Does Astrology Need To Be True? Part 1: A Look at the Real Thing

Astrologers complain that critics ignore serious astrology. But recent tests are uniformly negative.

Geoffrey Dean

Given the extraordinary ability of the human mind to make sense out of things, it is natural occasionally to make sense out of things that have no sense at all.

Richard Furnald Smith, *Prelude to Science*

THE MOST POPULAR arguments against astrology are (1) astrological signs bear no relation to the astronomical constellations, (2) astrology is earth-centered, whereas the solar system is sun-centered, (3) astrology is founded in magic and superstition, (4) there is no known way it could work, and (5) why moment of birth and not conception? The astrologer sees these arguments as no arguments at all, because if astrology works then it works, period.

Another popular argument is (6): If astrology can predict the future, why don't astrologers rule the world? Answer: Astrological prediction is far too tedious. To examine the birth charts (horoscopes) of every likely person or city or country in the hope of finding indications to your advantage is simply not practical.

Another more recent argument is (7): Research has shown that newspaper horoscopes and sun signs don't work. Here the astrologer replies that there is more to astrology than sun signs, and he then retires back to his charts convinced that such arguments reveal only ignorance and closed minds.

Unfortunately, these arguments are all too popular and tend to recur

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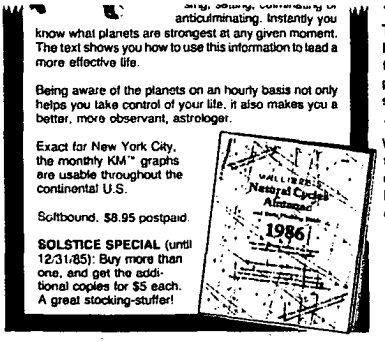
like old jokes. Thus, in their comprehensive review of the evidence for and against astrology, Eysenck and Nias (1982, p. 10) could say, "Much that passes for scientific criticism in the books and articles we have read is in fact little better than defamation and prejudice." Truzzi (1979) writes: "Attacking simple sun-sign astrology is largely a waste of time. . . . A manifesto denouncing newspaper astrology columns could as easily be signed by leading astrologers as by a group of respected scientists."

Recently astrologers in the United States have reacted to such arguments by a Media Watch project (AFAN 1985). This is designed to counter biased media reports on astrology, for example, those due to the "demagogical media grandstanding of self-appointed guardians of public morals and rationality like CSICOP." They point out that critics persistently mistake popular astrology for the real thing and that "just the last couple of decades has produced a psychologically and intellectually more mature astrology, of which the general population and the media remain totally unaware. How, then, are they to discover this, if we don't let them know?" A good point.

Obviously if we are to rise above the present shouting match we have to address astrology (the real thing, not popular nonsense) on the astrologers' terms. We have to go beyond the *popular* astrology of fairground tents and newspaper columns and seek out the *serious* astrology of consulting rooms and learned journals. It is not hard to find. In Western countries roughly 1 person in 10,000 is practicing or studying serious astrology (Dean and Mather 1977, p. 7), which is about the same as for psychology. In Western languages, serious astrology is currently the subject of more than 100 periodicals and about 1,000 books *in print* (1 in 2,000 of all books, or about the same as for astronomy), of which about half are in English. Since 1960 the annual output of new titles has doubled every ten years, at which rate the year 2000 will enjoy ten new astrology books every week, excluding almanacs and sun-sign books. Something this popular is clearly entitled to impartial investigation, especially since astrology has a solid core of testable ideas. We do not have to accept astrology on faith.

Unfortunately investigators of the real thing face daunting problems: (1) It takes at least a year to become even tolerably familiar with astrological theory and practice. (2) Competent criticism requires skill in astronomy, psychology, and statistics. (3) Relevant material in an astrological literature totaling some 200 shelf-meters of serious books and periodicals is highly scattered and usually inaccessible via normal library channels. (4) Relevant material in the orthodox literature is equally highly scattered over books, journals, and theses in psychology, education, sociology, and other disciplines, and is often accessible only with difficulty. Given these problems it is not surprising that debunkers with a living to make have taken the soft option of defamation and prejudice. Astrologers of course face the same problems, but they too have a living to make, so it is not surprising that U.S. astrologer Zipporah Dobyns can say that "astrology is almost as confused as the earthly chaos it is supposed to clarify" (Dobyns and Roof, 1983). However, in the



