

The Personal Ages : Lunar Node Returns

1. What are the lunar nodes?

The lunar nodes can be defined in a manner similar to the Aries-Libra axis, as the line of intersection of two notional planes. The Moon's orbital plane is inclined at about 5° to the ecliptic. **Figure 1**, a geometric idealisation, depicts the intersection of the ecliptic and the orbital plane of the Moon. The resulting line in the ecliptic plane, composed of two opposing directions centred on the Earth, is the nodal axis. Twice in every orbit of the Earth, the Moon will occupy a nodal position. Only when the Moon is actually at, or near, one of these positions are eclipses possible: if the Moon is in the same plane as the Sun and Earth then alignments of all three become possible. These nodal ecliptic longitudes have a geometric (calculable) existence whatever the Moon's actual position. The direction of the ecliptic normal (the ecliptic polar axis defined in the main text), a vector at right angles to the ecliptic plane, serves to differentiate between the nodes: the north, or ascending node, is that point where the lunar orbit emerges on the north face of the ecliptic. Conversely, the south, or descending, node is the opposite point in the orbit.

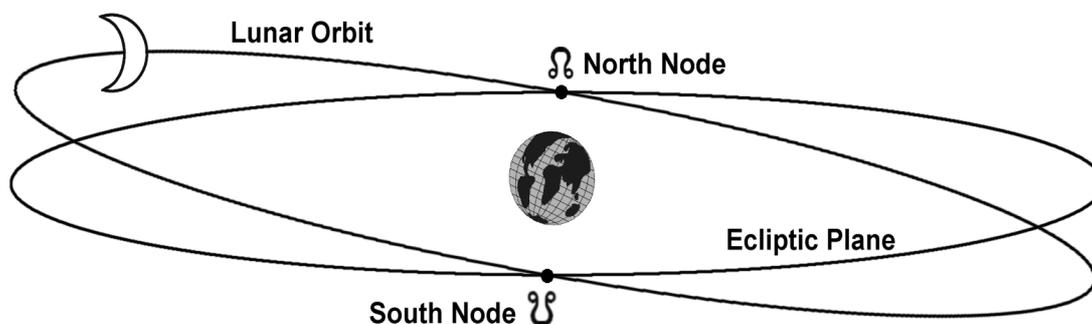


Figure 1 – Defining the lunar nodes

The Moon has angular momentum as a consequence of its orbiting the Earth. Its inclined orbit causes it to suffer precession in a manner similar to that described for the spinning Earth. As a consequence the nodal axis rotates around the ecliptic every 18.6 years approximately, although not in a monotonic (uni-directional) fashion. The charted positions of the Sun and Moon both travel around the ecliptic (through the signs of the zodiac) in a consistently anti-clockwise manner, as normally drawn. This means that the signs are traversed in ascending numerical order, starting from Aries as the first sign, to Pisces as the twelfth and last. This, by convention, is called *direct motion*. On average, the lunar nodes travel in the opposite (clockwise) direction, duly called *retrograde motion*, but the actual or **true node**¹ precession changes from time to time, going from retrograde to direct, then back to retrograde. No rational individual would *choose* this motion to mirror the progress of time, given the inevitable measurement difficulties: whenever the node changes direction the point of change can only be calculated *within certain error bounds*, so that there exists some uncertainty as to whether a return event has occurred for points close to the result of calculation. Arbitrary definition cannot resolve this dilemma: Astrology was born from the observing of correspondences.

¹ The **mean nodes** are an arithmetic averaging of this motion and are uniformly retrograde in their movement. Personally, I find no use for this average nodal position – all of the correspondences I have noted are associated with the true node. In this text, when I refer to the nodal axis, I will always imply the **true** nodal axis

2. The 'Personal Ages': an extension to traditional Astrology?

The retrograde motion of the nodal axis can be compared to the precession of the equinoxes: the retrograde movement of the tropical Aries-Libra axis against the sidereal (constellations) background that gives rise to 'The Ages'. We are currently in a transition zone where 'The Age' is changing from Pisces to Aquarius. In my view, consistent with the notion of 'The Ages', the Sidereal Zodiac is not an *alternative* to the Tropical Zodiac, but is a further partitioning of time – a separate, but hierarchically-related, clock-face element². Any 'Age' takes many generations to work through since each lasts for roughly 2,200 years. Each 'Personal Age' lasts for one complete 18.6 year nodal cycle and ends when the momentary direction³ of the axis returns to that of the true nodal axis at the time of birth. The Personal Ages, an allusion to a precession effect at the root of these *and* the Great Ages, are identified using the *principle sequence* {1,2,3,4}. The proposition here is that nodal returns mark transition points from one personal age to another. Based on my own observations, an astrological chart, erected for the moment of return, shows the astrological influences specific to the coming age; 'the observations' mainly involve noting the effects of transits to the planets in such a chart. In my experience there is a period of overlap: transits to planets in the *applying* return chart begin to be experienced in the year or so prior to the actual time of return. The influence of the nodal chart is most potent as the midpoint of the nodal cycle approaches. The

