

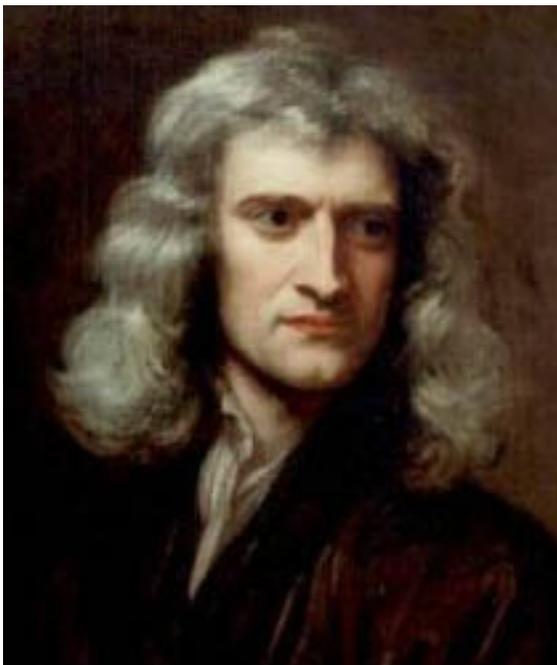
NEWTON, HALLEY AND URANUS

By Nick Kollerstrom

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The lives of Isaac Newton (1642-1727) and Edmond Halley (1656-1742) each spanned a complete Uranus-cycle. In those days, such longevity was most unusual. It seems appropriate that their lifespans express the concept of a total orbit, of revolution - and, of an unknown planet, since their lives were both oriented towards the future. They aimed to create a new science. At Newton's death, his Uranus-return was within two degrees, while at Halley's it was within ten degrees, as he lived to the beginning of his eighty-fifth year.

Halley was (with a brief exception) the one person who ever managed to get close to Newton. He was the only person to get a glowing send-up in Newton's *Principia*: 'the most acute and universally learned Mr. Edmund Halley,' while Halley in his introductory poem to it waxed lyrical about 'Nearer the gods no mortal may approach.'¹ Halley stimulated Newton to compose his masterpiece, then shortly after they collaborated on plotting what came to be called 'Halley's comet. Halley always looked up to Newton as a father-figure (his own having been murdered) and was guided by him in important life-decisions. Together, they worked on lunar theory.



Halley's Sun was conjunct Newton's Uranus within a degree, while Halley's Uranus (conjunct his own North Node) was conjunct Newton's Sun within three degrees, a rather charming synastry. Thus each of them found that their inner being (Sun) was inextricably involved with the other through the new science (Uranus). Also, both of their natal charts had a major opposition: Newton's was between Pluto and Neptune, as happens once per five centuries, while Halley had Jupiter opposing his Venus. The latter expresses Halley's genial, warm and affable disposition, while Newton's opposition seems more to

express his extreme remoteness from other people. These two oppositions were exactly aligned!

