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# THE “PRACTICAL” INTRODUCTION TO ASTROLOGY BY ADOLPH THIERENS

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## Mining Gold in 2,500 Years of Written Astrology

If astrology is a language, it is the oldest in the world. Astrologers can draw on written sources dating back to well before Christ. In this series, Ben Rovers delves into the gold mine of 2,500 years of written astrology and discusses works that are too interesting to forget. They come from all currents of Western astrology. The selection is a purely personal one. The main criterion is that the work can inspire astrologers of our time.

*This time: 'Cosmology; elements of practical astrology' by A.E. Thierens*

### Why this work?

It is time to scrutinise a relatively recent work. Thierens' introduction to astrology dates from 1911. For an astrologer, this is no more than a tiny diversion into history. Anyone who takes the book in hand immediately notices an important difference from many contemporary introductions to astrology. Modern introductions are almost without exception very practical, focused on describing some key techniques and usually provided with short 'cookbook' interpretations. Thierens' book is distinguished by a much greater attention to and connection with esoteric philosophy and cosmology. Blavatsky's theosophical teachings are an important source of inspiration. The embedding of astrology in a larger philosophical/religious system, makes his work fascinating even for the modern astrologer, as it often offers a new (and therefore actually old) take on familiar astrological symbols. Oh yes, and in 1911, Thierens predicted that the next new planet to be discovered would be after the nature of Pluto. Brilliant right!

The book under review is the second part of a trilogy. The first part contains essays on natural philosophy and the third part is called 'Astrology as a Theory of Life'. Thierens advised readers to read the books in this order. No superfluous luxury, because to follow his introduction to 'practical' astrology, some knowledge of theosophy and what he does with it in his book on natural philosophy is quite handy.

## Who was A.E. Thierens?

*Experience is a change in being*

*We do not dive into this subhuman world to 'learn lessons', but to be our Self*

Adolph Ernestus Thierens (1875-1941) was a man of many talents. He was a naval officer (he came from a military family), civil servant, journalist, philosopher and, of course, astrologer. He published on numerous subjects, including the navy, theosophy, education, freemasonry, (natural) philosophy, tarot, cosmology and astrology. In 1907, he co-founded the Dutch Society for the Study of Astronomy and Modern Astrology (forerunner of today's Society of Astrologers), together with Leo Knecht and Theo Ram. Thierens would later in his life develop major differences of opinion with Theo Ram in particular. And since history is written by winners, today we know more about Ram than Thierens. Perhaps unfairly so.

In 1925, Thierens received his doctorate from the University of Lausanne. It is unclear (to yours truly) on what subject, but it seems to be his natural philosophy work. A year later, he received an honorary doctorate at the same university for his pioneering work in (among others) astrology. Come to think of it these days. Some of his books, such as the one under review here, as well as his books on natural philosophy and tarot, are still readily available. Much of his work has been translated into English and is still widely read (in that language). This perhaps says something about the relevance of his work. He is seen as one of the founding fathers of modern astrology in the Netherlands. And that modern astrology was founded on theosophy.

## Theosophy summarised in 9 statements

Theosophy is an ancient wisdom doctrine revived in the 19<sup>e</sup> century by the Russian Helena Blavatsky. Her idea is that behind all wisdom teachings in history there is one, undivided truth to be discovered.

Theosophy is the knowledge of the divine that one acquires through spiritual development. It is (therefore) esoteric knowledge: it can only be acquired by turning the soul away from the material and towards the higher. By doing so, the true secrets of life will reveal themselves.

Even today, many are somewhat familiar with Blavatsky's texts, as contained in 'The Secret Doctrine' and 'Isis Unveiled'. Significantly fewer have managed to complete the reading of these texts. How shall we put it...: H.P. Blavatsky is no J.K. Rowling (*no offence*). Fortunately, it is bursting with followers who did persevere and understand, at least we, the non-followers, sincerely hope so. They have collated Blavatsky's ideas and made them more accessible.

For those as lazy as yours truly, I recommend Ianthe Hoskins' summary to start with (Foundations of esoteric philosophy, 1992). I will recap her summary in 9 statements.

## Some key tenets and teachings of theosophy

1. Underlying all forms in our world is an essential unity. This is omnipresent, eternal and unchanging.
2. This one being has two basic aspects: positive and negative (spirit and substance).
3. Everything in the universe is conscious. Consciousness arises from movement and change caused by the dimensions of space and time.
4. The dimensions space and time cause all cycles through movement.
5. Every external and visible movement is caused by an internal and invisible movement. Put simply, the spiritual causes the material, the higher the lower.
6. Everything is moving towards a 'higher life'.
7. All matter is animate.
8. Man is a microcosm that mirrors the macrocosm. The essential unity is present in both.
9. The human soul -like all souls- is equal to the 'Universal Super soul'.