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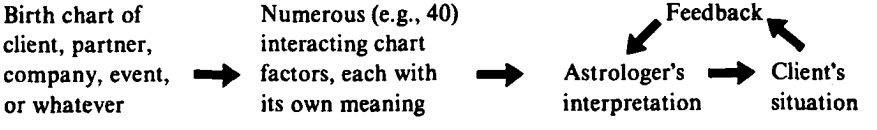
Left: From an ad for a 1986 book on planetary positions aimed at astrologers. *Right:* Some of the more expensive services advertised ten years ago in the now-defunct *Astrology Now.*

past ten years critical surveys have appeared that grapple with these problems, notably Dean and Mather (1977), Eysenck and Nias (1982), Kelly (1982), Culver and Ianna (1984), and Startup (1984). Unfortunately, these surveys do not properly address the real thing because relevant studies did not exist at the time they were written.

This situation has now changed. Relevant studies have now been made, and a consistent picture is emerging, most of it bad news for astrologers. In what follows we take a close look at the real thing, the reasons astrologers believe in it, and the very latest evidence. To be fair to a topic that has been so persistently misrepresented, and to allow adequate citation from a literature that is so difficult to access, this article will be a long one. But the findings have implications that extend to any character-reading technique, such as palmistry and numerology, so even if astrology is not your pet project you should find much of interest. We start with a look at the real thing and why astrologers believe in it.

The Real Thing

In broad terms the real thing boils down to a consultation between astrologer and client where something like this happens:



The content of the consultation depends on where you are. Eastern astrologers concentrate almost exclusively on fate and destiny, i.e, prediction, for example, see Perinbanayagam (*1981*). But for every Western astrologer who concentrates on prediction there are probably another two who concentrate on psychology and counseling. Thus the popular view of Western astrology as consisting of prediction and nothing else is incorrect. Indeed, many astrologers

eschew prediction; for example, the late Dane Rudhyar (1979), recognized as the leading U.S. proponent of humanistic (person-centered) astrology, says: "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." Rudhyar's approach has been critically examined by Kelly and Krutzen (1983), and their conclusions are cited in Part 2.

The chart interpretation itself is governed by the cardinal rule that no factor shall be judged in isolation. As noted above, a typical chart contains about 40 interacting factors, each with its own individual meaning, all of which will be relevant to the interpretation. (This total represents only the most basic factors, namely, planets, signs, houses, and aspects; many other factors, such as midpoints and dynamic contacts, can be included, which can increase the total to hundreds or thousands.)

However, as first shown by Miller (1956), our short-term memory cannot juggle more than about 7 ± 2 chunks of information at a time, as will be apparent when you try to dial a 10-digit telephone number. As a result the information content of the chart *always* exceeds our capacity to handle it. In theory the astrologer overcomes this problem by a process called chart synthesis, whereby the relevant factors are balanced against one another on paper. In practice there is little agreement on how this balancing should be done, or even on what factors are relevant in the first place. As we shall see in Part 2, this has predictable consequences.

The Real Thing and Prediction

After any notable event, such as a major earthquake or an assassination, articles appear in astrology journals showing a clear correspondence between the event and its astrological chart. However the correspondence means nothing unless it can predict the event in advance. This was put to the test at the U.S. Geological Survey by Hunter and Derr (1978), who as part of a general evaluation of earthquake prediction systems invited the public to send in their predictions. The biggest response was from astrologers, with psychics and amateur scientists next. Hunter and Derr analyzed a total of 240 earthquake predictions by 27 astrologers and found their accuracy to be worse than guessing. The same was found for the predictions by psychics and amateur scientists.

Culver and Ianna (1984) surveyed 3,011 specific predictions made from 1974 to 1979 in U.S. astrology magazines, such as *American Astrology,* and found that only 338 (11 percent) were correct. Many of these could be attributed to shrewd guesses ("East-West tension will continue"), vagueness ("A tragedy will hit the eastern U.S. this spring"), or inside information ("Starlet A will marry director B"). After allowing for chance there seemed to be nothing left for astrology to explain. The same was found by Châtillon (1985), who surveyed 30 specific predictions for North America in 1984 made

by Huguette Hirsig, one of Montreal's most famous astrologers. Only two (7 percent) were correct.