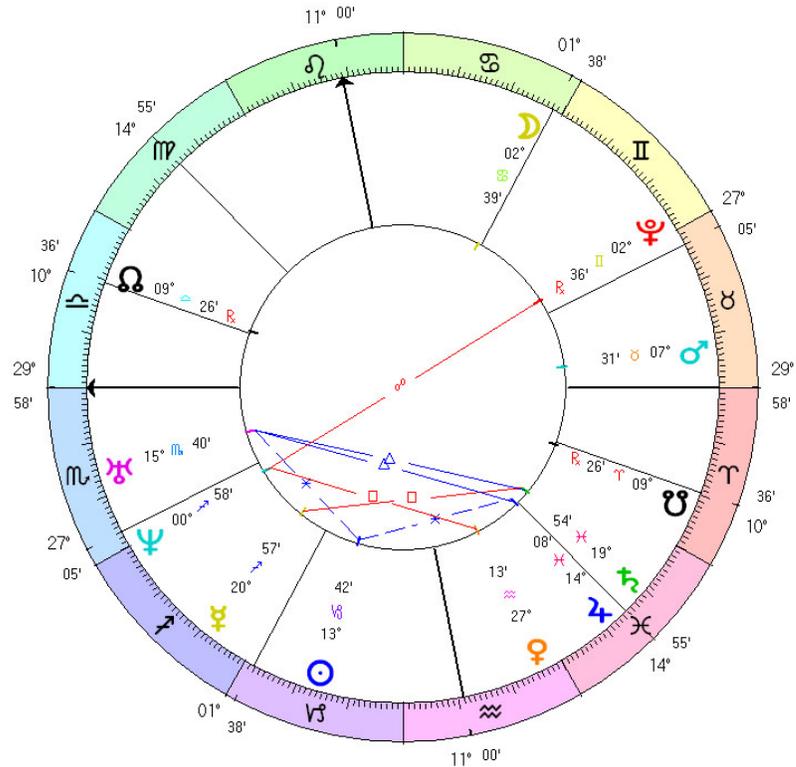
Halley: JU 3° Gem opposite VE 1° Sag,

Newton: PL 2° Gem opposite NE 1° Sag

Let's see how those synastry-linkages were activated at the big, history-making moments.

Newton's life fits like a blueprint into Uranus' orbit-cycle, which seems appropriate insofar as his life was that of the archetypal scientist: **'The life of Isaac Newton is the textbook case-study of the Uranus cycle in the life of a scientist.'**²

Newton
Natal Chart [2]
25 Dec 1642 OS
02:00 LMT +0:02:36
Grantham, UK
52°N55' 000"W39'
Geocentric
Tropical
Placidus
True Node



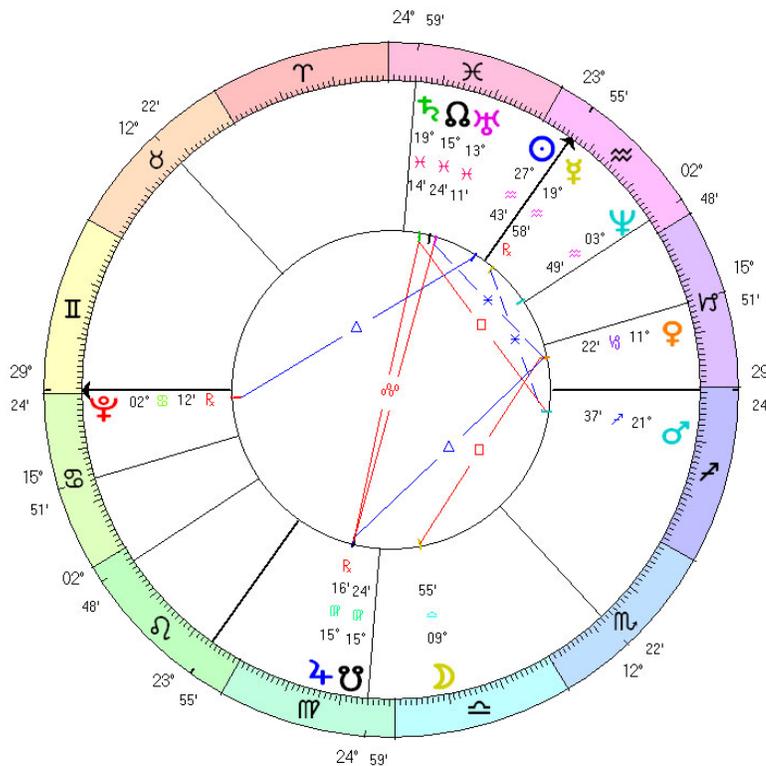
His main achievements happened as the major Uranus-returns chimed, which come round every seven years, more or less (Uranus' orbit of 84.01 years being a precise multiple of seven and twelve). The US astral philosopher professor Richard Tarnas has described Uranus as 'Promethian' in its essence, where this figure signifies 'the supreme mythic personification of rebellion, revolution, technological and cultural innovation, and the striving for freedom and change'³

Tarnas obtained this image partly from the charts of great scientists: 'I first looked into the chief protagonists of the Scientific Revolution - Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Descartes and Newton - because these men all appeared to be unambiguous representatives of the Prometheus archetype ... I found that every one of the five was born with Uranus in major aspect to the Sun' ⁴ That's quite a find! Newton had a Sun-Uranus sextile: his Uranus was in trine to the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction in his chart, and his Sun was midway in-between these. Halley's Sun and Uranus both touched this group, as we've seen.

