What Do the Terms ‘Malefic’ and ‘Benefic’ Mean?

What Do They Come From?

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By Robert Hand
Variations of this polarity may be found applied to
1. Planets
2. Houses
3. Aspects

They may be applied to other astrological chart-entities but in all those instances it can be derived from references to planets, houses and aspects.
The table at the right lists common pairs of adjectives used to describe benefic and malefic indicators.

* Mainly used with aspects.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Synonymous or Nearly Synonymous Terms also Used</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fortune</td>
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<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Harmonious*</td>
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</tbody>
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Section 1: The Polarity as Applied to Planets
5. Of Beneficent and Maleficent Planets.

... two of the four humours [hot and moist] are fertile and active ... and two are destructive and passive, the dry and the cold, ... the ancients accepted two of the planets, Jupiter and Venus, together with the moon, as beneficent because of their tempered nature and because they abound in the hot and the moist, and Saturn and Mars as producing effects of the opposite nature, one because of his excessive cold and the other for his excessive dryness; the sun and Mercury, however, they thought to have both powers, because they have a common nature, and to join their influences with those of the other planets, with whichever of them they are associated. *Tetrabiblos* Robbins trans. Book I.5
Vettius Valens, Book I. [Riley trans.]

Jupiter – “childbearing, engendering, desire, loves, political ties, acquaintance, friendships with great men, prosperity, salaries, great gifts, an abundance of crops, justice, offices, officeholding, ranks, authority over temples, arbitrations, trusts, inheritance, brotherhood, fellowship, beneficence, the secure possession of goods, relief from troubles, release from bonds, freedom, deposits in trust, money, stewardships…”
Vettius Valens, Book I. [Riley trans.]

Venus – “is desire and love. It indicates the mother and nurture. It makes priesthoods, school superintendencies, high offices with the right to wear a gold ring or a crown, cheerfulness, friendship, companionship, the acquisition of property, the purchase of ornaments, agreements on favorable terms, marriages, pure trades, fine voices, a taste for music, sweet singing, beauty, painting, mixing of colors both in embroidery, dyeing, and unguent making. <Venus makes> the inventors and masters of these crafts, as well as craftsmanship or trade, and work in emeralds, precious stones, and ivory.”
Vettius Valens, Book I [Riley trans.]

Saturn – “petty, malignant, care-worn, self-depreciating, solitary, deceitful, secretive in their trickery, strict, downcast, with a hypocritical air, squalid, black-clad, importunate, sad-looking, miserable, with a nautical bent, plying waterside trades. Saturn also causes humblings, sluggishness, unemployment, obstacles in business, interminable lawsuits, subversion of business, secrets, imprisonment, chains, griefs, accusations, tears, bereavement, capture, exposures of children. Saturn makes serfs and farmers because of its rule over the land, and it causes men to be renters of property, tax farmers, and violent in action. ...”
Vettius Valens, Book I [Riley trans.]
Mars – “force, wars, plunderings, screams, violence, whoring, the loss of property, banishment, exile, alienation from parents, capture, the deaths of wives, abortions, love affairs, marriages, the loss of goods, lies, vain hopes, strong-armed robbery, banditry, looting, quarrels among friends, anger, fighting, verbal abuse, hatreds, lawsuits. Mars brings violent murders, slashings and bloodshed, attacks of fever, ulceration, boils, burns, chains, torture, masculinity, false oaths, wandering, embassies under difficult circumstances, actions involving fire or iron, craftwork, masonry. In addition Mars causes commands, campaigns and leadership, infantrymen, governorships, hunting, wild game, falls from heights or from animals, weak vision, strokes.”
Lack of Explanations

