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# THE ASTRO-LOGIC OF THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

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## An Hermetic Approach

### Seven deadly sins, seven planets

It is obvious to assume a relationship between the seven deadly sins and the seven planets in classical astrology. Those who search for more information on this quickly come across very different interpretations and interpretations.<sup>1</sup>

Christianity is not the only source, but it is an influential one. Who does not know the story of Eve and the apple, the original sin in this religion? It is assumed that Christian texts on sins draw from older traditions (Bloomfield 1941, p. 121). Sins are also mentioned in Hermetic texts. These texts make an explicit connection with cosmological and astrological concepts. This makes these texts of interest to astrologers.

In this article, I take a closer look at the seven deadly sins and their counterparts-the virtues-and link them to the seven planets in classical astrology. This sometimes yields connections you wouldn't expect at first glance. On closer inspection, they do turn out to be astro-logical: the seven deadly sins -and virtues- are specific manifestations of planetary qualities.

### The soul's journey through the spheres

In Hermetic writings, we come across the image of the human soul travelling through the eight spheres (the sphere of the fixed stars and the seven spheres of the planets) on its way to earth, picking up something at each of the planets, which is returned after incarnation, when the soul returns to its source. In this image, the cosmos forms the link between our world of matter (the earth), and the world of pure spirit (let's say God). The seven planets are stops the soul makes on its way to the netherworld (and on

the way back). At each of these stops, the soul absorbs qualities that make life in this region of existence possible and which are released on return to the spirit (purification in Christianity).

Planets are considered animated in this view; they are 'intermediate gods' (Daimons), possessing both good and bad qualities. They have a dual nature, just like human souls: on the one hand, they are part of the eternal, indivisible world of spirit; on the other hand, they live in a material body separated from other bodies. Each of the seven planets shows specific manifestations of this connection between spirit and matter.

### Benefic and malefic effect: the soul tends to spirit and/or matter

The most basic tendencies of the soul in matter relate to the spirit-matter duality: to what extent does it connect with each of these realities? Think of Plato's image of the soul as a horseman trying to keep two horses in check: one horse wants to go up (to the spirit), the other down (into the substance). Sins are all the tendencies of the soul that prefer the material to the spiritual. Virtues are the soul tendencies that prefer the spiritual (God) to the 'temptations' of all bodily matters. Cardinal sins and virtues refer per sphere (planet) to the lowest and highest manifestation of that sphere. The benefic and malefic action of planets, forms an astrological elaboration of this idea.

## Planets, sins and virtues

In Hermetic texts, such as the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*, we find various indications of the existence of good and evil spirits in the cosmos, which, through the stars and planets they rule, each influence the human soul in its own way. There is no unequivocal attribution of these forces to planets. In one passage in the *Corpus Hermeticum* (CH, 25) we read which material properties the soul gives off to the various spheres after the death of the body: to the Moon it gives off the capacity for growth and diminishment, to Mercury the cunningness, to Venus the covetousness, to the Sun the outward show of dominion, to Mars the rash folly, to Jupiter the evil urges of wealth and to Saturn the lie that sets traps.

The description that follows is based on a personal interpretation. I appeal to historical sources on the one hand (in many ancient texts capital sins are linked to specific planets), but I also appeal to astro-logic.

### Moon

*Sin: gluttony*

*Virtue: abstinence*

The Moon is about nutrition and the cycle of growth in matter. Part of this cycle involves the absorption of nutrients from the earth to achieve material growth (waxing moon), after which the organism begins to bear fruit (full moon) and material shrinkage sets in (waning moon; Dutch astrologer Mellie Uyldert refers to this phase of material shrinkage as spiritual growth). We can also interpret the cycle in terms of the uptake and release of natural nutrients. In gluttony, the focus is one-sidedly on absorbing nutrients, even though the body no longer needs them. Abstinence (fasting) restores the balance and allows the soul to shift its focus to nourishing the mind, allowing spiritual growth to take place.

