

The Questing Scientist

Part II: Is Astrology True?

By Jose Becerra,

*Smile When Spiritual Beggars are called
scholars... Illumination, XII:1*

In the first part of this series, the philosophical and historical background, as well as, the psychological motives operating in the practice of "debunking" were presented. Skepticism was approached as any attempt to preserve equanimity of mind ("ataraxia") in the face of uncertainty. The psychological need to debunk the intangible was correlated with the initial phases (denial and anger) of the grief process accompanying paradigm shifts in science. Causal inference, the cornerstone of the intellectual crutch called "the scientific method, was shown to be an art rather than a science, and the Quest for Truth was proposed as the categorical imperative of all scientists.

In reaction to the ecclesiastical abuses of the Middle Ages, modern science has adopted a positivistic stance and rejects the Quest for Truth as the ultimate goal of scientific endeavor. According to this modern distortion, a fact becomes a fact only if it is falsifiable, that is, if it is empirically testable by anyone. If a hypothesis cannot be reduced to the "on" or "off" states of a computer chip, it is considered to be beyond the realm of legitimate scientific endeavor. Furthermore, the implicit assumption is that if a hypothesis does not yield to this reductionism approach, it is irrelevant (that is, it is not "real"). And if it is not real, in consequence, it cannot be true.

Modern Inquisitors forget that what is empirically testable is relative to the state of technology and to the state of knowledge at a given point in time. These two factors determine the limits of our means of perception and our understanding of apparently uncorrelated "facts." Despite these obvious limitations, a small but vociferous

group of scientists have declared a Holy War against anyone infringing upon their positivistic dogmas. In an ironic twist of events, this modern brand of Zetetics has become the reincarnation of the spirit of the Inquisition, bringing to a full circle the relationship between science and religion in the history of humanity.

Astrology, which paradoxically is considered by some as the oldest of the sciences, has become the focus of a heated controversy as to whether it is truly scientific or not. The most objective and balanced summary to date of the Skeptic position on this issue is provided in the two-part essay, "Does Astrology Need To Be True?" by Geoffrey Dean. Dean concludes that astrology is like "gum, satisfying but ultimately without real substance." To his credit, however, he acknowledges, "this does not deny the possibility that some as-yet-untested features of chart interpretation may work, or that some new and valid astrological techniques may be discovered... What is denied is the essential truth of [serious astrology] *as practiced by most astrologers* [emphasis mine]. This caveat represents a major and most welcome departure from the original manifesto stating "It is simply a mistake to imagine that forces exerted by stars and planets at the moment of birth can in any way shape our futures . . . Let us examine this essay in more detail.

Dean differentiates between the "popular" astrology of (fairground tents and newspaper columns") and the "serious" astrology ("of consulting rooms and learned journals"; "the real thing"). Serious astrology may focus on either prediction or psychological counseling. The latter emphasis, which Dean claims to be the predominant one among astrologers, was

articulated best by Dane Rudhyar: "I am only interested in astrology as a means to help human beings to give a fuller, richer meaning to their lives . . . I see no value in the prediction of exact events or even of precise character analysis."

This classification provided by Dean is useful and in agreement with the practice of esoteric astrology. For instance, in *Esoteric Healing* (p. 277) it is stated, "Astrology must be lifted out of the hands of those interested in prediction astrology and placed in the hands of trained mathematical scientists and in the hands of those who have given as much time to scientific training along astrological lines as is now given to training a reputable physician, a chemist or a biologist."

Dean summarizes the seven most popular arguments against astrology in general. I will briefly comment on each of them.

1. "Astrological signs bear no relation to the astronomical constellation." This is simply not true because both signs and constellations follow the same sequence. But even if they did not follow the same sequence, the point is irrelevant. There is no "direct" relation between energy and matter either. Does the need for a transformation function ($E = mc^2$) invalidate the theory of relativity?

2. "Astrology is earth-centered, whereas the solar system is sun centered." Astrology is mostly geocentric because humanity is mostly earth-centered. In the same way that a three-dimensional perspective does not invalidate a two-dimensional projection, the heliocentric perspective does not invalidate geocentric astrology but actually adds to it. After the heliocentric fact was established, did seamen stop using geocentric astronomy to guide their ships during the night?

3. "Astrology is founded in magic and superstition." So why do the major religions of the world include astrological symbolism? Why is Good Friday still observed after the first full moon of Spring? What came first, the 12 signs or the 12 apostles?