Reverchon (1971) surveyed a series of predictions made from 1958 to 1961 in the French astrological journal *Les Cahiers Astrologiques.* They were made by the renowned French astrologer André Barbault, a specialist in such predictions, and concerned the end of the French-Algerian war. As each prediction failed (the end was very protracted), Barbault was able to find further indications. No less than 11 successive predictions were made before the inevitable hit was achieved, thus reducing everything to a "childish game." Reverchon then compared Barbault's predictions of world crises for 1965 (published in 1963) against an independent list of 105 major world events for that year. There were 5 hits vs. 8 expected by chance. Specific predictions involving a dozen world leaders included many "high quality blunders"; for example, Kennedy would be reelected in 1964 (he was assassinated in 1963), Krushchev would remain in power until 1966 (he was deposed in 1964), de Gaulle would resign in 1965 (he was reelected), and both Erhard (Germany) and Wilson (UK) would enter a decline (both were reelected). Reverchon concluded, "What most surely appears . . . is the perfect inanity of the astrological undertaking . . . what was announced did not happen, what happened was not announced."

Of course it may be that the specific predictions involved in these four surveys are more difficult than those made in a personal consultation, which may be concerned only with general trends. But, as pointed out by Culver and Ianna, astrologers who make such predictions presumably feel competent to do so; hence there is no reason to suppose that the results are not typical of astrologers generally. For a rare description of a typical technique at work see Stearn's (1972) account of a U.S. astrology class held in 1970; the astrologer makes numerous predictions for Richard Nixon, including "unprecedented popularity . . . peaking in 1975" (Watergate occurred in 1973; Nixon resigned in 1974).

Dean (1983) analyzed 18 years of Nelson's daily forecasts of shortwave radio quality and found no support for Nelson's quasi-astrological claim that planetary positions correlate with radio quality. Now radio quality is quantified into numbers to avoid guesswork, and Nelson's technique (which is based on the angular separation between planets) is by astrological standards almost embarrassingly simple. Yet for 30 years Nelson was convinced he saw a correlation that in fact did not exist. So we should not be surprised that astrologers, working with generally vaguer events and far more complicated techniques, can see correlations even if none actually exists.

The astrologers' response to these five surveys, which are the only ones I know of, has not been to generate surveys of their own. Instead there has been either silence or brusque dismissal, such as that by a reviewer in the Canadian astrological journal *Fraternity News* (1986), who dismissed Culver and Ianna's entire book as "not even good objective criticism." Of course it could be argued that this is a legitimate response for the two in three Western

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Starck, Marcia
Earth Mother Astrology

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The Astrologer as Shaman
Movement in the Horoscope

Tyl, Noel
Changing Your Horoscope
Techniques of Counseling

Ungar, Anne
Forecasting II
Horary Astrology, Part II

Van Toen, Donna
Astrological Correlation of Gems
Introduction to Esoteric Astrology

Wangemann, Edith
Research on Identical Twins

Wehrman, Joyce
What Makes a Winner
Solar Returns and Sexual Needs

Weingarten, Henry
Panel: Professional Education of Astrologers
Future of Astrology: Computers & Artificial Intelligence

Wickenburg, Joanne
Vocational Astrology
The Lunar Nodes

As shown by this sample of topics from 18 of the more than 110 lecturers from 11 countries at an astrology conference, astrology today embraces just about everything.

astrologers who eschew prediction in favor of psychology and counseling. So the rest of this article is addressed to their point of view.

The Real Thing and Counseling

Here the term *counseling* is used in accordance with the following classification of astrological consultations due to Rosenblum (1983, pp. 33-44):

A. Chart reading. Usually one session only; astrologer talks, client listens.

B. Counseling. One or several sessions; client participates in a dialogue. Involves inquiry into client's life; addresses short-term problems.

C. Therapy. Regular ongoing sessions; client has major long-term problems and requires help to regain control of life. Astrologer has (or should have) orthodox qualifications in psychotherapy.