Unfolding of the Uranus-Cycle

The first stage of the Uranus-cycle is the square, associated with youthful rebellion. This happens around 21 years. Newton was then a student at Trinity College Cambridge around the year 1665, when the Black Death raged and London went up in flames. He later said of this period, 'I was in the prime of my age for invention and minded Mathematics and Philosophy more than at any time since.' Deep mathematical insights came to him concerning infinite series, the binomial theorem and the beginning of calculus, and he started using a prism for optical experiments. His biographer Westfall described this period as his *annus mirabilis*, ('wonderful year') adding that 'the autumn of 1665 passed with incandescent intensity.' ⁵ This defines the exact period of his Uranus-square. Using an orb of three degrees

Light Theory
Natal Chart (4)
6 Feb 1672 OS
12:00 LMT +0:00:40
London, UK
51°N30' 000°W10'
Geocentric
Tropical
Placidus
True Node



for these key positions gives us periods of one-and-a-half years per transit.

The Saturn-return and Uranus-trine return periods interact and so often form the most creative period in the lives of eminent scientists. On average the Saturn-return happens at twenty-nine and a half years and the UR-trine return is twenty-eight years. For Newton, oddly enough, the former was reached after only 28 $\frac{1}{2}$ years while the latter did not chime until 29 years, 3 months. These periods wobble around, from the retrograde motions, making Newton's Uranus-trine return chime well after his Saturn-return! His hair went grey at the age of thirty (from his experiments with mercury, he told people), an aftermath of his SA-return.

His colour theory was born during this key period, with a most potent line-up of transits to help it along. In December 1671 he sent to the Royal Society in London a rather fine reflecting telescope, the first anyone had made, as deeply impressed the cognoscenti. He ground and polished the mirror himself. In response they invited him to be a Fellow, as transpired in January of 1672. Then on February 6th he sent them his 'New theory of light and colours', with its (dubious) claim that white light was *composed of* the different colours into which it could be resolved by prism refraction. This was a big success: as the Society's secretary informed him, 'This paper mett both with a singular attention and an uncommon applause.' Surely, this was the first scientific paper, ever communicated to a scientific society.

Newton's Jupiter-opposition return and Saturn-return were both then chiming within a degree, as well as his Uranus-trine return which was within two degrees. A Saturn-Uranus conjunction opposite Jupiter was aligning with his natal Jupiter-Saturn conjunction, plus the lunar nodes were also aligned. In addition, it is rather charming to note that the Sun was conjunct his Venus within half a degree, and Venus was conjunct his Sun to two degrees - very appropriate for an experiment where a chink of sunlight passed through a prism to make a rainbow 'spectrum' (he gave the modern meaning to that word, before which it had just meant a ghost).

In the next few years he published a dozen or so letters and articles in the Royal Society's journal, about his new colour theory and his telescope. Thus his Saturn-return saw him becoming established as his fame spread. The 1670s happen also to be the period of

Newton's deep immersion in Hermeticism. This period came to an end soon after the death of his mother in 1680; after which, the rich, vitalistic concepts of alchemy faded away in his mind to be replaced by the lifeless, inorganic concepts of weight, inertia and gravity.

Halley stimulated Newton to compose the grand masterpiece, from 1684 onwards, encouraging the work and checking the proofs, then announced its existence to the Royal Society on April 28, 1686, when it was still incomplete. This was the precise moment for Halley's own Uranus-trine. Also, Jupiter, conjunct a Full Moon, was transiting both his Sun and Newton's Uranus. The Society, little apprehending what was coming, had just spent its last penny on an illustrated encyclopaedia of fish. This meant that Halley had to fund the book, which he did from his wedding-dowry. For the rest of that year and part of the next, Jupiter opposed Uranus.

In spring of the next year, Halley held the complete manuscript in his hands. It was a work, he told Newton, 'that all future ages will admire.' That was in March 1687, as Uranus opposed his Sun and Newton's Uranus, both within a degree, so that Jupiter in the sky was conjunct with them. This aspect remained in place on July 5th when the book was published, and in addition the nodes became aligned with this opposition. This was Halley's Saturn-return, and his role here was decisive.