In the essential unity underlying the manifestations, all information is stored that takes shape (i.e. becomes manifest) in the world we know and co-create. This is the idea of Akasha. Paracelsus articulates it thus:

*All knowledge comes from the stars. Man does not invent or create ideas; the ideas exist, and man is able to grasp them. If all the music teachers in the world died in one day, heaven, who is the original teacher of music, would not die and teach other people this art. [...] There are many ideas that man has not yet grasped; many stars are still too far away to form a connection with the earth. The realm of stars and ideas is infinite, and therefore the source of inventions and discoveries has not yet been exhausted." (Hartmann, s.d.)*

## Theosophy as cradle of modern astrology

It is clear from the preceding 'ultra' summary that the core principles of theosophy seem to fit very well with the practice of astrology, such as the idea of lawful cycles, the idea of a micro- and macrocosm, et cetera. It should therefore come as no surprise that in the *slipstream* of renewed interest in theosophy, astrologers also began to take an interest in these ideas. Blavatsky herself had little understanding of astrology, but in England it was mainly the theosophist and astrologer Alan Leo, who caused a radical revolution in astrology, by putting the inner and spiritual dimension at the centre of astrology and bidding farewell to the more materialistic and prediction-based astrology. Nicholas Campion, in his standard work on the history of astrology, calls this a revolution similar to the introduction of horoscopes in the Hellenistic era.

Alan Leo (1860-1917) introduced all kinds of things that many astrologers today take for granted, but which were absolutely not so for his time, such as the centrality of the Sun sign in the horoscope as being the inner light in which the spiritual core expresses itself in the individual. Or the idea of reincarnation, which, according to research by Gary Phillipson (2000), the vast majority of contemporary astrologers believe in. Leo can be considered the founder of modern, esoteric astrology in the West. Remarkable actually, because where Western thought after the enlightenment moved more and more towards a materialistic worldview, it was Leo who moved astrology in just the opposite direction. He gave astrology a spiritual pendulum that can be felt to this day.

## The contents of the book

*For those who are familiar with theosophical literature, (...) more than a superficial understanding will emerge. The others must content themselves with the superficial, because indeed astrology cannot be understood in its origin, its reasonableness and its true essence, than on the basis of true theosophy (Thierens, p. 30-31)*

It is fair to say that Thierens' introduction to astrology is not very accessible to contemporary readers, due to the very extensive use of theosophical terms and doctrines, which are often not explained; Thierens frequently refers to his other work on this subject (the 'We-of-WC-duck-formula'...only the Dutch understand this joke 😏).

The book contains, especially by today's standards, many (theosophical) cosmological reflections and few cookbook texts. Those looking for a concrete interpretation of their Ascendant sign will be left searching. Yet signs, planets, houses and aspects are all covered. Thierens' interpretation of this, however, refers only very narrowly to the 'earthly' manifestations (such as: Moon in Capricorn indicates responsibility), but focuses attention mainly on the spiritual plan underlying them.

The quote with which this paragraph begins *says it all*: to learn anything about astrology, he says, we should focus on its esoteric (i.e. hidden) aspects. These refer to generic spiritual truths rather than individual this and that in the netherworld. Not the individual, but the higher self as the operating principle within it, is central to him (called the ego in theosophy). This ego manifests itself in the combination of cosmic motives (planets, signs, etc.) and earthly circumstances (house placements). This approach differs substantially from many contemporary, popular approaches to astrology, which mainly focus on the individual. In a modern introduction to astrology, we can read that astrology answers questions such as *who am I, where did I come from and where am I going* (own italics, BR)? I suspect that, for Thierens, this is putting the cart before the horse, in other words: starting the interpretation on the wrong side.

Thierens discusses many fascinating cosmological and astrological themes in this book, such as the relationship between mind, soul and body, the development cycle of houses, rulerships by hypothetical planets, etc. It is impossible to walk past them all here (and ... there must also be something left to explore 😊). We highlight one theme: following the example of other theosophists, Thierens distinguishes, in addition to the horoscope of incarnation, a horoscope of the soul.