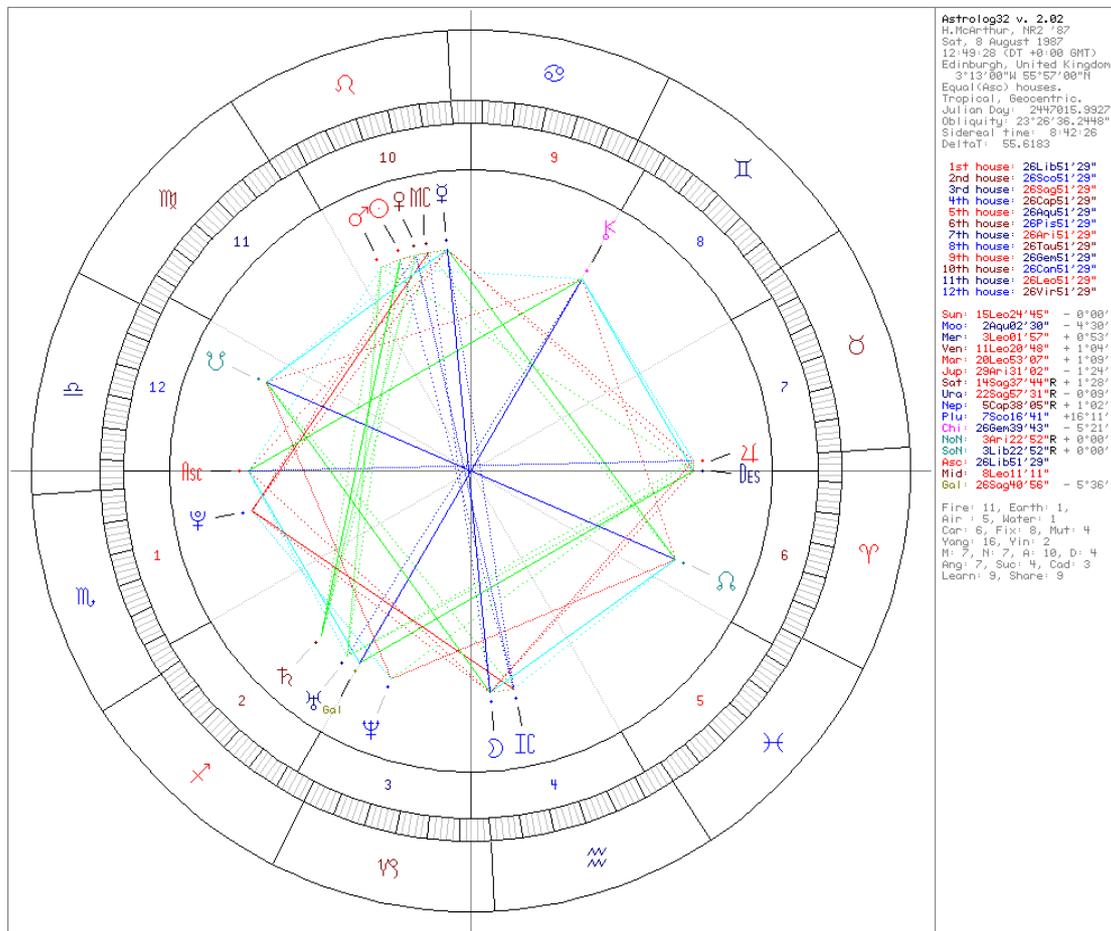


Figure 2 – Nodal Return 2: entering my third age

2 Researching the registration of sidereal and tropical zodiacs currently leads me to the conclusion that 0° Sagittarius (sidereal) is anchored to the Galactic Centre – a gravitational reference. This would imply the coincidence of the zodiacs, and the start of the Age of Pisces, at around 70 A.D.