## Mercury

*Sin: greed*

*Virtue: generosity*

At first glance, greed and Mercury seem to have little in common, but in the polarity of owning/keeping versus giving away, we do see a Mercurial theme of exchange emerging. In the myths, Mercury steals from the gods, then crafts what he has stolen (or cunningly obtained) and then resells it to mortals. Translated into spirit-matter duality: Mercury obtains spiritual qualities from the gods which he converts into things that are materially valuable. In the cycle, he exchanges these again for things that are spiritually valuable. In other words, an exchange takes place between values of matter and values of spirit. Greed indicates that the values of the substance are placed above those of the spirit, the temporal above the eternal. As a result, the exchange mechanism comes to a halt and the soul's connection with the spirit is lost. Mercury loses its wings, so to speak. Generosity restores the balance between taking and giving (by passing on what has been obtained).

## Venus

*Sin: Lust*

*Virtue: Chastity (Love)*

Like gluttony and greed, lust is a sin that indicates a focus on material needs. In Christianity, these three are also called sins of lust (the sins of the flesh). If we contrast lust with love, love is characterised by connection and the removal of duality. Lust, on the other hand, is characterised by an affirmation of separation: physical lust, after all, is aimed at satisfying one's own (separated) body. It is actually a Martian manifestation of Venus. The self-centredness of lust is opposed to the altruism of love. Love is psychogenetic, i.e. it forms (the) living soul, lust is a prerequisite for procreation, the maintenance of the species in matter. The tradition contrasts chastity as a virtue with lust. Chastity puts sexuality at the service of a higher spiritual goal: love and union.

## Sun

*Sin: envy (dissatisfaction)*

*Virtue: kindness (satisfaction)*

Envy is the first spiritual sin. Whereas in the previous three sins the emphasis is on fulfilling material needs (food, possessions/money and sex), with this type of sin the emphasis is on the spiritual values themselves, in particular on behaviour contrary to them. For this reason, one might consider them sins of a higher order. They are called sins of the soul in Christianity.

As with Mercury and greed, it is initially difficult to see the connection between Sun and envy. A Dutch proverb brings relief: 'to begrudge someone the light in their eyes'. The Sun is the light of life, the primary life-giving force. Envy means that this power is not granted to the other, the other is not allowed to have the good life. The psychological origin lies in the fact that the envious one does not see his own light, it

shines -in Biblical terms- under the bushel. Envy is thus a sin that stems from a lack of awareness (light, sun) of one's own fullness and completeness.

Note that with this sin, a social dimension makes its appearance. While the first three sins focus on one's own body, here the sin focuses outward, on one's relationship with others. Kindness is the 'social medicine' against envy. In some variants, contentment is also mentioned as a virtue, which we can think of as being kind to oneself.

## Mars

*Sin: revenge*

*Virtue: patience*

This too is a (spiritual) sin with a social component. That revenge belongs to Mars is no surprise to astrologers. In many ancient texts, the 'sin emphasis' is on its fiery and impulsive nature. This explains why patience is contrasted with revenge as a virtue. It seems strange that Mars' highest virtue is to curb his potentially fiery and impatient nature. My suspicion is that the explanation must be sought in the malefic action of this planet. With this planet, matter rules over spirit (remember the glyph: cross over circle). Growth and maintenance in the material realm thus prevail. Therefore, the virtue of this planet consists in curbing, at least in part, its natural tendencies.

In my view, the sin of vengeance is mirrored by that of Venus. Whereas with Venus the sin consists of a rather Martial expression of that planet (lust), here we see a rather Venusian elaboration of Mars: instead of focusing on self-preservation, the emphasis is on damaging the other person's power to maintain themselves. Revenge mostly indicates an inability to manifest Martian powers - such as survival, self-centredness and standing up for self-interest.

