



MERCURY Pi in the Sky

by Brian Clark

Trickster, messenger, wordsmith, guide: images that spring to mind when we mention astrological Mercury. Two-and-a-half millennia ago, the ancients called his predecessor Hermes shifty, cunning in mind, a rustler of cattle, and a shepherd of dreams.¹ Whatever the guise, Mercury is there at turns in the road, as we awaken from the dream, when we forget our way, or in the conversation we are about to have. At nightfall or at daybreak, he lingers in the shadows. We think of him as a god of the road, of numbers and words. What follows are some thoughts about the road he travels through the heavens.

The Cycle of Mercury

Catching a glimpse of Mercury is not easy. The planet is only visible near the horizon in the transitional twilight before sunrise or after sunset, the in-between zone where Mercury is most at home. In myth, Mercury was also difficult to corner. Unlike the other gods, he did not have sanctuaries or fixed places of worship; instead, he was spotted on the road, in between, in transition, and in motion.

Since Mercury is close to the Sun, the skies are never completely dark when the planet is discernible. Perched between day and night, Mercury can be fleetingly glimpsed after the Sun sets or before it rises. Even though he will make three morning and three evening appearances each

year, he remains elusive. In his morning face, Mercury leads souls up from the Underworld; as the shepherd of dreams, he guides them down again. Ancients knew his two faces as *Psychagogos*, the one who called up the spirits of the dead, and *Psychopompos*, the one who led the souls into the night world. Characteristically, Mercury lingers on the threshold of sleeping and waking, where we are in a distinctive state of consciousness, a state identified as hypnagogic.² On the borderland of sleep, sensory phenomena such as voices and visions are often experienced while Mercury guides us down to or up from the cavern of sleep each day.

Mercury's territory is that interval between wakefulness and sleep. He is a master traveller, and the zodiacal route he travels in the heavens maps out Mercurial time with regularity and order, suggesting that the god is not as haphazard as we sometimes mistakenly assume.

The Wily Wanderer

Like Venus, Mercury is identified as an "inferior" planet, because its orbit is contained by the Earth's. As we look towards the Sun, the orbit of Mercury is enclosed by that of the Earth — therefore "inferior." This is an astronomical term, not a judgement, as Mercury is far from inferior. Because of this arrangement, we only see Mercury in a limited relationship with the Sun. At its maximum elongation from the Sun,

Mercury can never be more than 28° away. From our vantage point, Mercury and the Sun are a duo. This astronomical dyad of the Sun and Mercury is also consistent in the mythic tales of the brothers Apollo and Hermes, inspirationally articulated in “The Homeric Hymn to Hermes.”

Due to its proximity to the Sun, Mercury can only be in one of three signs in a geocentric horoscope: the sign of the Sun or one of the Sun’s two adjacent signs. The only major aspect Mercury forms with the Sun is a conjunction — unlike the orbits of the “superior” planets (Mars–Pluto) which produce a full range of solar aspects. Being egg-shaped, Mercury’s orbit is eccentric, characteristic of this god. Its orbital speed around the Sun varies considerably, ranging from a standstill near its stations to more than 2.25° per day at its superior conjunction. Rather than a conjunction and an opposition occurring in each cycle, there are two conjunctions: At the inferior conjunction, Mercury is closest to the Earth, slower in motion, and retrograde; whereas at the superior conjunction, Mercury is on the other side of the Sun from the Earth, moving fastest, and direct in motion. The Mercury synodic cycle with the Sun begins at its inferior conjunction,³ averaging 116 days until the next inferior conjunction, when another cycle begins. Because of Mercury’s elliptical orbit, the length of this cycle can vary between 105 and 130 days, about one-third of a year.

Both conjunctions are turning points in the Sun–Mercury cycle. The inferior conjunction is akin to a New Moon; at this time, Mercury is between the Earth and the Sun. At the inferior conjunction, Mercury leaves its post as the evening star to begin to rise before the Sun, leading the souls up from the Underworld. At the superior conjunction, Mercury is on the other side of the Sun in its “Full” phase, now rising after the Sun, and thus being inwardly focused. At each conjunction, Mercury is invisible, obscured in the brilliance of the Sun, and in the process of changing from aligning with either the solar day or the lunar night team. Through the technique of planetary sect, our astrological ancestors respected Mercury’s changeable temperament by aligning him with either the day sect, when he rose before the Sun (oriental), or the night camp, when he set after the Sun (occidental).

