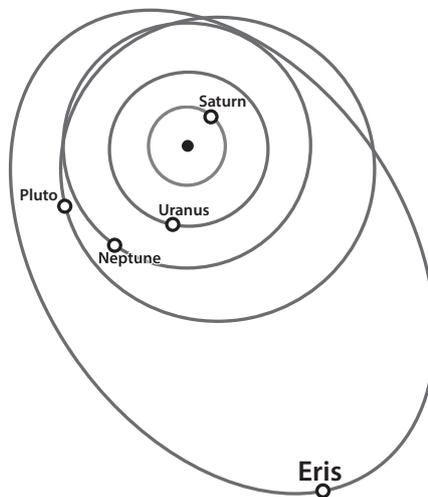


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The Challenge of a New Planet

In September 2006 a new planet was announced by the International Astronomical Union (IAU). It was named Eris - for the Greek goddess of Chaos and Discord - and true to its name, this planet's birth did not come easy. Because there were numberless objects remaining to be discovered and named in the region beyond the orbit of Neptune, and recognizing that the new body together with Pluto (discovered in the 1930s) were only the first and second of these, its astronomical characterization as a true 'planet' of our solar system was in doubt. This was so even though this new body, already nicknamed Xena after the television warrior princess, was about the same size as the existing Pluto, and identical in astronomical category.

The public, and the astrologers too, were fond of little Pluto, previously known as the outer-most member of the solar system, and school children had been memorizing it for years as part of the litany of planet names. Mike Brown, the discoverer of Eris, confidently considered this new celestial body to be even more important than Pluto, and was the 'tenth planet' for which astronomers had long been searching. Eris was slow to be discovered because although it was the same size as Pluto, even possessing a similar satellite configuration with one major moon, for the past century and a half Eris has been much farther out. Eris was only finally discovered through better astronomical techniques in our century. She was found quite near to her aphelion, or greatest distance from the sun. Her extremely eccentric orbit makes its orbital period a little over twice that of Pluto, taking 556 years to completely circle the Sun.



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Nevertheless the IAU, in a controversial move, decided to officially designate this next planet of the solar system a 'dwarf' planet, and to re-classify Pluto to this same category.

This decision caused considerable controversy and consternation almost everywhere. Debates sprang up within the astronomical community over Pluto's reclassification. When the Hayden planetarium in New York decided to modify its sculptural representation of the solar system to disallow the former ninth planet, many people were confused and disappointed. The official name that this new tenth planetary body was given, whether planet or dwarf, was turning out to be very significant in the furor of her coming because that name was Eris – in Greek myth the Goddess of Discord and sister of the God of War.

When this designation was made, creating a new astronomical category of 'dwarf planet', it presented a problem for astrologers as well as astronomers. The question became whether this latest member of the solar system, the first in the 21st century, would represent a new major archetype in Western Astrology just as had the discoveries of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto in the centuries before it. Thus in astrological circles, standards were also being overturned but from a different angle. Even though his astronomical designation had changed, there was no way that the established astrological symbolism of mighty Pluto – small in size but powerful in effects – would be dropped.

In the seven or more decades since its discovery, Pluto has come to represent the deep interior realm of human desire nature, largely unconscious, and the important area of death and rebirth. Pluto was seen as symbolizing deep transformation as a natural process, as well as sexuality. Wherever it touches the natal chart, there lies the potential for enormous change. This is true for aspects within a natal chart and, in the case of a transiting, or passing influence, such a Plutonian contact represents a climactic year of powerful metamorphosis for whatever natal factor is involved. Western astrologers have had the universal response that these demonstrated delineations, shown to be true over decades of practice, would be no different with the alteration of Pluto's official astronomical designation.

But what now, of Eris? Occupying the same astronomical category as Pluto, would it prove to be just as powerful in charts? Astrologers who disregarded the new planet because it was not considered by a majority of one section of the astronomical community to be a fully-fledged planet like Uranus and Neptune, were missing the point. Eris was still a complete match with Pluto, entirely similar in size and placement and representing the next step in planetary nomenclature even though officially a 'dwarf planet,'

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in fact a planet! This is especially so since the name Eris arises out of the same tradition of the Roman and Greek pantheon of gods and goddesses that had already supplied names for the other outer planets discovered in recent times, beginning with the discovery of Uranus in the eighteenth century, Neptune in the nineteenth, Pluto in the twentieth, and now Eris in the twenty-first.

Thus, I was captivated by the idea that the investigation into the astrological archetype of Eris would lead to vitally important results for modern Western Astrology. I began with her mythology. Just as the mythology of the gods had helped in initially informing astrologers as to the nature of the earlier planetary archetypes, what clues would the mythology of goddess Eris provide?

The Mysterious Connection Between Name and Astrological Function

The question arises as to why the name of these astronomical bodies might indeed matter. In other words, as Shakespeare famously inquired, “what’s in a name?” Well, it turns out, quite a lot. As those who work with astrology already acknowledge and recognize, the name of newly discovered planetary bodies represents a strong clue as to their astrological function.