## The prenatal horoscope of the soul

Theosophists like Thierens see the moment of birth in matter -the horoscope with which most astrologers work, -with the Ascendant as the concrete incarnation point-, as the final point of a development that starts from a spiritual starting point (Atman). From this point, from top to bottom, seven bodies that make up human beings develop, of which the material body is the lowest and most condensed. Alan Leo argued that the moment of conception can be seen as the birth of the astral body. This is the non-material body that, in this view, precedes the formation of the material body. Thierens speaks of the birth of the soul in this context because the astral body connects the spiritual with the material. Whereas the

horoscope of physical birth reflects one's outer life, is the idea, the horoscope of conception will offer more insight into one's inner life and the soul desire or soul plan that underlies the outer life.

## The rule of Hermes

Leo and Thierens were able to find this soul horoscope by using an ancient technique that was (and is) mainly used to correct horoscopes: the Trutina Hermetis, also called 'the rule of Hermes'. This rule, already mentioned by Vettius Valens in the 2<sup>e</sup> century, states that

the Moon position during conception is equal to the Ascendant or  
Descendant during birth and that the Moon position during birth is equal to  
the Ascendant point during conception (BR: see the references for the  
calculation rules).

The horoscope thus obtained is independently interpreted as being the inner soul plan underlying the outer manifestations of the birth chart. More recently, Darrelyn Gunzburg (2002) has illustrated such a mode of interpretation.

The author of this one is certainly enamoured of anything old and named after Hermes, but we cannot ignore the fact that this rule, however simple and cleanly formulated, is problematic in application. For instance, the calculation rules allow several time options from which to choose for this horoscope. What is the correct one? Besides, the theosophists assume seven bodies, why should we be able to find the soul plan of this life in the second body, and not the third, fourth or fifth body? And then there is the lack of verification, which will bother some modern astrologers: talking about soul plans that cannot be 'checked' anywhere. How do we test the quality of our interpretation?

## Final Thought: significance for this time

The title of this book refers to the practical dimension of astrology. This is misleading, as this book is anything but practical. Compared to Thierens' book, Theo Ram's introductory work ('Psychological Astrology') can be called an oasis of concreteness (note: everything is relative). So I would not call this book a recommended read for the novice astrologer. So what value does it have?

Thierens has a lot to offer especially to the advanced astrologer with an interest in the soul dimension. That astrologer must then have perseverance, because the author does not make it easy for his readers. For the persistent, there are certainly pearls to be unearthed in this work. The profound theosophical foundation makes you look at astrological symbols like signs and planets in a new way. Even if you want nothing to do with theosophy, this book will help you deepen your knowledge of astrological symbolism. And -also a quality-, with every (re)reading the book offers new insights. Only a rich work can offer this experience.

## Want to know more?

Thierens' book is freely available online via Delpher (Dutch):

<https://www.delpher.nl/nl/boeken/view?coll=boeken&identificer=MMKB18:009357000/>

Some of Thierens' other work can also be found at this site.

Ben Rovers (2023). *The Practical Introduction to Astrology by Adolph Thierens* ([www.benrovers.com](http://www.benrovers.com))

There is a lot of information about theosophy on the internet. For example:

<https://www.theosophy.world/>

The Working Community of Astrologers (WvA) is the successor to the Dutch Society for the Study of Astronomy and Modern Astrology, co-founded by Thierens. The WvA stands in the theosophical-astrological tradition. For more information on this society, see: <https://www.wva-astrologie.nl/>.

The quote from Paracelsus is from: <https://www.theosophy-ult.org.uk/wpcontent/uploads/2014/06/hartmann-the-life-of-paracelsus.pdf/>

Gunzburg's article on the prenatal epoch was published in *The Mountain Astrologer*, 101, Oct/Nov 2022. It is available at: [https://www.academia.edu/1308471/The\\_Pre\\_Natal\\_Epoch/](https://www.academia.edu/1308471/The_Pre_Natal_Epoch/)

The original arithmetic rules of Hermetis' Trutine can be found in Valens anthology, book 1, the chapter on conception. See: <https://www.csus.edu/indiv/r/rileymt/vettius%20valens%20entire.pdf>

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Ben Rovers works as a professional astrologer in the Netherlands. He runs a practice in Nijmegen. He is founder of *The Hermetic Cosmos | School of Astrology*. He writes and speaks regularly on astrological, cosmological and esoteric topics. His main interest is Hermetic Astrology (a soul-centred form of astrology that connects insights from Hermetic texts with astrology). Get in touch via [www.benrovers.com](http://www.benrovers.com).