This cycle accounts for Mercury’s mysterious disappearance and reappearance in our skies, as well as its apparent backtracking through the zodiac three times a year. In each cycle, Mercury is between 17 and 28 degrees of zodiacal separation from the Sun. This occurs twice, at its eastern and western elongation.

Shape-shifting between the god of dawn and dusk is symbolic of the Mercurial disposition: adapting to times of transition, being proficient in moving between hemispheres, acclimatizing to new arrangements, and navigating between different states of consciousness. Like his great grandson Ulysses, Mercury is *polytropos* — a god of many turns — and *polymetis* — a god with much cunning and intelligence.

At the beginning of the cycle, this “New Mercury” is still retrograde, closest to the Earth. A new facet of Mercurial development is set in motion. At the halfway period, Mercury is direct in motion, fast-moving, and farthest from the Earth. Similar to the Full Moon phase, Mercury is now at its most

objective and informed point of this cycle. It then enters its occidental phase, a more pensive and introspective period.⁴

Pi in the Sky: The Infinite Intelligence of Randomness

Mythic Mercury has a penchant for mathematical symmetry. He is the god of the classroom, yet with one wave of his hypnotic wand, he can induce drowsiness in his students — two sides of his learning curve. As the astrological ruler of Gemini, he pairs and duplicates; as the ruler of Virgo, he respects precision and measurement.

Mercury’s cycle reveres the sacredness of geometry through the mathematical constant of Pi that is etched on the heavens in this planet’s cycle with the Sun. The numerical paradigm of Pi states that the ratio of a circle’s circumference

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whose subsequent decimal digits
progress endlessly.*

to its diameter is always approximately 3.14. This reminds us of the connection between infinite (the circle) and linear (the diameter) ways of knowing. When we are in Mercurial space, we are in between — moving between imagination and intellect. This ratio is represented by the Greek letter π ; hence Mercury is embedded in the alphabet, a word which combines the first two Greek letters *alpha* and *beta*. All seminal Greek words were conceived in the union between logic and symbol, the two hemispheres that Mercury travels between. Mercury is the god of the hieroglyph which, literally translated, suggests a sacred carving. His heavenly hieroglyph is Pi, or 3.14.

Mercury’s cycle of 22 conjunctions in 7 years aligns with Pi, an infinite number whose subsequent decimal digits progress endlessly. Mercury invites us into his seemingly unplanned world, where intelligence is based not only on reason, but also on participation and transition. When we are in between and in motion, Mercury stirs thoughts and memories that reconnect us to the world we are passing through.

The affinity of Mercury’s synodic cycle with this mathematical and astronomical transcendent number can be shown in two ways:

1. Each Sun–Mercury cycle is an average of 116 days; therefore, in one year it completes 3.14 cycles (365.25 divided by 116).
2. The zodiacal location where the Sun–Mercury cycle begins repeats itself again in seven years, approximately 7–8 degrees and days earlier. Between these repetitions, there are 22 inferior conjunctions or cycles. The 22/7 ratio is often used to approximate Pi, or 3.14. For instance,

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Table 1 (page 43) begins with the first inferior conjunction of April 1, 2018 at 11°56' Aries. Seven years earlier, the inferior conjunction was on April 10, 2011 at 19°36' Aries, while the next one will be seven years later on March 24, 2025 at 4°24' Aries. Between each of these times, there are 22 inferior conjunctions.

Table 1 lists the 22 inferior conjunctions for two 7-year periods, given in Universal Time (UT). Mercury will always be retrograde at the inferior conjunction, which is the midpoint of its retrogradation subcycle.