This gets into the question of how and why astrology works. That it does work can be demonstrated. For a remarkably complete exposition of the subject matter of astrology I recommend Richard Tarnas’ landmark work *Cosmos and Psyche*, published in 2005. I could also recommend the software that I created, TimePassages. This astrology program puts up text for each chart feature. I created it with the specific purpose of demonstrating that astrology works, by allowing anyone who would like to take an unprejudiced view of Western Astrology their own access to the traditional meanings of factors in the chart: planets (including the Sun and Moon) houses and signs.

The issue for our times is, what does this fact – that astrology does work – tell us about the universe in which we live? Most importantly, that it is a far more magical universe than consensus thinking gives credit to. To again quote Shakespeare, it must mean that there are indeed “more things in heaven and in earth than are dreamt of in [our] philosophy”, if by our philosophy we imply the scientism that currently prevails in this early part of this paradigm-changing 21st century.

Astrology gives us a unique view of the human condition and of the specifics of a particular person’s innermost dynamics. The bibliography at the end of this book has more information and online references for

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the specialized meanings of the existing planetary archetypes of Western Astrology and their combinations. Incidentally, the way that astrology does work, in concordance with the mythology of 'planets' such as Venus, Mars and the Moon, also seems to discount physical cause and effect as being in any way responsible for the power of the astrological archetype. I am referring to such notions as emanations of hitherto unknown 'rays' from astronomical bodies, or gravitational or magnetic influences; theories which do not hold water because these planetary energies work on a symbolic level. However, how can this be? How can the name that is chosen for an astronomical body, in this case Eris, come to stand for its meaning in the astrological chart? It is a truly mystical connection that exists, as has been proved time and time again, over the past 350 years, as these more recent Western planetary archetypes have come to light in modern times.

If we take a look at the mythology of Eris, the idea of potentially violent struggle comes to mind as well as the ideal of the vital feminine warrior fighting for a just cause. Eris was named after the Goddess of Strife and Discord, who willingly accompanied her brother Ares (in Latin, Mars), the God of War, into the battle. The new planet was originally designated 2003 UB313, and was nicknamed Xena, after the warrior princess of popular television culture. We will also want to take a look at the events surrounding this discovery and naming period of 2003–2006. Combining these ideas, the archetypal image comes to the fore of a militant feminism that does not shrink from violence.

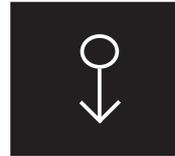
In preliminary investigations of the Eris astrological archetype, there is also to be considered a Plutonian element of deep inner process. When Pluto was found in the 1930s, its discovery introduced some dark notions regarding the human condition, of a depth and a power that were previously unacknowledged. It stands to reason that so also will the discovery of Eris, a cousin to Pluto by astronomical category, and in every other way. Eris is found even farther out into the dark void at the edge of the solar system and therefore partakes of the same symbolism. We have grown as a culture through our understanding of the astrological Pluto, and so too will we grow as we come to integrate the Eris archetype into modern astrological understanding.

The astrology of Eris seems to be related to the no-holds-barred fight for continued existence that is fundamental in all natural processes, and for making a stand for what one believes, even if violence is involved. As the sister of Mars, Eris willingly sought the battle. The struggle for survival is a side of nature that is quite harsh; and this struggle is a fundamental part of the human condition as well, for we are still half animal. Nature can

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be viewed in a rosy light, as it was in the hippie movement of the sixties, Bambi drinking from a little stream; but underlying this beauty is the possibility of sudden death at any moment, since all of nature's children need to eat. Eris is related to this principle of necessary harshness in nature to achieve a life-enhancing goal – and to the concept of the female warrior that embodies it – and especially to the feminist struggle for survival rights in a patriarchal society.

In the charts that follow, I will introduce the glyph that I designed for Eris with the help of my son, Asia Seltzer. This was circulated amongst the astrological community as a provisional glyph and is now gaining acceptance. This glyph, with a small circle above a downward arrow, is a combination of the glyphs for Pluto, Mars and Venus, as seems fitting for the sister of Mars and the astrological cousin of Pluto.



The first set of charts that came to mind as I began this research were the feminists of the twentieth century. They were struggling to right the wrongs done in the name of patriarchal culture not only to themselves as women, but to nature and to the ideal of communal coexistence among the peoples of a potentially peaceful and beautiful Earth.

And some were more involved with violence than others. Andrea Dworkin is one such feminist. In her day she was a standard-bearer for the struggle of women for equality, and did not shy from pursuing an extremely candid means to that end if necessary, speaking out against violence as a method of masculine control. As a young woman, she also was physically abused by her husband.¹

It was fascinating to see that Eris is indeed prominent in her chart – standing alone in one half of the available 180 degrees and therefore the focus of a Bucket (or Funnel) pattern. It stands across from the rest of her planets and directly opposed to the Libra planets in her eighth house of evolutionary change, including Neptune directly on the cusp of that house representing the idealism of her fundamental position toward necessary change and her activist focus on sexual power issues and pornography. Her chart is given in Chapter 2, Fig. 2-14.

Another feminist from the Sixties who is philosophically and intellectually prominent and is also sometimes associated with very direct and radical action in pursuit of societal goals is Angela Davis. Her chart is given on the following page.

