, who could evidently see all, were onto the issue a long time ago. Note that in the myth, nothing is really exempt from being drawn into the pageant — jealous goddess of marriage, Hera, who you might expect; the goddess of love, Aphrodite, who you can figure would go along; and then Athene, the goddess of protection and wisdom, perhaps the most surprising of all, but indeed, there is a word of caution how even these things are susceptible to vanity. Eris broke the human experience down to its least common denominator: vanity, vulnerability, and insecurity.

However, in the postmodern personality structure, we have a special kind of problem. The earlier “modern personality” came with a double mind, or rather, double bind: on one hand, it made the promise that every person is autonomous, unique and special. But on the other, the cosmos is understood (thanks to science) to be so vast and impersonal that the individual’s role could hardly matter less.⁹ Unless, of course, you are very special and very famous or powerful — but even that fame or power is as transient and ephemeral as all the kings laying under grass mounds, the great generals in their cold and silent tombs, and the great stars of yesterday in their graves in California.

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Yet still that thirst for specialness and uniqueness and power persists, to the degree of a mystical longing that is indeed answered and used by those who recognize it and can indeed use it to take power of their own.

The narcissism wound, which can magnify into a vast collective shadow, takes many forms, and mainly it's exploited by marketing, politics and religion, in seemingly different ways. Marketing promises that you will be that special someone and find fulfillment if you buy this product. You will be the most beautiful, revered, and so on, if you wear this watch, drive that car, or wear this perfume. In many ways, this drives the world economy, and the resulting consumerism is driving the world ever closer to the brink of environmental disaster.

Politics, for its part, exploits the sense of powerlessness (the "little man" phenomenon), or yearning for individual power, and promises to deliver that power — which typically arrives in the (projected) form of a political leader, one often bent on making war or stealing vast resources that belong to the whole population. Wilhelm Reich suggested that what was really a sexual longing (echo of Mars and Aries) transposed itself into a *mystical* longing, which was answered in the form of politicians who presented themselves as gods. We basically allow these supposed gods to get away with anything they want. They are, after all, powerful enough

to do so and it seems instinctual to worship them.

As for religion, it tends to play on the individual ego's feeling that it's worthless, or that its existence is somehow wrong. This makes people an easy mark. If you can invoke guilt and shame, you have instant control over people.

We have the Eris principle at work in two of the most critical turning points of the postmodern world: the Reichstag fire, which essentially was the turning point in Nazi fascism, leading to laws that suppressed civil rights and dissent and eventually to the Holocaust; and a strikingly similar event, the "attacks" of Sept. 11, 2001. In both cases, a chain reaction was started, and political leaders enjoyed and benefited from the ridiculously disproportionate repercussions.

As has been said, "The truth is the first casualty of war." The Big Lie, as described by Hitler — essentially, his proposition that people will more readily believe a big lie than a small one — preys on people who do not trust themselves, or who seek to fulfill some other longing or personal void with nationalism, militarism and politics. A lie is also easier and more convenient to grasp than the many fragments of truth that surround and confound us, few of them obviously presenting themselves as valid. The more dismantled our old concept of self becomes, the more attractive are the lures of deceptions that promise us some sense of

wholeness, and some common ground from which to relate.

"Eris may be connected to historical events, conflicts or long-term feuds," writes Lynda Stevens, "that may lead to 'post-traumatic' cultural issues, the origins of which may be forgotten later." Examples might be the Inquisition (in which upwards of 40,000 people were killed across Europe under church authority, ostensibly for being witches), or the Holocaust. We tend to think of these things as being over, but they have implications and ripple effects extending down the generations, probably encoded in the most accessible surface layers of DNA, and also through long-lasting institutions to the present day. Eris may be related to these undercurrents of history, particularly as they define our notion of self, based on traumatic (but forgotten) cultural experiences.

Both the Inquisition and the Holocaust had sexual overtones, as during the Inquisition you could be tried as a witch for raising the sexual desire of a man, or for allegedly doing so, and most of the victims of the witch-hunts were women. This was construed to be some kind of mystical power that could only be applied by sorcery. The Nazis, for their part, were famous for their sexual experiments on both men and women, though women seemed to bear the brunt of Nazi sexual cruelty and curiosity.

