

Astrology, Autochthony and Salvation

R. Blackhirst

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Not only in the plants that grow from the earth but also for animals that live upon it there is a cycle of bearing and barrenness for soul and body as often as the revolutions of their orbs come full circle, in brief courses for the short-lived and oppositely for the opposite. But the laws of prosperous birth or infertility for your race, the men you have bred to be rulers will not for all their wisdom ascertain by reasoning combined with sensation, but they will escape them, and there will be a time when they will beget children out of season.

Plato, *Republic* 546A-B.

In a system of astrology preserved for us in a short treatise by the late Byzantine writer Julius Firmicus Maternus, which system he attributes to ancient Egyptian sources, we are supplied with a symbolic horoscope or geniture of the world. This horoscope or geniture - which is only rarely mentioned subsequently in the western astrological tradition - is called the "Mundi Thema" - Theme of the World - and, in this system, it is against the Mundi Thema that all particular genitures of individuals are to be compared and contrasted. Prognostications and diagnoses are made on the basis of the similarities and differences between the Mundi Thema and the particular geniture in question. The Mundi Thema is - symbolically and not literally, as Firmicus Maternus insists - a horoscope made for the moment of creation, the moment of the birth of the cosmos or for the pristine organisation of cosmic forces. The births of individual souls are to be considered against it and the value of particular astrological configurations is determined in this way. We are supplied, therefore, with the primordial or archetypal horoscope and it forms the basis of all further considerations. The therapeutic correlative of this method is that each individual soul must, given the gifts with which they are born, attempt to bring their particular "distorted" horoscope back into a realignment with the primal horoscope. In so doing they participate in or are reunited with the creative cosmic moment and lose, so to speak, their particular nativity and are instead born with the cosmos, with the world, with the earth. In other terms, they reunify microcosm with macrocosm, healing the primal breach between the two. Although antiquity has not left sufficient remains to trace the most remote origins of this system even brief meditation upon the Mundi Thema reveals that it is indeed a primal crystallization of astrological symbolism and that this Byzantine writer has preserved a real key to the horoscopic arts. It is an astrology consonant with and that no doubt was once part of a much fuller cosmological understanding, some of the themes of which we will explore briefly here.

Since we are concerned with natal astrology as opposed to other types let us first consider the correlatives of this system to the plain physiology of birth, since the human body gives us the most primal order of symbols. In this case, the crucial moment in an individual nativity is the actual moment of partum in which mother and child are separated and the child emerges as a distinct entity, whether this is defined as the first breath of the child or the cutting of the umbilicus or some other exact juncture. By correlation, in this system, this event must be compared to the birth of the cosmos and so

we observe that the emergence of the spherical head of the child from the birth canal of the mother is directly analogous to the birth of the cosmic sphere. The comparative roundness of the human skull betokens the spherical form of the cosmos itself, and the round human head is microcosmic of the cosmos as a whole, and since each individual nativity is to be compared to the nativity of the world, human birth is analogous to Creation and the emergence of the child's round skull from the darkness of the birth canal is therefore analogous to the emergence of the cosmos from primal Night. But as anyone who has attended a birth or is familiar with new-borns knows well, the process of birth invariably distorts and misshapes the human skull away from its pristine and geometrical inter-uterine roundness: the passage through the birth canal invariably enlongates the skull and so in the passage from its life in the watery womb to its life in the airy realm the human being has its head undergo a fundamental morphological distortion. This is a mark of the particularization of individuality. While we once all shared the spherical head of the foetal state, our births have all distorted our heads in unique ways so that we all suffer a unique corruption from the ideal. In terms of the astrology we are considering, the Mundi Thema is the pristine ideal and the deviation of individual horoscopes from the Mundi Thema is a measure of the type and magnitude of the distortion of the spherical forms of the head at birth. This is exactly as Plato describes it in his cosmological treatise the *Timaeus*. He describes the spherical cosmic sphere then describes the spherical human head, drawing parallels between the motions of the stars and the very structures of human thought. Then, he says:

the motions which are naturally akin to the divine principle within us are the thoughts and revolutions of the universe. These each man should follow, and correct the courses of the head which were corrupted at our birth, and by learning the harmonies and revolutions of the universe, should assimilate the thinking being to the thought, renewing his original nature, and having assimilated them should attain to that perfect life which the gods have set before mankind, both for the present and the future.