Where Pi becomes fascinating in terms of Mercury is that the meaning of its exact value is unknowable, resulting in Pi being described as an “irrational number.” In other words, the pattern of Pi, like Mercury, does not conform — perhaps because it embraces both finite and infinite possibilities. Pi is engaged wherever there is a circle, and as we know, a circle is infinite, not finite: no beginning, no end. Mathematical Mercury is irrational in the truest sense, in that it is unlimited in possibilities. Mercurial space is liminal, in-between, often invisible and/or nonsensical, a borderland. Here, between wakefulness and sleep, day and night, logic and symbol, we encounter creative ways of knowing. As Pi in the sky, Mercury reminds us of the infinite possibilities of thoughts, ideas, and movements as we explore the path of our life.

The Mercurial Round

Times vary, but about one week before the inferior conjunction, Mercury sets in the evening to visibly rise approximately a fortnight later, a week or so after the inferior conjunction. It will set in the morning about a week before the superior conjunction and rise in the evening a week or so later, a fortnight or more after its morning set. Mercury disappears from our skies, preparing to change focus. **Table 2** (following page) traces the critical points in the Sun–Mercury cycle, starting with the last inferior conjunction in 2018. (Dates, in UT, read across the table in chronological order.)

The average times between these phases in the average Mercury cycle of 116 days are as follows:

- Inferior conjunction to stationary direct: 11 days
- Stationary direct to greatest western (morning star) elongation: 10 days
- Greatest elongation to superior conjunction: 37 days
- Superior conjunction to greatest eastern (evening star) elongation: 37 days
- Greatest elongation to stationary retrograde: 10 days
- Stationary retrograde to inferior conjunction: 11 days

Table 3 (following page) shows the approximate zodiacal positions of the Sun and Mercury at critical points in their cycle (UT).

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Table 1: Sun-Mercury Inferior Conjunctions, 2018–31 (UT)

Number and Date of Inferior Conjunction	Zodiacal Degree	Date of Inferior Conjunction (Subsequent Cycle)	Zodiacal Degree (Subsequent Cycle)
1. April 1, 2018	11°56' ARI	March 24, 2025	04°24' ARI
2. Aug. 9, 2018	16°27' LEO	Aug. 1, 2025	09°00' LEO
3. Nov. 27, 2018	05°03' SAG	Nov. 20, 2025	28°18' SCO
4. March 15, 2019	24°11' PIS	March 7, 2026	16°52' PIS
5. July 21, 2019	28°28' CAN	July 13, 2026	20°42' CAN
6. Nov. 11, 2019	18°55' SCO	Nov. 5, 2026	12°10' SCO
7. Feb. 26, 2020	06°55' PIS	Feb. 19, 2027	29°47' AQU
8. July 1, 2020	09°44' CAN	June 23, 2027	01°39' CAN
9. Oct. 25, 2020	02°47' SCO	Oct. 19, 2027	26°01' LIB
10. Feb. 8, 2021	20°01' AQU	Feb. 2, 2028	13°01' AQU
11. June 11, 2021	20°21' GEM	June 2, 2028	12°06' GEM
12. Oct. 9, 2021	16°35' LIB	Oct. 2, 2028	09°45' LIB
13. Jan. 23, 2022	03°22' AQU	Jan. 16, 2029	26°29' CAP
14. May 21, 2022	00°43' GEM	May 13, 2029	22°30' TAU
15. Sept. 23, 2022	00°14' LIB	Sept. 16, 2029	23°18' VIR
16. Jan. 7, 2023	16°56' CAP	Dec. 31, 2029	10°06' CAP
17. May 1, 2023	11°19' TAU	April 23, 2030	03°21' TAU
18. Sept. 6, 2023	13°36' VIR	Aug. 29, 2030	06°32' VIR
19. Dec. 22, 2023	00°39' CAP	Dec. 16, 2030	23°51' SAG
20. April 11, 2024	22°32' ARI	April 5, 2031	14°51' ARI
21. Aug. 19, 2024	26°35' LEO	Aug. 12, 2031	19°17' LEO
22. Dec. 6, 2024	14°27' SAG	Nov. 30, 2031	07°40' SAG

Note: The inferior conjunctions retrograde through elements and repeat every 7 years within an orb of approximately 7 days or 7 degrees.