Here we have an interesting link

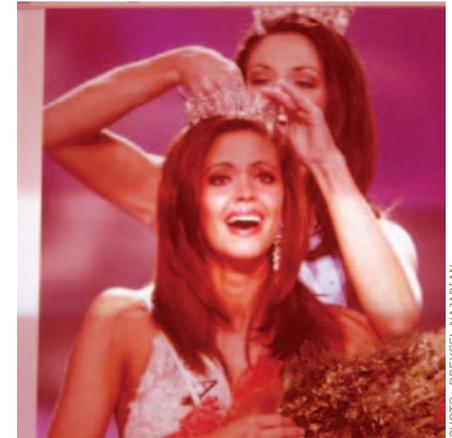


PHOTO: DREXCEL NAJARIAN

**THE NARCISSISM WOUND,
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between Eris and Mars in its role as the god of war, Mars as the god of passion and desire, and Aries, the sign of self-identity. If Eris is an inherent part of Aries in our time of history, it will be involved in that nexus of sexuality, aggression, deification of the ego, and desire. And at a time when the narcissism wound is so clearly pronounced, and preyed upon, this can be dangerous.

On this subject, we have in the myth the theme of sexual shadow, which is capitalized on by marketing, politics and religion, and which in many ways dominates our negative perceptions of ourselves — and of the opposite sex. In large measure, denial of our sexual instincts, and the extent to which they are preyed upon by almost every powerful institution, creates an environment where a lot of blame goes around, and where the pristine images of “sexy” that we see in advertising reveal, when you look behind the scenes, something much more sinister.

Pluto and Eris (Pluto, the myth and the planet, and Eris, the myth and the idea) seem to vibrate with the themes of the “scary woman” and the “scary man.” We hear people say this — they like a person, they might go out with them, but they’re “too scary,” which probably translates to, “they’re so attractive that they evoke my insecurities.” Many men and women, conversely, report the feeling of being scary to the opposite sex merely because they are intelligent, alive and aware, though

they always seem to be searching for a plausible explanation for why they know they are attractive when they are often treated as if they are repelling or appalling.

There are other shapes lurking in the shadows as we follow this theme deeper into the brain crevices of humanity. Women in shadow form are often perceived as sneaky and manipulative, but shrewd and cunning, a theme highlighted in the Eris myth. This is, at least, a common archetype of those (men and women included) who feel that women are untrustworthy. The golden apple that Eris rolls in the door has an echo of the Eve myth: of female knowledge, of original sin, and how it’s “all the woman’s fault.” A surface level message of the story is that women are treacherous, and that smart women are bad/scary/witches.

In contrast, Pluto, Eris’s counterpart at the far edge of the solar system, seems to ground the opposite shadow energy: the assertion, or perception, that “all men are sexual aggressors,” sometimes stated as “all men are pigs.” Pluto of mythology kidnapped Persephone, the daughter of Demeter, and took her down to Hades; indeed, kidnapping was his *modus operandi*. We get many images of this metaphor in the current world: men will fuck you whether you really want it or not, so you may as well let it happen; or they will fuck you and then kill you. They will give you a disease. If you are lucky, they will just rape

you and leave you alone. Feminist author Inga Muscio says that whenever she hears about a woman getting murdered, she assumes she was raped as well.

All of these things become part of the

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cultural image of “what a man is.” In less extreme situations, men “just want what they want, and that’s it, who cares about the results” (i.e., emotional devastation,

pregnancy). In another common projection of sexual shadow, sexual desire is “all their fault.” (At different eras in history, one gender or the other takes all the blame for sexual desire, while the other is the passive victim. In our era, desire is presumed to be the fault of men, and women are typically construed to be the passive victims — despite how much work they may do or money they may spend to be sexy, attractive and provocative).

What is perhaps interesting to consider is that Pluto was discovered in a feminine sign (Cancer), and Eris in a masculine one (Aries). The implication is that either gender can make, or be subjected to, the projections of the other, or the image of evil project onto its own gender. Sexual projection works in any direction you like; women will blame other women for being attractive or seductive, men will accuse (or try and convict) other men, men and women will accuse one another. Here, we have an echo of the cultural trauma of the Inquisition, where arousing desire was perceived as a magic or demonic act, and evidence of loyalty to the devil.

We often pursue and attempt to establish our shadow beliefs about the opposite sex with conviction — but as Robert Anton Wilson, one of the heroes of the Discordian religion (whose goddess is Eris), says, “convictions make convicts.”

We certainly proceed through life with many convictions about existence, our-

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selves and the people around us, grasping for certainty even as we are reminded every day that we just don't know, and fending off disturbance at every turn. Eris is saying we need to invite some of that discord into the party of consciousness, and dance with her.