The system of Firmicus Maternus is nothing more than an astrological extension of this idea. It will be noted that the "courses of the head" are "corrupted at birth". The spherical human head, which is a microcosmic reflection of the cosmic sphere is, in the travail of birth, invariably disaligned with its macrocosmic counterpart, and the horoscope is a record of the heavenly configurations at the exact moment that this disalignment occurred. It is as if the peculiar configurations of the heavens - representing that precise and unique moment in time and place - is imprinted on both the soul and the body of the child in a fundamental disalignment with the greater universe. As a cure for this predicament, Plato recommends that men study the "harmonies and revolutions of the universe" in order to "renew his original nature". In this system of astrology the Mundi Thema is an image of "original nature" and our geniture is an image of the type and degree of our deviation from that nature. Plato says we should "assimilate the thinking being to the thought" and "correct the courses of the head", bringing our own internal, skewed "Circles of Sameness and Difference" (our nativity) into realignment with the "Circles of Sameness and Difference" in the macrocosm. Thus will we enjoy the perfect life, both for the present and the future, which is to say what in other traditions is called salvation.

In terms of addressing a particular geniture and in the context of the practical symbolism of a horoscope, each configuration is compared to the pristine arrangement in the Mundi Thema and judged accordingly. In the Mundi Thema, for example, the planet Saturn is located in the (diurnal) zodiacal sign of Capricorn. If the planet Saturn is located in, say, Libra in the nativity of any given person, one judges according to the character of this relationship (or deviation from the ideal), in this case a deviation of ninety degrees. Similarly, if the Moon, which has its pristine abode in Cancer, is in Capricorn in any given nativity, it stands at 180 deg. or in opposition to the ideal, and so is judged accordingly. This single feature of the system Firmicus Maternus sketches also initiates two cornerstones of traditional astrological practice in the West, the doctrine of planetary "domiciles" and the value given to "aspects", though their fundamental relation to the Mundi Thema is generally forgotten. The places given for the various planets in the Mundi Thema are none other than those places traditionally known as "domiciles" or "houses" or "rulerships" whereby one planet is said to have its "home" in a particular zodiacal sign. In the Mundi Thema the planetary "homes" are their places on the day of Creation, the places where they were first placed in the heavens by the Creator. The method of determining relations between the actual position of a planet and its "home" in angular terms in this system is none other than the traditional method of determining the value of "aspects" which is still in regular use in Western astrology today. By "assimilation", as Plato calls it, we can overcome these deviations and slowly restore the planets to their homes and our souls to their original state. We can never be not born with Moon in Capricorn or Saturn in Libra if that is our fate, but we can overcome these configurations and restore the planets to their "domiciles", which is to say to their pristine condition. This is the means to salvation. It is also the Pythagorean doctrine of the harmony of the spheres, by which the microcosmic order is reattuned to the macrocosmic order by way of their pristine unity. We might also transpose this to alchemy by regarding the planets in their metallic incarnations (as indeed Plato does in the *Timaeus*) and say that the task is to refine the admixture of metals given at birth back to their pure, original ores. In terms of physiology, one must restore the spherical purity of the womb and so in that sense be "born again". In Judeo-Christian and Islamic terms the Mundi Thema is representative of the Edenic state, and the deviation of the planets from their original homes is indicative of post-Edenic deviation. To restore the planets of one's inner cosmos and its "Circles of Sameness and Difference" to their original stations, or to refine the planetary metals to their pure ores, or to "correct the courses in the head", it is to restore the Edenic state, the dawn of the world, and to be reborn with the world anew.

The Edenic comparison brings us to another point and to a vital extension of this whole symbolism, namely that all that can be said of the cosmos is interchangeable with the symbolism of the primordial man, Eden with Adam, and so we must not neglect to consider the Mundi Thema not only as the horoscope of the world but also - even though Firmicus Maternus does not elaborate on this - as the horoscope of the primordial being. In the Edenic state, of course, there is not yet a breach between the microcosmic and macrocosmic orders. The horoscope of Eden is the same as the horoscope of Adam. Adam is made of the very same soil as the Garden. If it is objected that Adam was created some time after the creation of the world, as such, in the Genesis account, the

reply is that all events in Eden have the same horoscope until Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden. This is for the simple reason that the paradisaical Garden is in eternity beyond mundane time or is actually "in" the eternal "now" that is before, beyond and between time. To actualize this in oneself is salvation, for it is to find an unshakeable "safe" point outside the vicissitudes of the temporal order, including one's own existential encounter with the temporal order in death. In astrological terms, salvation is to cleave to and identify with the centre-point of the horoscope, no longer tossed around in the to-ing and fro-ing of the periphery. And this is, at the same time, to realise within oneself the primordial man: to make as one's own the horoscope of Adam. To be saved a man must overcome or put aside - make irrelevant - his individual nativity and adopt the nativity (and spiritual anonymity) of Adam, everyman, who, in turn, has the same nativity as the very soil from which he was made.