Table 2: Critical Points in Sun-Mercury Cycle, 2018–20 (UT)

Inferior Conjunction	Stationary Direct	Greatest Western Elongation	Superior Conjunction	Greatest Eastern Elongation	Stationary Retrograde
2018 Nov. 27	Dec. 6	Dec. 15	2019 Jan. 30	Feb. 27	March 5
March 15	March 28	April 11	May 21	June 23	July 8
July 21	Aug. 1	Aug. 9	Sept. 4	Oct. 20	Oct. 31
Nov. 11	Nov. 20	Nov. 28	2020 Jan. 10	Feb. 10	Feb. 17
Feb. 26	March 10	March 24	May 4	June 4	June 18
July 1	July 12	July 22	Aug. 17	Oct. 1	Oct. 14

Note: A confusing feature is the use of “east” and “west.” When Mercury is emerging from its inferior conjunction, it is in the morning dawn, or east; however, being west of the Sun, this is referred to as western elongation. Sometimes I think of it as going uptown, not downtown!

Table 3: Sun-Mercury Zodiacal Positions at Critical Points, 2018–19 (UT)

	Inferior Conjunction	Station Direct	Greatest Elongation as Morning Star (12:00 p.m.)	Superior Conjunction	Greatest Elongation as Evening Star (12:00 p.m.)	Station Retrograde	Inferior Conjunction
Date	2018 Nov. 27	Dec. 6	Dec. 15	2019 Jan. 30	Feb. 27	March 5	March 15
Sun	05°03' SAG	14°42' SAG	23°27' SAG	09°54' AQU	08°35' PIS	14°52' PIS	24°11' PIS
Mercury	05°03' SAG Rx	27°16' SCO	02°17' SAG	09°54' AQU	26°39' PIS	29°36' PIS Rx	24°11' PIS Rx

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Phases of the Mercury Cycle

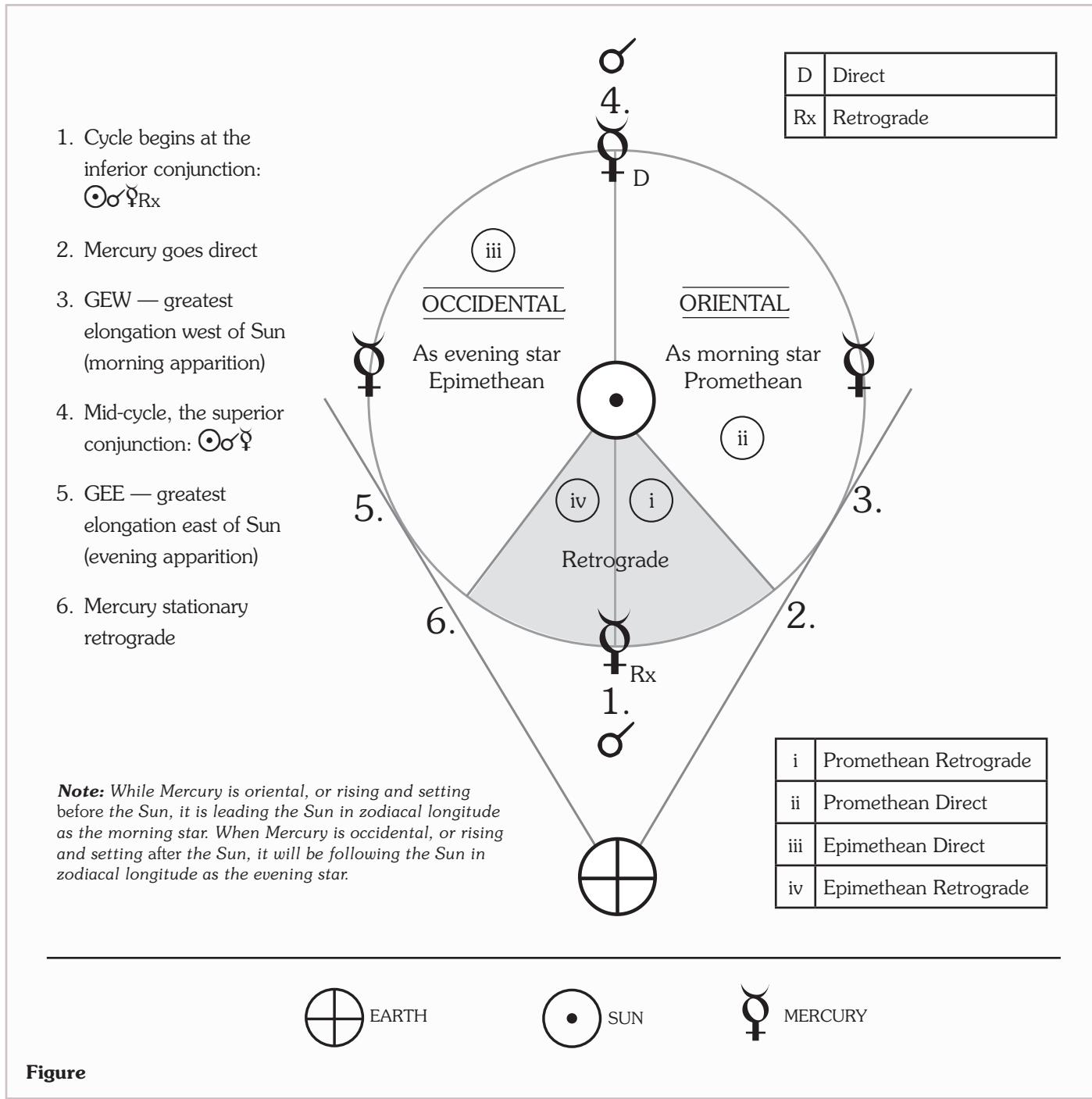
As we move through the Mercurial cycle, each phase is an integral aspect of the sequence, symbolizing how we process information, develop concepts, and return to and renew ideas. The Mercury cycle is a metaphor for the phases of thinking something through.