Epilogue: Eris and Alienation

CONNECTING the dots, measuring the stars and looking inside myself, my impression is that Eris is about healing alienation and finding our core self in the process. From where I stand in the world, I hear many stories of people who feel alienated, like they belong nowhere, belong to no one, have no real purpose, and in a sense, like they are no one. This is a struggle that engulfs so many people so deeply, they are only dimly aware of it, because it's a color everything is painted.

This alienation reaches into our relationships, because when you don't feel like you know who you are, it's difficult to relate to another in a satisfying way. Self-searching can be satisfying in a relationship, but usually that counters the stability we seek with our partners, and calls for unusual honesty. If it works out that you are relating to another person who has a strong sense of who they are, you may experience disorientation, resentment, jealousy or envy that they seem to have something that you do not.

One consequence of all our scientific technological advances has been the slow stripping away of meaning from our lives,

even to the point where we no longer miss it. But when we do miss it, often we can't find the meaning in events outside ourselves, nor in the emotions and mental experiences we have within.

Our society extols fame and celebrity, specialness, glory and grandeur, and bestows wealth and privilege on people of exceedingly little accomplishment or integrity -- then projects this back in our faces as what we're supposed to want or worship. Many are starving for substance and self-awareness, and we sit down to a plastic dinner.

Much how Pluto speaks of the soul, and the shadow material that emerges as a result of identifying with, or claiming, one's soul -- an elusive concept for many -- Eris seems to be about the equally elusive self, and making contact with oneself. This is not the self in the sense of ego, or construction of personality, but rather self as in who we discover ourselves to be when we align soul and ego, personality and spirit, 'inner me' and 'outer me', the person I am and the one I dream of being.

My sense is that working with Eris as an astrological archetype, that is, in self-study and chart work with astrology, will help us weave the golden thread of consciousness through these many facets and fragments of what we call self, be they true or false, past life or present, concealed or exposed. Borrowing from Simone de Beauvoir, one cannot take on the challenge of life when one is at war with within. But worse than

this, we tend to deny our own feeling of alienation, and of course, that wreaks havoc. I would say where to begin working with Eris is first by making friends with the part of you who feels like you do not belong, and taking it from there. If you can do it, maybe someone else can too. — *Additional Research: Tracy Delaney, Mandy Hall, Priya Kale, Kirsti Melto.*

Notes

[1] Pluto was discovered as a result of the search for "Planet X," but is not considered to be Planet X, because its mass is not sufficient to explain certain factors in the orbit of vastly larger Neptune. A Centaur, 1994 TA, is currently referred to by some astrologers as Pylonor, but this name is neither in mainstream use nor recognized by the wider culture, it is known only by a very small group of astrologers, and its use, while for the most part accepted, is still controversial.

[2] Eris is not really being quite so noticed at all. I was recently on the phone with one of the better-known astrology software development companies, which *did not know the name of Eris*, nor the story of the change of status of Pluto. In an email, they mistakenly referred to it as "Eros" and said they would put it on their list of possible points to include in a future edition of their software. On another level, it is easy to appreciate their frustration, given the number of new discoveries that have been announced the past five years, but still, the Eris story was difficult to miss, even making page one of *The Wall Street Journal*.

[3] Spring; Dunquin Series; *Prometheus the Awakener* by Richard Tarnas, 1995.

[4] Regarding the Symbol Grounding Problem,

the Wiki continueth, "Objects cannot be symbols autonomously; symbols are elements in symbol systems. The meanings of the symbols in a symbol system are systematically interrelated and systematically interpretable. Symbols are combined and manipulated on the basis of formal rules that operate on their (arbitrary) shapes, not their meanings; i.e., the rules are syntactic, not semantic. Yet the syntactically well-formed combinations of symbols are semantically interpretable. (Think of words, combined and recombined to form sentences that all have different meanings, but are systematically interrelated with one another.)"

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Symbol_grounding

[5] At around the same time Eris was being discovered, another discovery was in the works — that of 2003 EL61, nicknamed Santa. This is an unusual football shaped planet probably wider across than Pluto, but squished a bit. Mike Brown reports on his web page that the discovery data for Santa were stolen and the discovery claimed by someone else first; this incident prompted them to announce the discovery of Eris before they had planned to do so:

<http://www.gps.caltech.edu/~mbrown/planetlila/>

"According to our web server logs, these observing logs were accessed on July 26, 2005 by a computer at the Instituto de Astrofisica in Spain. Less than two days after this computer accessed the observing logs, the same computer was used to send email officially claiming the discovery by P. Santos-Sanz and J.-L. Ortiz at the Instituto de Astrofisica (see detailed timeline here