Each type blends into the next to form a continuum, so the classification is basically one of emphasis. Many astrologers consider A to be unhelpful and potentially harmful because the client is passive and dependent on the all-knowing astrologer. But if clients are merely curious about astrology, A may be all they want. In occurrence, A and B are probably roughly equal, while C is rare, probably roughly 0.5 percent of B. For these reasons I have focused on B as the real thing.

Lester (1982), a professor of psychology in the United States, visited an astrologer, talked to clients of astrologers, and surveyed astrological writings. He concluded: (1) Astrologers play a role similar to that of psychotherapists. (2) People consult astrologers for the same reason they consult psychotherapists, but without the stigma the latter may entail. (3) Clients get empathy,

advice, compliments (which increase self-esteem), and positive comments about possible future traumas, all of which amounts to supportive psychotherapy.

Skafte (1969), a psychologist and counselor, tested the effect of introducing popular astrology (and palmistry and numerology) into personal and vocational counseling, for example, by saying "a person born under your sign is supposed to enjoy travel—does this sound like you?" The words were chosen to avoid implying validity and to promote dialogue. She found that: (1) this provides a focal point for discussion that often stimulates clients to talk openly about themselves, (2) mutual interest in an unconventional activity quickly creates closeness and rapport that would otherwise take many sessions to establish, (3) the focus on individual qualities (as opposed to, say, impersonal questionnaires), meets the client's need to feel special.

Clearly, when used in this way, astrology can be valuable without needing to be true. Skafte's first point about astrology's providing a focus is amply confirmed in astrology books and lectures, which often contain surprisingly little astrology. Thus an exposition by a good astrologer on the special problems faced by Neptune in each house, or how to live with a T-square or a void-of-course moon or a Splash pattern or a heavy fifth harmonic, will contain beneath the jargon a sensible and insightful commentary on human behavior that any caring person of rich experience could deliver. In such cases astrology, without needing to be true, acts as an organizing device for the otherwise unmanageable smorgasboard of human experience.

Mayer (1978), a humanistic psychotherapist and astrologer, extends Skafte's sun-sign approach to include all of astrology. His concern is to help clients confused about their identity and seeking a meaning in life. He argues that this is difficult via the orthodox personality theories used to guide therapy, but easy via the imagery and complexity of astrology without requiring it to be true. For this purpose he proposes a new kind of astrology for which no claims of validity are made, and which is contraindicated for clients opposed to nonrational approaches or overinclined to fantasy. However, therapists and clients seem unlikely to accept a tool of this complexity unless some underlying truth is assumed, in the same way that we would resist using English if it required us to speak in riddles.

Laster (1975), an educational psychologist and astrologer, makes the pragmatic point that the many people who believe in astrology can be reached on common grounds of faith by counselors familiar with astrology, just as Jews can be better reached by Jewish counselors than by non-Jewish ones. On this basis the validity of the belief—whether Jewish or astrological—should not be an issue if the belief helps to establish rapport between client and therapist. Here Laster is in effect redefining astrology as a religion, so his point becomes invalid if the client seeks earthly guidance divorced from spiritual understanding. I say more about utility vs. validity later.

Wedow (1976), a sociologist, made tape recordings of counseling sessions with eight astrologers to find out what happens when they make a wrong

statement about the client. She found that they gave one or more of the following explanations:

1. Client does not know himself. 2. Astrologer is not infallible.	This shifts the blame from astrology to the participants.
3. Another factor is responsible. 4. Manifestation is not typical.	This puts the blame on the ambiguity of the birth chart.

Wedow notes that such explanations make the whole process nonfalsifiable, and that the participants seem to be unaware of this nonfalsifiability. Hence once the session has begun the end result can hardly fail to maintain astrology's credibility.

Note that this nonfalsifiability arises not from the chart factors themselves, which are in principle testable and therefore falsifiable, but from what astrologers do with them. The process is described so vividly by Hamblin (1982), an astrologer critical of current practice and later chairman of the U.K. Astrological Association, that he is worth quoting in full:

> If I find a very meek and unaggressive person with five planets in Aries, this does not cause me to doubt that Aries means aggression. I may be able to point to his Pisces Ascendant, or to his Sun conjunct Saturn, or to his ruler in the twelfth house; and, if none of these alibis are available, I can simply say that he has not yet fulfilled his Aries potential. Or I can argue (as I have heard argued) that, if a person has an *excess* of planets in a particular sign, he will tend to suppress the characteristics of that sign because he is scared that, if he reveals them, he will carry them to excess. But if on the next day I meet a very aggressive person who also has five planets in Aries, I will change my tune: I will say that he *had* to be like that because of his planets in Aries.