I have drawn the Mercurial round in the **Figure** (below), starting with the inferior conjunction.

Mercury Retrograde

In the article “Retrograde Beliefs,” published in *The New York Times Magazine*, Kristin Dombek reflected on the increasing popularity of belief in and advice about retrograde Mercury. With a Mercury retrograde approaching, she amusingly said: “Facebook and Twitter will clog with reports of appointments missed, important e-mail sent to the spam folder, wars between nations, cars crashed and iPhones dropped in toilets, all followed by some version of the hashtag ‘#mercuryretrograde’.”⁵

Mercury’s retrograde patterning is a wonder, but too often this phase of its cycle is sensationalized and exaggerated,



a Mercurial quality anyway! Mercury retrograde periods can be times of reflection, contemplation, and rethinking; ideas can be conceived, and new patterns of thinking may emerge. The iPhone dropped in the toilet during Mercury retrograde could be embraced as a call to re-examine the distractions that we mindlessly engage in. While such an accident appears to be a random act, it could result in mindfulness and consciousness if we listen, reflect, and recognize that the Trickster at work might be our own unconscious response. The ancient Greeks recognized that moment in life when a critical discovery or event happens; they called this *anagnorisis*, or recognition — the change from ignorance to knowledge — being most apparent when there is a reversal of fortune. It is highly unfortunate that our iPhone is in the toilet, but in Mercurial parlance, this moment of reversal potentially brings a new understanding.

In the context of its cycle, Mercury is retrograde just before and after its inferior conjunction, the ending of one cycle and the beginning of the next. Mercury turns retrograde 10–11 days before its inferior conjunction, ingesting the information, impressions, ideas, impact, and senses from the past three to four months of its cycle. After the inferior conjunction, Mercury retrograde suggests that the learning experiences of the past cycle have been digested enough to nurture the new cycle that has just begun. For these

While Mercury retrograde “events” may seem to be indiscriminate, they invite us to consider and reflect.

next 10–11 days, the retrograde period is reformatting and reframing what has been distilled, nourishing the newborn cycle. I often think of this part of the cycle as slow motion, allowing us to retrace our steps in order to become mindful and more conscious of how we move through time. Seen from this perspective, Mercury retrograde is an essential part of its cycle, ending one cycle with the Sun and beginning another. While Mercury retrograde “events” may seem to be indiscriminate, they invite us to consider and reflect.