<http://www.gps.caltech.edu/~mbrown/planetlila/ortiz>). At the time of the announcement we truly believed that they had no prior knowledge that we had been observing the object, and we truly believed that they had not used our data to make the announcement of the discovery, but other people found the coincidence suspicious. Shortly after their announcement, however, we

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realized that all of our observing records — including those about what is now known as 2003 UB313, the tenth planet — were unexpectedly public, and made the decision to prematurely announce the discovery of 2003 UB313 that same afternoon by a press conference. We were unhappy about having to forgo normal scientific protocol and announce the discovery with no corresponding scientific paper, but under the circumstances we felt we had no choice.

[6] One response to this has been the development of something called polyamory, or responsible non-monogamy, as an established relationship mode. This began to gain popularity in the early 1960s, in part based on the publication of the book *Stranger in a Strange Land* by Robert A. Heinlein. Polyamory is an umbrella term covering a diversity of relationship styles that are not based on a rigid monogamous structure, but where sexual exchange, honesty about other relationships, and good old fashioned commitment are involved. One of the keynotes of polyamory is honoring the diversity of relationship styles that exist, and supporting the idea that each person can find a way of relating to others that is right for them.

[7] Pluto's puppies come in a few colors and breeds. Things that inhabit the vast region beyond Neptune include those that are in a similar orbit to Pluto (called plutinos); ones that resemble the first discovery beyond Pluto, which was 1992 QB1 (called cubewanos, a pun on *q-b-one*); other occupants of the Kuiper Belt; and objects a further region of space, what is called the Scattered Disk, including Eris. There is a mostly-adhered to naming scheme, which includes giving plutinos the names of underworld gods or goddesses, and cubewanos and Scattered Disk objects the names of deities of creation or resurrection.

[8] While I have in previous articles discussed the moving edge of the solar system and its implications for astrology, it was Tarnas who pointed out in a recent interview that this dissolving of boundaries, and the associated uncertainty, are specifically postmodern phenomena, a model of what is happening to the mind as we experience a breakdown of many forms of barriers that we were previously accustomed to. Recent astronomical developments symbolized by the edge of the solar system melting into a haze of little planets suggests a way in which our minds are merging with the cosmic order, and reaching past previously imagined membranes of our consciousness into the open space of the galaxy.

[9] The double-bind condition that we face today, where we have been delivered as supposedly autonomous, self-aware beings into a "modern world" that simultaneously seems to not care about us, was first introduced, much more eloquently, by Richard Tarnas in his first book, *The Passion of the Western Mind*. The split is a significant one; on the one hand, we are told we have substantial if not total control over our destiny. On the other, we have a great deal of evidence to surmise that we have no influence whatsoever, a condition that Tarnas proposes is analogous to how a child grows up to become schizophrenic after experiencing an abusive, negligent or non-responsive early environment.

*Special Note.

A Centaur planet called Asbolus is a good example of how it's possible to infer the function or archetype of a planet. Asbolus is the fourth named Centaur, discovered in 1995 with an orbit of 76 years. It was named at the suggestion of astrologers, the second planet in history to have this distinction (Nessus, another Centaur, was the first). What I kept noticing about Asbolus is that it would appear prominently in the charts of people who had endured terrible experiences as children, such as hiding behind the couch for safety as their parents would fight brutally. From this, it's possible to infer that prominent Asbolus is associated with such traumas, which is true, but what I began to recognize is that I was talking to the survivors, that is, the people who had made it through those events relatively unscathed, and who had become functional adults.

The name translates from Greek as "carbon dust." All forms of life have two things in common, carbon-based biology and the imperative to survive. My current delineation of Asbolus sounds something like this: "Survival and the recognition of having survived. Deep contact with something organic and essential -- the ability to endure and even thrive despite it all. Protection from victimhood. The blessing of protection even when it seems like none is there, such as in the story 'Footsteps!'"

Let's consider how two other astrologers have delineated Asbolus. Costa Rican minor planet specialist Juan Revilla's keywords include: preacher, magician, dreams, mist, fog, clairvoyance, penetrating, hiding secrets, mystery, conspiracy. Philip Sedgwick, a specialist in Centaurs and galactic points, is a little more explicit: "This Centaur insists that one always, always must follow their intuition. Typically, real life circumstances demand their payment for failure to adhere to instinct. Leading charges against causes not worth engaging bring short circuits of life efforts and a significant loss of energy."