3 This is one of many astrological experiences that has implications on how we should view **time**.

year in which the transiting nodal axis approaches opposition to the natal node is a very dynamic time for the individual, when life-forming pressures are felt most intensely. In keeping with the opposition aspect, these are times of questioning and re-evaluating focussed on the way the personal life is developing. In this scheme, the birth chart is the first, and so the most formative, of a sequence of four primary ages of individual existence, covering a little more than the fabled 'three score and ten years' of personal allotment. As with the birth chart, a nodal return chart can maintain an influence on individual life, beyond its primary formative period - through transits to planetary positions in the return chart. Well ... almost; for myself, the fly in the ointment is the first of these nodal return charts: I have not detected unequivocal effects due to transits of its planets. This has some parallel in the sequence of aspects: I find the semi-sextile, second of the *main sequence* aspects, almost impossible to detect - it doesn't create much of a stir. In any text book on planetary aspects it would be unusual to find delineations for the semi-sextile - nobody notices them! I suspect something similar is happening with this first nodal chart - a higher-order variant of the semi-sextile non-effect. That said, the other consequences of the nodal progression did occur: namely, a period of tension and change (in my relationships and life goals) around the midpoint of the cycle, based on the content of that nodal return chart. It is, of course, entirely possible that I have succumbed to the philosophical beauty of these personal ages - the self-appointed arch-realist falling foul of an all-too-Human self-delusion? Time will tell.

3. Personal observations.

I only discovered the significance of nodal returns during my own *Third Age*, when some major changes occurred around its inception⁴ in August, 1987, that just could not be completely understood using traditional astrological techniques. Since then I have been tracking the effects of these influences, primarily in the shaping of my own life. Now a few years into my Fourth Age, and detecting the effects of transits to its return chart, I still experience strong effects from transits to planets in the previous nodal return chart, the very potent Third Age. I suspect this will continue but only time will tell. I regard the sequence of ages as marking out the process of individual maturation. They structure periods of personal discovery about life and the individual's place in the scheme of things - astrological rites of passage, if you like. With that idea in mind, and using elements of my own life as illustrations, we look at each age individually. There are, of course, many pressures toward maturation including those of a cultural and biological nature. Here, I try to restrict myself to the inner processes of a developing individuality that create a personal position, a unique point of view, with respect to life itself.

First Age : Birth to 19th year, with midpoint around 9yrs 4mths : A time of physical maturation, growing to full stature. Becoming an identifiable individual presence with a unique perspective on life. Learning to assert your individual will, to know what your particular talents are, and how you might employ them within the culture of the day. In astrological terms, the constraints of the natal chart shape basic personality all through life. It is a reference point.

Here in the UK, the age of majority is eighteen years. Entering the nineteenth year of life, one is considered to have become an adult, with adult freedoms and responsibilities. Around eight years old, and beyond, I was struggling with the basic questions relevant to this age: why had I been brought into being, what was life about and why did I have to die at some point? The adults around me didn't have any convincing answers, telling me I was too young to understand (code for 'we don't have a clue!'), so by the age of ten I'd given up reading fiction and turned my attention to reality. I read what I could find on science, philosophy, and psychology. I identified 'Life' as a problem to be solved: meaning, for *my life*, seemed inextricably linked with the '*meaning of life*' itself - without understanding the latter, the former was undefined. In the late '50's and early '60's, science seemed to promise the answers to everything - and soon! The years around the midpoint of my 'first age' were troubling; one recurring question I was asking myself seems entirely in

⁴ I call this time the astrological midpoint of life. The start of Phase 3 is the midpoint of the sequence of four phases. For the author this was a very dynamic period, both at its inception and midpoint in '96.

keeping with the most basic meaning of this time – do I really want to live this life? **This questioning of personal involvement and commitment is the common thread running through every nodal period: “Do I need to be here?” where the meaning of *here* varies for each personal age.** I felt odd and awkward; relating to adults was difficult. They had very fixed ideas on how I should think and behave without giving me what I really needed – all the reasons why! In fact, it was only the naive belief that someday I would find the answers to 'life and everything' that kept me going. Without conceptual closure I had difficulty in engaging with local life, becoming fairly self-contained, not opening fully to other people, maintaining a certain distance. I needed to understand; simply following the Human herd, although a practical necessity, made no real sense. In my sixteenth year I clearly remember thinking that I would put aside my quest for reality, for a while, and just have some fun. There are many prompts to maturation and the hormonal imperative was pushing me in another direction. Nevertheless, I was quite clear that the quest would have to be rejoined at some future date. That took much longer than anticipated, but ... I had a lot of fun!