Hamblin notes that this gives astrologers an inexhaustible reserve of explanations for even the gravest difficulties. It also reduces to inutility claims like that of Metzner (1970), a psychologist and astrologer, that chart factors in combination are "probably better adapted to the complex variety of human nature than existing systems of types, traits, motives, needs, factors, or scales." More subtly, it kills off the very understanding that the real thing is supposed to promote and replaces it with tokens of understanding that have value only in an economy of free-floating, all-purpose astrobabble. We may ask how the previously cited Media Watch astrologers could believe that this kind of thing is "psychologically and intellectually more mature." As we shall see in Part 2, due to the nature of astrology and of the human mind, the answer is, "Very easily."

The Dark Side of Astrology

Steiner (1945), a medical and psychiatric social worker, made a remarkable

survey of U.S. astrologers, palmists, numerologists, Tarot readers, and similar "consultants." The survey took 12 years, during which time she posed as a consultant to find out what people's troubles were, and visited consultants (including 40 astrologers) posing as a client to find out what their advice was like. She concluded: (1) There is no agony like emotional turmoil. People will seek relief anywhere, usually quite uncritically. (2) In general, consultants were utterly untrained for professional practice. Many were unscrupulous and dishonest. (3) No technique was better or worse than the others. Yet all consultants claimed success for their particular system.

That was the situation in the United States in the 1930s and early 1940s, and it could only improve. Thus 25 years later L. Sechrest and J. Bryan (1968) consulted 18 U.S. astrologers who advertised mail-order marital advice. They found that the advice bore no discernible relationship to astrological principles but was always realistic, and was usually direct, clear, vigorous, personal, and friendly. They concluded that the advice was not likely to be damaging and, because it was friendly and cheap, was even a great bargain. In 1978 a survey of 75 astrologers found that they and their clients were mostly solidly middle class and well educated (Koval 1979). The same year, for a consultation of one to two hours, plus up to three hours of preparatory work, the average fee for 276 U.S. astrologers was $40 to $50 (American Federation of Astrologers 1978a), which per hour was about a third of the average rate for psychoanalysis. Larner (1974), an astrologer and New York businessman, divides U.S. astrologers into the following five types but without indicating their relative numbers. The costs are those of a consultation in 1974: (1) The sun-sign astrologer $2 to $10. Typically the gypsy lady with a storefront in the low-rent district or with mail-order services advertised in newsstand astrology magazines. (2) The large-volume astrologer, $5 to $10. Found mainly at parties, resorts, and fund-raising events. (3) The kitchen astrologer, $10 to $25. Typically the hobbyist, usually a housewife, invariably conscientious and best value for money. (4) The professional astrologer, $25 to $100. Usually has training, experience, expenses, and overhead. Best judged by reputation. (5) The flamboyant astrologer, $250 to $1,000. As (4), but gives personal service and magnificently presented charts to wealthy clients like film stars.

Today most astrological organizations hold examinations, award diplomas, and have codes of ethics. What they do not have is effective regulation, which means that anyone can become an astrologer just by saying so. With or without codes of ethics, some astrologers do play God, or make irresponsible predictions, or intrude their hangups, all of which can have traumatic effect. For example, Rudhyar (1979) says, "I have received many letters from people telling me how fearful or psychologically confused they had become after consulting even a well-known astrologer and being given biased character analyses and/or predictions of illness, catastrophe, or even death." For a personal account of such an experience see L. Wallace (1978). For a discussion of the various sins to which astrologers are prone during a consultation, see

Rosenblum (1983, pp. 120-128).

Of course people can suffer just as much from parents, teachers, and clergy, so it would be unfair to single out astrologers, especially as they are much easier to avoid. My own experience, and my canvassing of informed opinion, suggests that the proportion of astrologers who are irresponsible is something like 1 in 20. Since astrologers are about 50 times less numerous than lawyers (Dean and Mather 1977, p. 7), the problem, while distressing, is hardly of epidemic proportions. This of course may not be the case if we include fairground astrologers and newspaper columnists, whom most serious astrologers regard as irresponsible by definition.