One of the unique features of the Mercury retrograde cycle is that it will turn retrograde at approximately the same zodiacal degree it occupied when it turned direct eleven months previously. (See **Table 4**, following page.) As Mercury weaves its way through the zodiac, it picks up the threads from the previous year which may have been overlooked, weaving them again into the Mercurial tapestry.

Mercury is retrograde for 20–24 days, three times a year — about one-sixth of the year. Therefore, about 18% of all horoscopes will have Mercury in retrograde. Mercury has a penchant for 3s, as it has three synodic cycles a year and retrogrades three times a year for approximately three weeks each time. If we plot these retrograde stations on a zodiacal wheel, a triangle is formed. For instance, the retrograde stations of Mercury for 2018 (as shown in Table 4) occur at 16°54' Aries, 23°27' Leo, and 13°29' Sagittarius, forming a grand trine in fire. Mapping the inferior and superior conjunctions separately, two triangles would form the Star of David. While Venus etches a pentagram in the sky, Mercury designs triangles and six-pointed stars.

Mercury's penchant for triangles is also demonstrated in its retrograde stations through the elements, residing about 4–6 times in each element before it slips back into the previous element. Erin Sullivan has brilliantly demonstrated this in her book *Retrograde Planets*.⁶



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Going through Phases

Each planetary cycle has its own timing. It is tempting to always see time as chronological rather than cyclic, rendering us metric rather than symbolic. We are often persuaded to see planetary time as measured by the clock on the wall, rather than in the integrity of the planetary cycle. When considering the time frame for writing an article, launching a campaign, or studying architecture, the Mercurial cycle might be a better clock to consult.

As we have seen, Mercury has distinct crossroads in its synodic cycle: It begins at the inferior conjunction, turns direct, reaches its greatest elongation as the morning star, disappears, then rejoins the Sun again on the other side, reappears, reaches its greatest elongation as the evening star, turns retrograde, and then renews its cycle at the next inferior conjunction. Each phase could be seen as stages of the development of one idea or the mind in general. To reflect on this, I turn to Dane Rudhyar's revealing design of the eightfold developmental phases of the lunation cycle as prototypical of any cycle. I have laid out the Sun–Mercury cycle using Rudhyar's approach, not as delineation or theory, but as a way of thinking about this developmental cycle. (See **Table 5**, following page.)

Rudhyarian Phases: Promethean and Epimethean Mercury

Rudhyar was interested in Mercury's phases with the Sun, so he also developed a fourfold approach to understanding the Sun–Mercury cycle. He dubbed the first half, when Mercury was the morning star, Promethean.⁷ (The ancient Greeks called the morning star Apollo.) Rudhyar named the daytime half of the cycle for the culture hero who stole fire from the gods and disseminated it to mortals. Since Mercury rises before the Sun, Rudhyar regarded this Mercury as eager, progressive, and forward-thinking, like Prometheus. The first week-and-a-half, Mercury is retrograde, and Rudhyar differentiated this phase as the *Promethean Retrograde*.

When Mercury is the evening star, Rudhyar coined this period Epimethean, after Prometheus's brother who looked back to past events and was more circumspect, deliberate, and conservative. (The ancient Greeks named the evening star

Mercury is often aligned with the solar spirit, but its cycle also describes a lunar phase, reminding us that the development of the mental process involves both hemispheres of the brain.

Hermes.) A more introspective spirit emerges; as the guide of souls, he is about to begin his descent into the Underworld. The last week-and-a-half of this phase, Mercury is retrograde, and Rudhyar dubbed this phase the *Epimethean Retrograde*.

Promethean and Epimethean phases classify the progressive and reflective sides of the Mercurial process. Rudhyar differentiated the retrograde and direct times of the cycle, delineating four Mercurial types as seen in **Table 6** (following page).

Rudhyar drew on philosophical symbolism for the two figures of Prometheus and Epimetheus as prototypes of progression and conservatism — or, as Rudhyar described, the one who seeks to focus ahead of time and the one who takes counsel after the event.⁸ While Rudhyar's naming of the phases was philosophically astute, the myths of Prometheus and Epimetheus are much more diverse and wide-ranging and not always consistent with these categories. Still, as four different ways to think about the cycle, this phraseology is very inspirational.