Tarnas has described how 'in the life of a Promethian individual, the midpoint of the Uranus-cycle represented an unmistakably climactic moment in the unfolding of that individual's Promethian impulse.'⁶ This gives us a way of apprehending the big mid-way division in Newton's life, whereas modern psychology rather lacks a vocabulary for describing these epochal events, as are at once personal and historic. Hardly was the ink dry in March 1687 from composing his magnum opus, when Newton turned to politics, putting his career at risk by urging Fellows of his college to resist the imposition of a Catholic representative, as King James wanted. This paid off, and soon after Newton became a member of Parliament. Before this act of resistance he was the most reclusive of ivory-tower scholars, where all the stories about him concerned his absent-mindedness. The rest of his life was spent as a public figure, as Master of the Mint and President of the Royal Society.

In the last year of his life at 84 years, the full Uranus-cycle, Newton had removed to the quiet village of Kensington to escape the fumes and bustle of London. William Stukeley

(later to become 'the archdruid') had tea with the ageing sage one afternoon, and heard the first version of the falling-apple story. Why, it was even as he sat in his Mother's garden, way back in 1666, wondering about the Moon, when he watched an apple fall. The apple story became immortal, the best-known of eureka legends. The last and third edition of his *Principia*, the only one translated into English (from Latin) also came out that year. So his full Uranus-return was quite eventful.

Untuning of the Spheres

The 'untuning of the spheres' happened in the 17th century. Newton's book was a tome of 'glacial remoteness' that hardly anyone could understand and its austere demonstrations showed dire new mechanical universe. All causes were material and atoms were all that existed. Since Newton's book, not a single astronomer of note in the English-speaking world has expressed a belief in astrology (unless one wishes to include Percy Seymour...). Let's here ask the question, who was the first astronomer who unequivocally disbelieved in astrology? Figures like Christopher Wren, the Gresham professor of astronomy and John Flamsteed, the first Astronomer Royal, held some degree of belief in the art⁷. My candidate would be Edmond Halley. It was the Newtonian revolution which made that possible.

Newton's close friend James Conduitt recalled how 'in later years he had so ill an opinion of poets that you could not do any man a worse turn with him than to say he was a poet. He always imagined that poetry was a study so very contrary to mathematics.'⁸ People always want to believe there was a hidden, mystical streak in Newton but I never found it. He was a mortalist i.e. he did not believe in human survival after death,⁹ and he was a monist i.e. he did not believe in the Holy Trinity, either of which would have utterly banned his holding any public office - had they been known. He felt that his deity was close to him, as much as other people were remote.

'May god us keep/from single vision and Newton's sleep' exclaimed William Blake, who designed his figure of Urizen from Newton's god (the blend of these two might possibly be visible in the forecourt of the new British Library). Thus, 'Till, like a dream, Eternity was obliterated & erased...a philosophy of the five senses was complete. Urizen wept & gave it into the hands of Newton & Locke' This deity became in the end quite oppressive: 'Urizen answered, 'Read my books, explore my constellations, Enquire of my sons & they shall teach

thee how to War.¹⁰. Blake's stern 'Urizen' had somehow lost his feminine counterpart: 'Urizen, sitting in his web of deceitful religion...' 'Visiting St James' in Picadilly one can mull over these things, where Blake was baptised and where Newton, living in Jermyn Street, had attended services now and then, to keep up appearances. Perhaps their incompatible spirits are battling above its roof.