In Davis's chart we can again observe a strong Eris. Notice that her Sun trine Mars and Uranus is mediated by Eris at the midpoint. This lends

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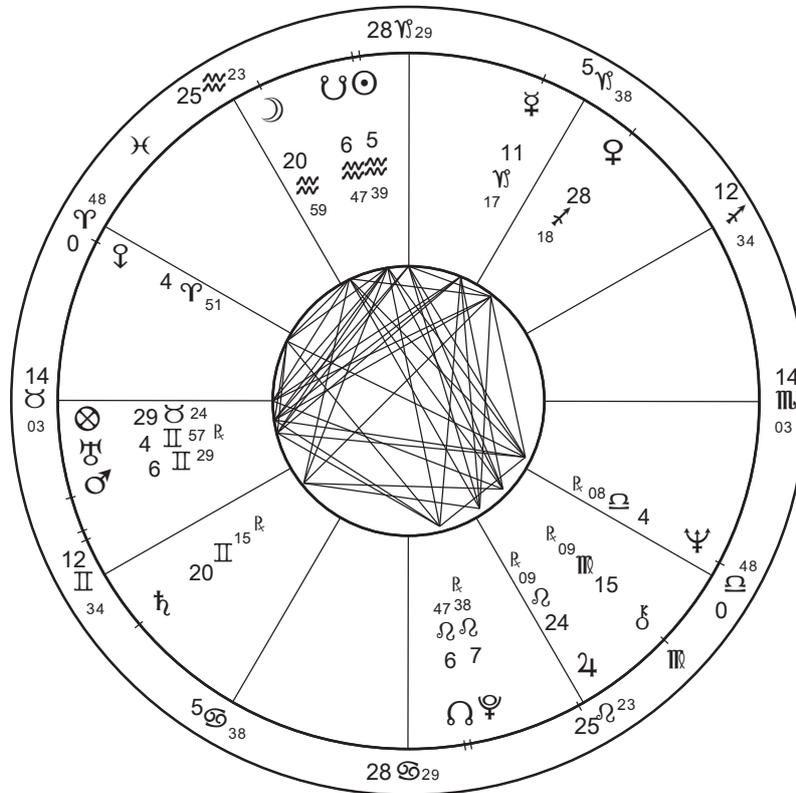


Fig. 1-1 Angela Davis, January 26, 1944, 12:30 PM CWT,
Birmingham, Alabama, USA

an edge to the stand that she is willing to take in support of her idealistic and forward-thinking, even revolutionary, agenda. During the violent sixties, Davis was accused of involvement in the courtroom abduction of Judge Harold Haley in an attempt to free her lover, Black Panther leader George Jackson, from San Quentin prison. This incident resulted in the deaths of Jackson's younger brother and three others, including the judge. Although her politics mellowed with maturity, earlier in the sixties Angela Davis had made the statement: "The only path of liberation for black people is that which leads toward complete and radical overthrow of the capitalist class."²²

The last example that I would like to include in this introductory chapter is Jane Fonda. Although not initially feminist, Fonda's life definitely demonstrates a radical and activist bent.

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strongly iconoclastic persona as she matured. Indeed that has proven to be the case. She played the rebel in her role as an anti-war protester in the late '60s and early '70s, famously allowing herself to be photographed behind the sights of an enemy anti-aircraft gun. Her vocal, defiant and radical opposition to the war highlights the basic idealism of evolved Eris as a force for change and in opposition to the existing patriarchal establishment.

As these charts have shown, and as client work over these past two years has also demonstrated to me, the Eris archetype has a consistent theme of taking a stand for oneself, violent if necessary, and of being very sure of oneself in the face of pressure to conform. Just as with Pluto, there are positive manifestations as well as the more compulsive and relatively unevolved activities that can also be associated with this archetype. Jane Fonda has been a positive force for good in the world, and a steady moneymaker. Over the course of her life she has been a strong voice for physical fitness, having produced a series of exercise videos, as well as a champion of the underdog, including the Viet Cong, and this is consistent with a strongly placed Eris in the second house of body, resources and finances, and in conjunction with Saturn. In speaking of two of her father's films, *12 Angry Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*, Jane Fonda had this to say: these films "instilled in me my father's values and made me care about the underdogs of the world, and showed me that films can make a difference." Earth-oriented Saturn represents a powerful connection with the physical world, and also implies a sense of justice, being exalted in Libra.

In the course of several years of research, I have seen hundreds of charts that show a powerful correlation between Eris and taking a strong stand for oneself, radical and even violent if necessary. These people can be a handful, especially when young and relatively unevolved. Later they become a strong force for advancing what they see as necessary and good, both in terms of social ideals and for what has come to be regarded by them as their soul purpose.

Notes

1. See Dworkin *Heartbreak*, p. 119; Dworkin, *Letters from a War Zone*, pp. 103, 332. Also see *Life and death: unapologetic writings on the continuing war against women*.
2. From a speech in 1968 when Ms. Davis joined the Communist Party. Quoted in her bio on marcuse.org: URL <http://www.marcuse.org/herbert/scholaractivists/AngDavisBioBib88.htm>.