Although Mercury's four faces could be delineated as psychological types, we can also see them as four points of reference when thinking things through. Each is an authentic and appropriate way and stage for considering things. Being closest to the Sun in the heavens and in myth, Mercury is often aligned with the solar spirit. But its cycle also describes a lunar phase; therefore, the Mercurial round reminds us of the development and expression of the mental process, which involves both hemispheres of the brain.

Table 4: Mercury Retrograde Cycle (UT)

Stationary Retrograde	Degree	Stationary Direct	Degree	Travel in Degrees & Minutes	No. of Days Retrograde
2017 Dec. 3	29°18' SAG	Dec. 23	13°00' SAG	16°18'	20 days
2018 March 23	16°54' ARI	April 15	04°46' ARI	12°06'	23 days
July 26	23°27' LEO	Aug. 19	11°31' LEO	11°56'	24 days
Nov. 17	13°29' SAG	Dec. 6	27°16' SCO	16°14'	19 days
2019 March 5	29°38' PIS	March 28	16°05' PIS	13°32'	23 days
July 8	04°27' LEO	Aug. 1	23°56' CAN	10°31'	24 days
Oct. 31	27°38' SCO	Nov. 20	11°35' SCO	16°03'	20 days

The two brothers illustrate different ways of judgement: Prometheus is progressive and eager; Epimetheus is conservative and deliberate. Representative of the bipolar mind, they were appropriate symbols for Rudhyar's ideas. As mythological figures, they also describe underlying layers of the pre-rational mind. Prometheus and Epimetheus were sons of a Titan and an Oceanid; hence both belong to an earlier cosmological order that existed before Zeus and the rational order arose, before philosophical concepts took the place of mythological stories. This stratum of mythological time is pre-literate, and the thinking process is more aligned with instinct

and the right brain. Mercury honours the ancient as well as the modern ways of knowing.

Epimetheus suggests afterthought, and Rudhyar used this mythic figure to capture a way of thinking that looks backward, considering precedents and past experiences. This way of assessment is through historical and coherent pieces of evidence. In the mythological account, though, Epimetheus did not heed his brother's warning and took the captivating Pandora as his wife, unknowingly colluding with Zeus's plans to unleash every sorrow and ill onto the world. Epimetheus is seen as gullible and easily swayed by beauty and desire. When

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Table 5: Phases of the Mercury Cycle

Phases of the Lunation Cycle	Corresponding Phases of the Mercury Cycle	Average Length: 116 Days (These can vary considerably due to the eccentricity of Mercury's orbit.)	Mercurial Time
New Phase	Inferior Conjunction to Stationary Direct	This phase can vary, but on average is 10–12 days.	Mercury leads the spirits out of the last cycle and the Underworld, so their essence may be brought to light.
Crescent	Stationary Direct to Greatest Elongation	This phase might vary between one and two weeks, but on average is 11 days.	Instinctive and remembered ways of thinking are at a crossroads, with new developments taking place.
First Quarter	Greatest Elongation as Morning Star to Morning Set	These phases are inclusive of the greatest elongation until morning set, when Mercury disappears as the morning star, and end at the next conjunction, a period lasting about 5 weeks.	Ideas and insight release the Gemini spirit to find a way forward with new plans. The Virgo attitude of discrimination, focus, and craft can later be applied to bring the ideas to fruition.
Gibbous	Morning Set to Superior Conjunction		
Full	Superior Conjunction to Evening Rise	These phases last from the superior conjunction to evening rise, when Mercury reappears as the evening star, through to its greatest elongation, a period lasting about 5 weeks.	This is the time to reflect and harvest insights and initiatives that have been applied towards the goal. It is time to disseminate the design, share the products of your creative process, and articulate your process.
Disseminating	Evening Rise to Greatest Elongation as Evening Star		
Last Quarter	Greatest Elongation to Stationary Retrograde	This can vary, but on average is 11 days.	Thinking becomes more introspective and philosophical.
Balsamic	Stationary Retrograde to Inferior Conjunction	This phase can vary between 9 and 14 days, but on average is 10–12 days.	It is time to gather in ideas and, in the privacy of personal space, journal what has taken place, for future reference.