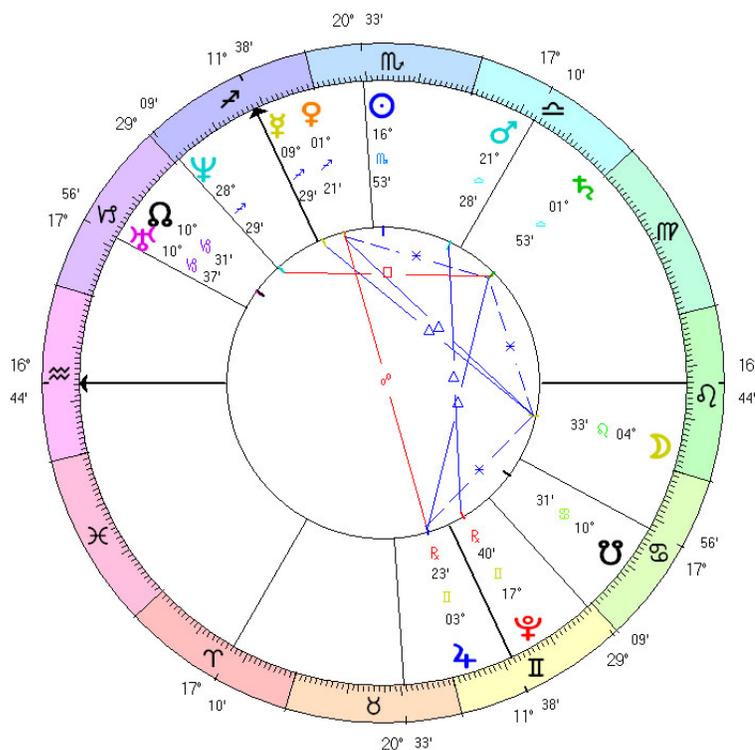
Delirium

Newton is the extreme case of a 'natural philosopher' who had no relation to women. Music, art and poetry meant nothing to him. His one passion for another was homosexual and lead to his nervous breakdown in 1693 (from May to September) as he endeavoured to suppress these feelings. That 'breakdown' was caused by Neptune transiting his firmly-placed Saturn. He wrote paranoid letters about how he had lost his 'former consistency of mind' to Samuel Pepys (13th September), then a few days later accused John Locke of having 'endeavoured to embroil me with women.' He wrote an uncharacteristic alchemical tract about how to make magical oils that would glow in the dark, which as his latest biographer astutely remarks was 'little more than a blend of naked delirium and false conviction.'¹⁰

Penguins & Icebergs

What happened to Halley at his Uranus-opposition? Halley was commissioned by the Lords of the Admiralty to undertake a perilous voyage around both the north and south Atlantic oceans, in a boat called the Paramore Pink with twelve sailors aboard. He had to check out

Halley
Natal Chart (3)
29 Oct 1656 OS
13:27 LMT +0:00:40
London, UK
51°N30'000"W10'
Geocentric
Tropical
Placidus
True Node



the magnetic declinations, and the maps he drew up were much used by sailors in the 18th century. He went further south towards *Terra Incognita* than had anyone before him, and his diary records herds of seal, schools of penguin and even the tossing tails of killer whales (though he didn't know what they were). This was around 27th January 1700, at the midpoint of his Uranus-opposition. Going further south Halley passed between huge icebergs, ignorant as to what they were or how dangerous this was. Then, it dawned upon him that they were: 'very distinctly nothing else but one body of Ice of an incredible height whereupon we went about Shipp and stood to the Northward.' After returning safely from this epic voyage, Halley was henceforth called 'Captain Halley,' and Flamsteed (England's other astronomer) commented that he 'talks, swears and drinks brandy like a sea-captain.'¹¹ This did not prevent him from becoming appointed as geometry professor at Oxford. Halley's Uranus-opposition was thus one of grand achievement and adventure.



We find a pattern in their destinies, Halley and Newton, by using a planet then unknown. These pioneers of a new science sought for 'objective' knowledge and kept clear of self-knowledge or an inner understanding of things. Perhaps we can now supply that, but only by reference to an invisible sphere. One could not imagine such characters as having any belief in astrology, since the primary dynamic of their charts was then unmanifest. Tarnas' Prometheus-thesis works remarkably well for creative and innovative scientists, and it does give us such a language. Biographers of the future will surely want to use these planetary cycles to help them discern the essential meaning.

References

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- 3) Richard Tarnas, *Uranus and Prometheus* AA Jnl. June 1990 p.150-156,150.
- 4) Richard Tarnas, *Prometheus the Awakener*, 1995, Spring Publications, p.17. This masterpiece began as AA Jnl. articles, see ref. (3).
- 5) Richard Westfall, *Never at Rest, a biography of Isaac Newton* CUP 1980 p.140.
- 6) Tarnas (3) p.35.
- 7) For background reading see *Prophecy and Power* by Patrick Curry, 1989.
- 8) Castillejo *The Expanding force in Newton's Cosmology* p.43.
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- 10) William Blake, *Vala or the Four zoas*, and Song of Los.
- 11) Michael White, *Isaac Newton, The Last Sorcerer* 1997 p.250.
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