On a more metaphysical note, in my pre-teen years there occurred a sequence of vision experiences, three in total and identical in content. On each occasion the vision occurred while I was in bed, just prior to getting off to sleep. It began with a metallic taste in my mouth, followed by the vision of a copper penny – one pence in old money! The circular form then began to twist into a shape I would only later recognise as the glyph for infinity – a 3-D version of it. This was followed by the sensation of moving out of my body, into a black space populated only by pinpoints of light. This final scene was always a little too much for my young mind, so I mentally resisted any such movement. In retrospect, I regard these experiences as a cosmic “Hello!”, a welcoming to life by some living process more usually beyond conscious appreciation. There were other early experiences, in the form of recurring dreams, that later proved to be precognitions of some life-changing events, some of them decades in the future and none of them particularly pleasant. In all, it seems that even at this primary stage of life an individual's path has already been charted in some detail. Even in my sixtieth year I find this hard to reconcile with the consciousness-based view of life that we all have as our primary appreciation. Some revel in this small world; I see it only as a prison. I suspect we Humans are very primitive lifeforms.

Second Age : 19th to 38th year, with midpoint around the 28th birthday : establishing personal status and worth, the structuring of a social and professional life – the fully-grown physical self begins to accept responsibility and goes to work. Learning to accommodate other adults; establishing mature relationships on an even footing. In the practical application of early learning we find out who we really are, how productive we can be and what can actually be achieved in life, rather than what we are taught is valuable as aspiration. The personal question appears, as always, as “Do I need to be *here*?”, where *here* is this career, this primary relationship and this system of social values and goals.

In my 28th year I felt settled enough within myself to return to full-time education, at Edinburgh University. Having dropped out of my first course (Mathematical Physics) in '69, I needed to 'set the record straight'. The nature of the course, 'Physics and Electronics', echoed the duality of my purpose. Up to that point, I made my living as an electronics technician, providing technical support to university research teams, but the increasing demands of that post meant that further education in electronic engineering was essential to ensure long term success. The physicist (the natural philosopher) in me wanted to continue the search for reality - the inner mystic clothed himself in outer practicality. The lesson of this period was the dichotomy - social responsibility versus personal necessity - and the practical need for compromise. In terms of personal relationships, I was beginning to fall out of love with love itself. The woman (my then wife) who had seemed to be my perfect partner was, from my perspective, changing in a way that took her away from 'us' and more in the direction of her friends and colleagues. We had been inseparable for years, sharing the one life, apparently. We were becoming individuals, once again, and I was questioning the nature of Human relationships.

For many people, this is also the age of reproduction and the raising of families. Despite being the father of one son, Chris, I never really felt comfortable in inflicting 'the problem of life' on another. Any value in the communal construct, in my view, was inextricably linked to the value of *Life* itself. Ultimately, this rests on the relation of *Life* to the rest of the universe as the containing context - something I understood innately. If *Life* is only a local phenomenon, not intrinsic to the nature and structure of the Universe, then there has, in the context *Reality*, never been a meaningful Human act or utterance, nor could there ever be. (This is equally true for the great men of both science and religion.) Astrology, at the very least, points to a living structure reaching over large periods of time and space, the understanding of which may well point to *Life's* intrinsic involvement with the fabric of reality. Now that would be a worthwhile starting point.

Third Age : 38th to 57th year, with midpoint around the middle of the 46th year : the second age ends as the third begins at the most dynamic point of the complete fourfold sequence – the astrological equivalent of a mid-life crisis. By now we know a lot about the established world and how we function in it, or not. Youthful dreams and exuberance have been tempered by experience. Time is limiting youthful vigour, as we begin to view the whole of life – from beginning to ultimate end. Now we may turn to questions previously avoided, about reality and the purpose of all of this living effort. The recurring nodal theme appears as “Do I need to be *here*?”, where *here* refers to conceptual and social systems, world-views that shape our thinking about Life and individuality. As always, I answered in the negative: there is not enough on display to satisfy my personal need.

Having understood that the information I sought did not yet exist in the Human world, I decided to go it alone, to seek the 'the truth' wherever I could find it. Referring to the topological model in the main text, introduced primarily in the spatial definition of the Horizon Plane, we can use its temporal aspect to express the journey through these four phases of life, especially this central dynamic point. Ages 1 and 2 combined are the temporal equivalent of the *neighbourhood of the individual*, the traditional Horizon Plane of chart construction. Beyond this region, in both spatial and temporal cases, we travel beyond what is immediately visible – the world of everyday routine and the practical necessities of living. There is a tradition in Kabbalah: no one should come to the study of inner knowledge before the age of 40 years. Given that, from experience, 'age transitions' require a period of adjustment either side of the return, this seems an entirely reasonable piece of advice. I remember the day after my 40th birthday, sitting in Edinburgh's Reference Library, reading a book on Kabbalah (I think it was Z'ev ben Shimon Halevi's 'The Way of Kabbalah') and feeling that this text had been prepared just for me, to find on that very day. Perhaps for the first time in my life, I had a sense of belonging. The lesson of this mid-life period, for me, was to realise that my path through life was going to be quite different from the norm, that others would inevitably see me as an oddball outsider, and that my support would come mainly from *Life* itself. And so it has been.