*Fun fact: women from Mars and men from Venus*

Revenge, the Venusian expression of Mars, is traditionally attributed more often to women than to men, while lust, the martial expression of Venus, is more often attributed to men. Therefore, if there is any truth in this, women are also from Mars and men are also from Venus 😊.

## Jupiter

*Sin: pride, vanity*

*Virtue: modesty (self-knowledge)*

Pride is also a spiritual sin. It is generally considered the highest sin a human being can commit. This sin too involves relation, but unlike envy and anger, it does not concern the relationship between people, but the relationship between man and God (the highest spiritual reality). It is the violation of the first commandment in the Bible: the recognition of the higher spiritual reality from which one originates and the submission to its laws.

Modesty is obviously the counterpart of pride. In some variants, self-knowledge is also mentioned as a virtue and medicine for pride. We recognise Jupiter in the pursuit of knowledge of one's position in the greater whole, the cosmos; Jupiter provides us with access to (knowledge of) the highest spiritual reality, hence this planet is referred to in classical astrology as the greater benefic. The malefic effect or sin occurs when the highest is sought in material manifestation (one's own person, achievements made, great possessions, etc.). The prideful person lacks knowledge of the higher and places himself on the throne of Jupiter, atop Mount Olympus.

## Saturn

*Sin: sluggishness, laziness*

*Virtue: diligence (responsibility)*

Inertia, like gluttony, greed and lust, is often considered a sin of substance. In my opinion, there are good reasons to consider inertia a spiritual sin as well, because this sin is not so much aimed at pursuing material needs, but rather at avoiding inevitable 'obligations in the material realm'.

Inertia is caused by the soul being in a body. Its resistance has to be overcome to move the body. Laziness and inertia indicate an inability or unwillingness to do so. Acedia, the Latin term of this sin, is also associated with despair and tendency to suicide. It makes this sin for me of a different order from the aforementioned material sins. Inertia or laziness seems to be a sin against the cycle of life itself (or the law of karma), it indicates an inability or unwillingness to accept a life in (the heaviness of) the material world. Diligence or hard work is the medicine against this sin.

Saturn's cardinal sin and virtue can be recognised in the well-known Biblical sayings 'idleness is the devil's ear cushion' and 'in the sweat of thy face shalt thou earn thy bread'. Responsibility is another virtue associated with Saturn. In my opinion, this one describes even better the essence of Saturn's highest virtue: the soul taking responsibility for an embodied life.

In conclusion: sins and virtues in the interpretation of horoscopes  
The way I have linked the seven deadly sins and virtues to the seven visible planets in the universe should be seen as a possible arrangement. Other possibilities are certainly conceivable (after all, there are also 'sin-systems' that assume more than seven deadly sins). Importantly, this exercise, this way of looking at planets, can provide new insights regarding the manifestation of soul in our lives. Indeed, it is possible to ascertain how the soul orients itself to spirit and matter for each sphere of life. Thus, this perspective offers concrete possibilities to go a step deeper in horoscope interpretation and support spiritual seekers with practical tools. However, this approach is intrinsically normative: for it is stated in the Hermetic texts that the soul's inclinations in matter are a means to spiritual growth and not an end in themselves. This is how we arrived at the term sin.

## Want to know more?

Good sources for further reading are:

Broek, Rudolf van den, & Gilles Quispel (2016). *Hermetische geschriften*. Amsterdam: In the Pelican. (Dutch)

Ben Rovers (2019). *The Astro-Logic of the Seven Deadly Sins* ([www.benrovers.com](http://www.benrovers.com))

Morton W. Bloomfield (1941). The origin of the concept of the seven cardinal sins. *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 34, No. 2, pp. 121-128.

Solomon Schimmel (1997). *The Seven Deadly Sins. Jewish, Christian, and Classical Reflections on Human Psychology*. Oxford University Press.

## Endnotes

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<sup>i</sup> See, for example, <http://skyscript.co.uk/forums/viewtopic.php?t=2828/>.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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