The characterizations of the two principal benefics and the two principal malefics given in the previous slides by Vettius Valens differ immensely from other such lists but are fundamentally similar. They are also similar to medieval descriptions of these four planets. None of these authors give any reasons as to why planets should be classified as benefic or malefic, outside of the one given by Ptolemy. As we shall see in the section on Aspects, there is another theoretical explanation for the category of benefic/malefic. This will require going into the factors that cause the aspects to be classified as benefic and malefic or more commonly into “harmonious” and “inharmonious.”
Section 2: The Polarity as Applied to Aspects
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
<th>8</th>
<th>9</th>
<th>10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>limit</td>
<td>odd</td>
<td>one</td>
<td>right</td>
<td>male</td>
<td>rest</td>
<td>straight</td>
<td>light (day)</td>
<td>good</td>
<td>square</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>unlimited</td>
<td>even</td>
<td>multitude</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>female</td>
<td>motion</td>
<td>curved or bent</td>
<td>darkness (night)</td>
<td>bad</td>
<td>oblong</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Odd vs. Even Numbers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Odd Numbers</th>
<th>Even Numbers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>$1 + 3 = 4$</td>
<td>$2 + 4 = 6$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1 + 3 + 5 = 9$</td>
<td>$2 + 4 + 6 = 12$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1 + 3 + 5 + 7 = 16$</td>
<td>$2 + 4 + 6 + 8 = 20$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1 + 3 + 5 + 7 + 9 = 25$</td>
<td>$2 + 4 + 6 + 8 + 10 = 30$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$1 + 3 + 5 + 7 + 9 + 11 = 36$</td>
<td>$2 + 4 + 6 + 8 + 10 + 12 = 42$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All Square Numbers</td>
<td>No Square Numbers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This aligns odd and even numbers with the square-oblong pairing.
Odd vs. Even Numbers – Another View
Domiciles, Aspects, Malefics & Benefics
Vettius Valens does not distinguish between “good” and “bad” aspects. His only concern was whether there were or were not aspects. In his work the “aversion” (which corresponds to the modern semi-sextile and quincunx, except that they were not considered to be aspects) was the worst relationship two planets could have or that a ruler could have to a house over which it has rulership. Other authors from the ancient world did make the good/bad distinction and the medieval astrologers made it quite emphatically.
Section 3: The Polarity as Applied to Houses
The Good/Bad Polarity in Houses or Places

- There are two distinct ways in which houses or places are described as good or bad.
- Houses or places can be “bad” because of what they signify. Examples include the eighth house which is said to signify death, the twelfth house which is said to signify secret enemies, imprisonment, etc. and the sixth house which is said to signify illness.
- The second way is through the Angular, Succedent and Cadent distinction in which the cadent houses are for some purposes considered “bad.”
Section 4: A New Model for the Causes of the Polarity
Two Major Groups of Planets – a Modern View

I. The “inner planets”— the Sun, Moon, Mercury, Mars and Venus—move quickly through the zodiac. As a result, they affect your day-to-day life, moods and habits.

II. The “outer planets” — Jupiter, Saturn, Neptune, Uranus, and Pluto move slowly, changing signs every one to fifteen years. As a result, they shape the bigger trends in life. In fact, Neptune, Uranus and Pluto orbit the sun so slowly that they are said to shape entire generations.

Source: From http://astrostyle.com/learn-astrology/planets-and-meanings/ May 5, 2018
Major Groups of Planets – The Traditional View

I. The “inferior planets” — The Moon, Mercury, Venus.

II. The “superior planets” — Mars, Jupiter, Saturn.

III. The Sun — The boundary line between the two categories. It belongs to neither, but is usually considered “inferior” with respect to Mars, Jupiter and Saturn and superior with respect to the Moon, Mercury and Venus.

But now we have the modern planets, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto etc. Astronomically they are superior planets, however perhaps a new group is required. The following slides make such a proposition.
A New Classification

1. Personal Planets _DRIVER:
   знаком:  

2. The Sun  

3. Collective/Social Planets
   знаком:  

4. Saturn  
   partly #3 partly #5.

5. Transpersonal  

The Planets at the Several Levels

1. All planets operate at all three levels.
2. Each planet has a lowest preferred level, which is the lowest level at which it can work well.
3. All planets operate well at levels higher than its lowest preferred level. At the lowest preferred level or higher all planetary energies are “benefic.”
4. When a planet operates at a level below its lowest preferred level, its energy corresponds to what is commonly called “malefic.”
“That the circuit of the stars indicates definite events to come but without being the cause direct (as the general opinion holds) of all that happens, has been elsewhere affirmed, and proved by some modicum of argument. . .” Enneads 2.3.1, McKenna translation.
“The belief is that the planets in their courses actually produce not merely such conditions as poverty, wealth, health, and sickness, but even ugliness and beauty and, gravest of all, vices and virtue and the very acts that spring from these qualities. the definite doings of each moment of virtue or vice. We are to suppose the stars to be annoyed with men—and upon matters in which men, moulded to what they are by the stars themselves, can surely do them no wrong.” Enneads 2.3.1, McKenna translation.
However!
We may think of the stars as letters perpetually being inscribed on the heavens or inscribed once for all and yet moving as they pursue the other tasks allotted to them: upon these main tasks will follow the quality of signifying. . ." Enneads 2.3.7, McKenna translation.
“... our personality is bound up with the stars, whence our Soul takes shape; and we are set under necessity at our very entrance into the world: our temperament will be of the stars' ordering, and so, therefore, the actions which derive from temperament, and all the experiences of a nature shaped to impressions.” Enneads 2.3.9, McKenna translation.
“... by [the souls'] descent, they have put themselves in contact, and they stand henceforth in harmonious association with the cosmic circuit—to the extent that their fortunes, their life-experiences, their choosing and refusing, are announced by the patterns of the stars." Enneads 4.3.12, McKenna translation.
It is clear that Plotinus disapproved of the idea that the planets could become evil or good depending on their placement in the birth chart. For him the planets as gods are wholly benevolent. The planets therefore must always be benefic. There can be no malefics, no afflictions, no indications of an inevitable, dire fate. So where do these come from? The answer is most clear in the writings of Iamblichos.
Iamblichus