I included my nodal return chart for this 'Third Age' as it really did signal a departure from 'ordinary' life. I'd had enough of the world built by Human animals, but I could not see the point of continuing in my hedonistic escape. I was already feeling a presence around me; something wanted to communicate and so I invited communication – I prayed, if you like, and received my answer almost immediately. A link was established to 'my teachers', for want of a better term, discarnate (non-present physically) entities wishing to instruct me in my life's purpose, apparently. This has never been an entirely satisfactory arrangement since my desire to know remains unfulfilled – a *need to know* condition seems to apply to all of us mortal creatures. Also, some of the things I have learned are very difficult to accept. Interacting with *Life* has not been about getting what I needed. Mainly, it has been about learning what *Life* needs from me, as one individual. As I have observed in many 'spiritual' situations, the unseen realm cares nothing for abstractions like *Truth* and *Reality*; *Life's* purpose is to support life and it is not above colluding in delusions, including my own. Individuals come and go - only *Life* goes on, and to that end it can be brutal.

For most people this time does not involve a dramatic departure from the ideals of established normality, the accepted reality-constructs. Most will choose to support society through increasing engagement with the institutions of the day, bringing their acquired experience to the various

associations active in civil society. Of course, some will seek to change the world: through political means, financial philanthropy or whatever talents they have at their disposal. By now, we understand the 'society of the day', its structures and values, and how it might be changed for the better. For many, life simply goes on as usual, as if they never leave the limits of local horizons. Certainly, as a youngster growing up in a small community, I knew of people who had not ventured more than 3 miles from their place of birth – over a whole lifetime. Nor had they discarded the values imparted to them in the earliest years of life. These are not life's movers and shakers but society's backbone of slow-to-change ordinary folk. Perhaps only the most receptive and dynamic personalities respond to these subtle evolutionary forces?

Fourth Age : 57th to 75th year, with midpoint just beyond the 65th birthday : a time to pull it all together, to bring life to a satisfactory conclusion. Have we done all we intended to? Is there stuff yet to do? A time of acceptance that the years of personal growth and expansion are coming to a close. One can easily imagine the kind of question I will be asking as mid-cycle approaches, "Do I really need to be *here*?".

The sequence of *The Personal Ages* is subject to the same alternating polarity as any other sequential arrangement in Astrology. The first and third phases are the most outgoing, assertive periods, when we seek to be seen and heard, to be noticed by the world around us. In the second and fourth ages we are much more receptive to, and supportive⁵ of, the needs of others. Nostalgia, memories from the whole of my life, seem to be an increasing part of my thinking – trying to illuminate the pattern in the apparent chaos. Currently in the early part of this fourth age, I feel the need to bring this life to a satisfactory conclusion, to pull it all together in a meaningful way, to effect some kind of closure.

4. Some practical points in conclusion.

To test this new aspect of Astrology will require the most accurate software. As you can see from the illustrative chart, I have used the free program 'Astrolog32' which displays angles to the nearest second of arc. Finding the nodal return point can be fiddly – there is no automatic generation of this type of chart - but Astrolog32 has the ability to easily step forward and backward in time, using steps of selectable size, at the press of a button. Also, if you try a range of calculation software, you'll find that the resultant nodal position, and so any return chart calculated from it, can vary from package to package. That being the case, there has to be some doubt about the accuracy of any nodal chart angles (Ascendent etc.) and the position of the Moon. These two features are the most sensitive to calculation uncertainties. Nevertheless, transits to other chart features do, in my personal experience, behave as expected. Keep in mind that each of these ages is a *distinct context*, and related events must be interpreted within those contexts. Recently, (today is 31/05/09) I experienced a solar return based on my fourth age (third nodal return chart) 'Sun in Taurus'. Great day! The chart for that return has Mars in Aries close to the Ascendent, bringing a self-confidence and motivation that has lasted for several weeks, although it is slowly fading now. Such was the boost to my self-worth that I did not touch alcohol for about two whole weeks – truly amazing! Looking back to the corresponding time last year (journal entries) I see the same 'birthday' effect operating. This brief introduction to 'the personal ages' should be enough to get you experimenting for yourself. Keeping a personal journal is invaluable to this kind of research, as it is for all astrological work.

5 On average, these periods involve parenthood and then grand-parenthood, respectively.