The reasons people believe in astrology have been surveyed by Fullam (1984) using all available opinion polls from Western countries. She concluded that people believe in astrology because it is satisfying on many levels from the trivial to the profound. Some use it as entertainment. Some use it to solve problems ("Is he right for me?"). Some use it to discover the sacred meaning of life. And of course some use it to make money. In other words, different people believe in astrology for different reasons. The interesting question of how such beliefs arise in the first place will be discussed in Part 2. For the moment let us look at why *astrologers* believe in astrology.

Why Do Astrologers Believe in Astrology?

The arguments commonly put forward by astrologers to support their belief in astrology have been critically examined by Kelly et al. (1986), who concluded that none of them stood up to inspection. The arguments and (in parentheses) responses by Kelly et al. are briefly as follows.

1. Astrology has great antiquity and durability. (So has murder.)
2. Astrology is found in many cultures. (So is belief in a flat earth.)
3. Many great scholars have believed in it. (Many others have not.)
4. Astrology is based on observation. (Its complexity defies observation.)
5. Extraterrestrial influences exist. (None are relevant to astrology.)
6. Astrology has been proved by research. (Not true.)
7. Non-astrologers are not qualified to judge. (So who judges murder?)
8. Astrology is not science but art/philosophy. (Not a reason for belief.)
9. Astrology works. (The evidence suggests otherwise.)

Of these nine arguments none is more common, more simple, and more disarming of criticism than "astrology works." So let us examine this point in more detail with a look at the views of astrologers.

The late Charles Carter (1925), the leading U.K. astrologer of the 1930s and noted for exceptional clarity of expression, says: "Practical experiment will soon convince the most sceptical that the bodies of the solar system indicate, if they do not actually produce, changes in: (1) Our minds. (2) Our feelings and emotions. (3) Our physical bodies. (4) Our external affairs and relationships with the world at large."

Edith Custer (1979), editor of a U.S. quarterly magazine devoted exclusively to letters from serious astrologers, says, "Whether the scientific world accepts or rejects astrology makes it no less a valid tool for me to work with. . . . I know it works and I am satisfied with that."

Dane Rudhyar (1970), guru of person-centered astrology, says, "If, after having studied . . . his . . . birth chart, a person . . . is able to feel a direction and purpose . . . in his life . . . then astrology is 'existentially' proven to be effective in this particular case. It 'works'—for him."

Rudolf Smit (1976), founder editor of the Dutch astrological journal *Wetenschap & Astrologie* (Wetenschap = Science), says: "On the inevitable question 'why does astrology work?' even the most intelligent and experienced astrologers are obliged to be pragmatic: Don't ask them how it works, because they know only that it does work, which is why they use it."

The most popular vague assumption, and the subsequent circular argument, is that everything in the universe is interrelated, so that in effect we can tell what our fingers are doing by looking at our toes. For example, Zipporah Dobyns (1986, p. 33), one of the few astrologers with a Ph.D. in psychology, says: "But, increasingly, modern astrologers are realising that the correspondences are symbolic. The sky is part of the universe, and it is visible, so it is a convenient way to see the shared order."

The idea of "shared order," more usually called *synchronicity,* is not without a certain conceit. As Mackay (1852) noted, "How we should pity the arrogance of the worm that crawls at our feet, if . . . it . . . imagined that meteors shot athwart the sky to warn it that a tom-tit was hovering near to gobble it up." Astrologers are not aware of this but argue that, because astrology works (note the circular argument), theirs is not to reason why.

What are the views of orthodox professionals who use astrology? Dr. Edward Askren (1980), a psychiatrist who was once skeptical of astrology but who now uses it in his practice, says, "Like ethics or theology, astrology presents at its best a coherent explanation of what is, and broadly indicates how an individual does in life and how he . . . may relate to the rest of creation." He describes the benefits of using astrology in his practice of psychotherapy as follows: "[Astrology provides] me with a different view of personality—one that seems to be more congruent with the world. . . . By giving me a new set [of analogies] with which to perceive, it helps me to see things I would not see otherwise. My patients have responded—some negatively, some positively, some gradually positively."