4. "There is no known way it could work." This is a statement of ignorance and the

burden of proof lies on physical scientists not on astrologers. The same could have been said about radioactivity and X-rays. Modern science has prematurely dismissed the existence of the ether in space due to a faulty interpretation of the Michelson-Morley experiments. How can subatomic particles simultaneously affect the state of other subatomic particles at a distance (in violation of Bell's theorem)?

5. "Why the moment of birth and not conception?" Because the first independent breath is the first physical communion of the incarnating soul with the ethers of space. Conception is more related to the genetic makeup ("frequency range") chosen by the incarnating ego: the moment of birth is more related to qualities in the expression of consciousness ("fine tuning"). Do the limitations imposed by the frequency range in a radio invalidate the fine tuning mechanism?

6. "If astrology can predict the future, why don't astrologers rule the world?" Because astrology is not deterministic; astrology can only indicate possibilities made actual by human freewill. In this sense, astrology is indeed un-falsifiable. Does the present consist only of what is actually happening or does it also include what could have happened?

7. "Research has shown that newspaper horoscopes and sun signs don't work." So, newspaper horoscopes and sun signs don't work! Does that disprove the validity of astrology?

Dean reviews studies that consistently show that subjects and astrologers are unable to blindly tell right from wrong charts. In addition, Dean presents his own data. Disregarding the ethical standards by which researchers should abide, Dean describes how he impersonated an astrological counselor and actually deceived 22 subjects to prove his point. He states "The subjects were led to believe that the chart interpretations were authentic. In fact, only half the subjects received interpretations based on their actual charts." The results showed that true horoscopes were as likely as fake horoscopes to be selected by subjects as their own.

In essence, Dean attempts to place the burden of proof on astrologers and challenges the astrological community to prove the scientific validity of their claims, to "desist from making claims at variance with the known facts," and to "label their product honestly so that the public is not misled." "Honest labeling" means for Dean that astrological advice be presented as potentially beneficial and useful but scientifically unproven.

I agree that astrologers should honestly label their product. The fact is that astrology, as practiced by the average astrologer, has not been scientifically proven. An instance of "honest labeling" is presented in the preface of the book *Esoteric Astrology*, telepathically transmitted by the Tibetan Master Djwhal Khul to his amanuensis Alice A. Bailey. It is stated, "The books that I have written are sent out with no claim for their acceptance. They may, or may not, be correct, true and useful. It is for you to ascertain their truth by right practice and by the exercise of the intuition." Should not this be an acceptable standard "disclaimer" for astrological advice provided in selfless service by honest astrologers? By the same token, the scientific community should "desist from making claims at variance with" the limitations of their current research methods. It is dishonest to consider the current scientific method as the touchstone of reality. Dean's disclaimer is a good start.

The acceptance that astrology has not been proven to the scientific community does not rule out the possibility that it is a scientific fact. The science of astrology may already be established as an indubitable fact in the consciousness of some more advanced individual or group of individuals. This may not be the astrology practiced by the average astrologer, however. It is important to realize that astrology has never been really tested and may never be fully tested empirically; only astrologers and their beliefs have been tested so far. And the results, we must agree with Dean, are not encouraging. But, are we asking the right questions to the right practitioners?

Inductive inference will never answer this kind of question, but the answer is crucial to evaluate the research method itself.

Astrology IS, in the same sense that Life IS. Astrology is the anatomical and physiological consequence of a vital and wholistic universe. The weight of evidence available at this time overwhelmingly favors the notion that all parts of the universe are interrelated and that humanity does not live in the empty space currently postulated by science. The burden of proof is not on astrologers alone, as Dean suggests, but on honest research scientists who value the Quest for Truth above and beyond their limited personal experience, wherever that truth may lead them.

The right question to ask is not whether astrology is true or not, but *how* does astrology work. The fact that astrology resists standardization does not make it less scientific than the modern science of fractals and nonlinear dynamics.

Is Beauty true? Is the finding of meaning in life a falsifiable event? Is Reality contingent on scientific standards? Only a true scientist, who has explored "the breadth, and length, and depth, and height", can honestly aspire to answer these questions. Only then would scientists be in position to approach "the real substance."

NOW, IF YOU ARE ASKED, "DO YOU RECOGNIZE ASTROLOGY?" ANSWER, "DO YOU DENY MEDICINE?" IF YOU ARE ASKED, "DO YOU INSIST UPON THE LIFE OF THE SPIRIT?" ANSWER, "DO YOU DENY THE DEVELOPMENT OF MATTER?" *ILLUMINATION IV:5*

References

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