A still fuller perspective opens up at this point. Here we encounter the mythology and doctrine of autochthony. To make this connection we merely need to appreciate that certain mythologies express the idea of being born with the earth in the more concrete form of being born from the earth, but the meaning is in both cases identical. In autochthony mythology, such as that of Adam, or that which we find among the ancient Greeks and the Athenians especially, primordial man was the product of a creation directly from the primal soils. In Greek mythology this is a characteristic of the fabled Golden Race: but whereas in Adamic mythology the primal man was crafted from the soil, in Greek mythology they were plant-men, born from the soil. In either case, the symbolism here concerns the primal unity of macro- and microcosms: primordial man is still in harmony with the cosmos and the measure of this original, harmonious identity is expressed by saying that he was made from or came from the soil of the primordial earth. In Greek mythology, this is also expressed - noting the alchemical significances - by saying that the primordial men were golden in quality, being the very purest and best of souls, before the inevitable degeneration of the Ages which is usually represented by a decline away from autochthony into animal reproduction. Transposed to the astrological framework, the great souls of the Golden Age are those primordial beings made at the creation who, therefore, all have the Mundi Thema - the Creation - as their geniture. The myths describe their excellence in terms of an aurumic symbolism and their conjunction with the cosmogonic moment and their primordiality is expressed in terms of being born from the soil. The fall into animal reproduction - where human beings begin to be born from one another and not from the soil - is the beginning of particular genitures. Our particular geniture is an image of our "animal birth". To "assimilate" the Mundi Thema and to make the "horoscope of Adam" one's own is, in this mythological view, to be reborn, to overcome one's "animal birth", to restore the primordial aurumic quality of one's soul, to restore the unity of macro- and microcosms, and so to be of the earthborn. In astrological symbolism, this means overcoming one's individual horoscope and restoring each of the planetary powers to their original purity so that, in effect, the day of Creation becomes the day of one's birth and one rediscovers in oneself the primordial man. The distinctive Christian development of the themes of autochthony deserve special mention. Like Islam, Christianity takes from Judaism the Adamic autochthony but adds to it Christ as the new and regenerated Adam. In this Christ appears as the primordial plant-man, firstly by being crucified (imposed) upon the Tree of Life which grows from

the place where the skull - noting the physiological resonances of this detail - of Adam was buried like a seed, and secondly, and more obviously, in being resurrected from the grave in the Christian adaptation of ancient vegetative mythology. In the Christian scheme one must, like Christ, redeem and reattain the Adamic state, the autochthony expressed quite directly in the doctrine of the bodily resurrection from the grave.

Among these ideas we also encounter one of the secrets of the sacred calendars of the ancient world; namely that they embody a system of astrological autochthony. They do this by way of a parallel between the day of the New Year with the Day of Creation. In ancient Athens this involved the astrological calculation of the state wedding festivals. All of the young couples who had met in any given year were married at a single festival and in a single, collective rite. This was calculated to be nine months - the term of a pregnancy - before the New Year, which in Athens was marked by the Panathenaea, the great festival of Athene herself, also the festival marking the birth of the original Athenians, the autochthons, from the sacred Attic soil. The calendar was crafted, therefore, so that a high proportion of Athenian children would be born on or around the New Year. Anthropologists will explain that "primitive" societies manipulated births in this fashion to ensure that children are born in seasons of plenty, and consistent with this in Athens the Panathenaea was at midsummer, the fruiting season. But more significant, for our purposes, is the fact that it was New Year and hence the symbolism: the New Year is to the solar cycle what the day of Creation is to cosmic cycle. Children born at New Year in ancient Athens were presented with golden serpentine necklaces - noting the alchemical symbolism again - as an emblem of their autochthony; by being born at New Year they symbolically participate, by parallel, in the day of Creation and the birth of the primordial golden-souled autochthons. In this way - by "seasonable marriage" - the Athenians sought to prolong the original "golden blood" of their mythic ancestors. As it happens, the Panathenaea - calculated by the new moon after the summer solstice, a lunar festival tied to the solar cycle - falls in the sign of Cancer, and this is exactly where Firmicus Maternus has situated the pivot of Creation in the Mundi Thema. The Western astrological tradition - following Roman models - is accustomed to thinking of the zodiac starting with Aries in Spring. Firmicus Maternus, using a much older arrangement, has the zodiac starting in Cancer in midsummer, which we note is the time of the Panathenaea in ancient Athens. In today's astrological terminology we would say that Athenian citizens tended to be Cancerians: their marriage festivals were organised so that as many children as possible were Cancerians. Why? Because Cancer marks the New Year and hence the Day of Creation, and children born at this time partake of the aurumic nobility of their earthborn ancestors.