Passages from I.18 (Clarke, Dillon, Hershbell, p 67f)
Iamblichus, also known as Iamblichus Chalcidensis, or Iamblichus of Apamea (Greek: Ἰάμπλιχος, probably from Syriac or Aramaic ya-mlku, “He is king”; c. 245 – c. 325 AD), was a Syrian Neoplatonist who determined the much of the later directions taken by later Neoplatonic philosophy.
Thus, then, the entities visible in heaven are all gods, and all in a certain way incorporeal. In your next question you ask, “How is it that some of them are beneficent, and others maleficent?” This belief is derived from the casters of horoscopes, and is completely at odds with reality. For in fact all alike are good and causes of good, and looking towards one single good they direct themselves unitarily to the Fine and Good; alone.
Nonetheless, the very bodies subject to them [the planets] possess a vast array of potencies, some themselves firmly established in the divine bodies, others proceeding from them into the nature [soul] of the cosmos and the actual cosmos, descending in order through the whole realm of generation, and extending unhindered as far as individuals.

So then, as regards the potencies that remain in the heavens attached to the divine bodies, no one would dispute that they are all similar. It remains, therefore, to examine those that are projected down here and mingled with the realm of generation.
His Major Work, *De Mysteriis* 3

Now it is for the preservation of the universe that these penetrate and likewise hold together in the same mode the whole realm of generation; they are impassive and unchanging, despite the fact that they are entering a realm of change and passion. Indeed, the realm of generation, multiform as it is, and constructed of diverse elements, receives not without a struggle and [only] to a partial extent, by reason of the contrariness and divisiveness proper to it, their unity and freedom from differentiation; with passion it receives the impassive, and in general it is in accordance with its own nature and not with their power, that it is naturally fitted to participate in them.
While, therefore, it is odd of some people to attribute colour and shape and texture to intelligible forms, by reason of the fact that the things participating in them are of such a nature, similarly odd are those who attribute evil to the heavenly bodies, simply because those things participating in them sometimes turn out evil. For there would never have been any such thing as participation in the first place, if the participant had not some divergent element in it as well. And if it receives what is participated in as something other and different, it is just this element (the one that is other) that, in the terrestrial, realm, is evil and disordered.
His Major Work, *De Mysteriis* 6

It is participation, then, which becomes the cause of the proliferation of otherness in secondary entities, and also the intermingling of material elements with immaterial emanations, and further, the fact that what is bestowed in one way is received by the things of this realm in another way. For example, the emanation deriving from Saturn tends to pull things together, while that deriving from Mars tends to provoke motion in them; however, at the level of material things, the passive generative receptacle receives the one as rigidity and coldness, and the other as a degree of inflammation exceeding moderation. So then, does not what causes decay and want of symmetry come about through the differentiating, material and passive deviance of the recipients?
1. The stars and planets are incorporeal gods.
2. Why do these sometimes appear beneficent, sometime maleficent?
3. This notion is due to astrologers.
4. But the potencies of these beings extend down into the realm of Soul and Nature down to individuals.
5. These potencies hold together Nous, Psyche and Kosmos.
6. In the realm of Nature that includes us, the diversity and instability of this level tends to distort the potencies of the stars. Conflict, ambiguity and impermanence arise.

7. That which passively receives these potencies receives them according to its own nature, not according the natures from which they were transmitted.

8. The normal relationship between entities of this world is only to participate in the natures of the potencies, not to become one with them.
9. This participation rather than a proper joining causes the problem. At the higher level Saturn signifies a pulling together and Mars signifies rapid change and motion.

10. At the level of Nature these become for Saturn “rigidity and coldness” and for Mars an immoderate and unbalanced fiery nature.

11. Thus, it is the manner in which the stellar potencies are received, rather than their intrinsic nature that makes some good, some evil. The normal relationship between entities of this world is only to participate in the natures of the potencies, again, not to become one with them.
A Possible Conclusion

Other sources make clear what is only implicit in Plotinus and Iamblichus. The major cause of the problem of the “malefic,” “benefic” problem in astrology is the lack of consciousness in general and unitary (i.e. self-actualized) consciousness in particular, known in Greek as agnoia (ignorance). Both Plotinus and Iamblichus make it clear that the restoration of unitary consciousness is the requirement for transcending the problems of the physical world. They differ on the method but not on the necessity of the task.
Contact Information
Robert Hand
Robhand@arhatmedia.com
www.arhatmedia.com