Table 6: Retrograde and Direct Mercury Phases

Mercury Phase		Rudhyar's comments from <i>An Astrological Study of Psychological Complexes</i>
Promethean Retrograde	Inferior Conjunction to Stationary Direct (approximately 10% of the cycle)	<i>The mind seeks its independence from the instinctual nature.</i>
Promethean Direct	Stationary Direct to Superior Conjunction (approximately 40% of the cycle)	<i>The mind reaches towards the future and seeks to convey the rhythm of tomorrow to the ego.</i>
Epimethean Direct	Superior Conjunction to Stationary Retrograde (approximately 40% of the cycle)	<i>The mind seeks to reflect objectively on the meaning of life and events after they have occurred.</i>
Epimethean Retrograde	Stationary Retrograde to Inferior Conjunction (approximately 10% of the cycle)	<i>The mind seeks introspective union with an inner reality – returning to the source, as it were.</i>

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unconscious, he does not think things through or reflect on consequences or outcomes.

Prometheus is the brother who looks forward toward the future; he is forethought. He is also a rebel, culture hero, and revolutionary. For his theft of fire, Zeus sentenced him to be chained to a rock in Tartarus; each day an eagle would tear out and devour his liver, which would grow back overnight, only to be consumed again the next day. Prometheus's mythic temperament suggests hasty actions that are not well planned, unfocused intuition, and boundaries being ignored. The shadow side of each brother characterizes the pitfalls of each phase, such as the lack of foresight and thinking things through (Prometheus) and the lack of reflection (Epimetheus). When unconscious, both approaches fail to understand consequences.

The mythic narrative symbolizes how ignorance can influence physical reality: Epimethean action leads to bodily ills, while Promethean action can bind us to the futility of repetitive acts.

When we are on thresholds, in transitions, between times, crossing borders, or at a crossroads, Mercury might appear out of the shadows to lead us into or out of the situation. Mercury is not interested only in ideas, but also in what underpins them — their source, derivation, and motivation. He moves between both solar consciousness and lunar intel-

ligence. This is well demonstrated in his earlier relationship with goddesses such as Hecate, Hestia, and Mnemosyne, with whom he was often paired. Mercury's appearance in our life leads us into and out of our soul's essential experiences. He is the guide to the guru, the unexpected detour, the thought that reconnects us to our dream the night before; he is leader and follower, eyeing the landscape in front of and behind us.

He is our Pi in the sky.

References and Notes

1. "The Homeric Hymn to Hermes" from *The Homeric Hymns*, trans. Michael Cruden, Oxford University Press, 2001.
2. For a thorough and engaging scientific study of this in-between zone, see Andreas Mavromatis, *Hypnagogia: The Unique State of Consciousness between Wakefulness and Sleep*, Thrysos Press (London), 2010.
3. This cycle is known as the *synodic cycle*. *Synod* originates in the Greek; it means a "meeting or assembly" and can be applied to a conjunction of planets: *synodic*. *Syn* means "together" and *hodos* refers to "going" or "a way"; therefore, the *synod* suggests a planetary dialogue which goes in a certain direction or way. There are various schools of thought regarding whether the *synodic cycles* of Mercury and Venus begin at the inferior or the superior conjunction.
4. At the inferior conjunction, the Sun is travelling faster than Mercury, which is moving backward through the zodiac; thus after the inferior conjunction, Mercury will be at an earlier zodiacal degree than the Sun and will rise first. The New Moon is a different situation, as the Moon is always moving faster than the Sun. Therefore, after their conjunction, the Sun will be in an earlier degree of the zodiac and will rise before the Moon.
5. Kristin Dombek, "Retrograde Beliefs," <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/magazine/retrograde-beliefs.html> (accessed in August 2018).
6. Erin Sullivan, *Retrograde Planets*, Penguin Books, Arkana Series, 1992, pp. 68–69 (reprinted by Samuel Weiser, 2000).
7. Dane Rudhyar, *An Astrological Study of Psychological Complexes*, Shambhala, 1976, pp. 74–84.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 73.

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