This is a literal enactment of the astrology we find in the Mundi Thema, an astrological eugenics in which a society attempts to manipulate the time of birth of children to give them all similar horoscopes so as to impart to them a particular quality. In other Greek cities - in fact in many other ancient societies in general, including among "primitive" tribes - the same effect was achieved by festivals or customs in which all the men or all the women would depart for a period of time and all return at an appointed time so that the women would all conceive together. Aside from anthropological explanations, these customs involve calculations of an astrological nature and are a device by which

traditional societies attempt to prolong the original, aurumic essence of the Origin to which they characteristically cling. Traditional social and religious orders seek to cling to the state of primordial purity, resisting the inevitable decline of the Ages. One of the ways in which they do this is by the deliberate calculation of conceptions and births to try to give their children horoscopes that deviate as little as possible from the best of horoscopes, the horoscope of the Origin. It will be noted that this imparts a quality that is quite independent of blood-line, the usual measure of nobility. As far as retaining something of the aurumic essence of the Origin is concerned, it is not of whom one is born but when one is born that is important. Aristocracy by blood-line is secondary but still reflected in the idea that the admixture of corrupt blood-lines will yield head-shapes that deviate more and more from the spherical ideal (and yield children who are less and less handsome). But the aristocracy imparted by "seasonable marriage" as opposed to "breeding" is the aristocracy of the soul of which Plato speaks in the Republic, the spiritual aristocracy of the philosopher-kings who rule, not by virtue of noble lineage, but by virtue of their inherent philosophical nature. The philosopher-kings are cultivated from children born into any class, independent of blood, who display the philosophic nature which, as Plato himself says, means any evidence of the persistence of the "Golden Race" in the character of a child. The purpose of an astrological eugenics is to maximize the possibilities of such children arising. The qualities of the primordial race will persist in a child whose horoscope has been crafted to be as near to the ideal as possible, and moreover such children will have less deviation from the ideal to overcome and so will have spiritual and philosophical realisation - realignment with the ideal - within their grasp and are equipped from birth, by nature, for the education and discipline that makes a philosopher-king.

In the conditions of the Latter Days, of course, conception and reproduction happen willy-nilly and children are born in all seasons and the horoscopes of men deviate further and further from the ideal and the rectification of the planets to their domiciles becomes more and more difficult. Men lose contact with the Source. Adam is exiled further and further from the soil from which he was made, in deeper and deeper alienation. The "courses of the head" become hopelessly scrambled. The golden quality of the primordial order becomes increasingly rare. The task, in terms of the astrology we have been considering, remains the same, however: to compare our particular nativity to that of the Theme of the World and to attune the two. In this way we restore the Edenic unity of man and cosmos and occupy the eternal "now". The Mundi Thema is, in fact, "contained within", so to speak, the primordial point that is at the centre of any given horoscope and awaits realisation. The particular configurations of a nativity are like so many shackles that bind us to time and space and to the illusion of our own egos. To be free of them all is to negate them, or to purify them, so that they return to their primordial stations which is, by a parallel symbolism, the same as all configurations "collapsing" into the Centre where, in so far as they are still considered as separate powers, they are now in their Edenic and aurumic perfection. To achieve this is to mend our human alienation and to become, as an early Greek inscription put it, a true "child of earth and starry heavens". In the symbolism of both astrology and alchemy salvation is a return to the Edenic state by a realignment or reattunement of the microcosmic and macrocosmic orders. The system of astrology recorded by Firmicus Maternus, with the primordial horoscope, is clearly a key

within this broader tradition and illuminates many of the most important but least understood aspects of ancient and esoteric astrology, exposing a fundamental vein of traditional symbolism that is rarely if ever explored in contemporary astrological thinking.