Dr. Bernard Rosenblum (1983, pp. 3-4), a psychiatrist who uses astrology in his practice, describes his first visit to an astrologer at age 41 and incognito. He was told about his conflicts, talents, intellectual style, emotions, parental images, and much more, including the opinion that he was, or should be, a psychoanalyst or psychiatrist: "It was all pointedly meaningful to me—and surprisingly specific. The usual criticism of astrology, that it produces a variety of generalities that can refer to almost anyone, was suddenly, in my mind, relevant only to newspaper and magazine types of astrology and no

longer to the experience of going to a competent astrologer. . . . Now that I have studied astrology myself, I am well aware of the excellent contributions astrology can make to human understanding."

Not all professionals come away from astrology with such glowing opinions. Dr. Anthony Stevens, a psychiatrist who assessed chart readings as part of Parker's (1970) investigation of astrology, concluded that astrology is a delusional system comparable to organized religion and is used to impose order on private chaos. Thus astrologers drag their clients into "a shared paranoia, a *folie à deux,* in which both astrologer and client subscribe to the same delusional system."

To illustrate the understanding that astrology can bring, suppose you are experiencing emotional ups and downs (or restlessness or problems at work or whatever). Your astrologer points out that your chart has Mars aspecting Venus, or the moon in a Fire sign, or a lack of Earth, or transiting Uranus in the fifth house, or any of a hundred other things, all of them indicating ups and downs and thus confirming your situation. The astrologer then explains the strengths and weaknesses of these factors and how they interact with other chart factors, and shows how any liabilities can be minimized or even turned into assets, for example, by avoiding situations abrasive to your sensitive Neptunian nature, or by concentrating on the fine communicative skills shown by your strong third and ninth houses. In effect your situation is repacked and put into coherent order by the structure of the chart, in the same way that a transactional analyst would repack it in terms of Adult, Parent, and Child. So you see your situation from a new vantage point. Since you have never heard yourself explained in such a simple and appealing way, it is a revelation. You end up reassured, self-aware, and very satisfied with the service, which the astrologer sees as yet more evidence that astrology works.

These examples (and I could have cited many more) illustrate the kind of evidence that astrologers respect most. They see that astrology gives benefit, self-understanding, and spiritual insight. They see that it helps people. They see that it works. And because seeing is believing, they don't care what the critics say—*they know.* What could be more reasonable? But phrenologists said exactly the same.

A Salutary Lesson from Phrenology

Phrenology is a system of intellectual and moral philosophy that is based on reading character from brain development as shown by head shape. Phrenology is now virtually dead, but in the 1830s it was more popular than astrology is today. Like astrology, it encourages you to assess yourself via its principles and act on the findings to achieve harmony with the world. Like astrology, it attracted people of intelligence and a vast literature wherein every criticism was furiously attacked. Like astrology, it flourished because practitioners and clients saw that it worked. For many other parallels see Dean and Mather (1985).

But the claims of phrenology are now known to be wrong. Character is not indicated by brain development because the brain does not work like that, at least not in the way and to the extent required by phrenology (Davies 1955; Flugel 1964). So a certain head-shape cannot mean what it is supposed to mean. Yet millions of people could agree that phrenology works, just as millions of people today agree that astrology works. But could millions of people be wrong? As discussed next, the answer is yes and no.

It All Depends on What You Mean by 'Works'

We have seen that astrologers believe in astrology because it works. But as Eysenck and Nias (1982, p. 211) point out, it all depends on what you mean by *works.* If by *works* you mean *is helpful,* the popularity of serious astrology leaves no doubt that it does indeed work. But this is hardly surprising—after all, to most people astrological ideas have undeniable beauty and appeal, the birth chart is nonjudgmental, the interpretation is nonfalsifiable, and astrologers tend to be nice people. In a society that denies ego support to most people, astrology provides it at a very low price. Where else can you get this sort of thing these days?

But if by *works* you mean *is true,* this changes the situation entirely and brings us back to the question of utility vs. validity. It is one thing to say we can learn about ourselves by following the interaction of Mars and Venus like toy soldiers in a psychological war game and quite another to say that these interactions are related to what Mars and Venus were doing at our moment of birth. As one astrologer who recognizes the problem put it, "Any good I've done as a consultant, and I have done some good, had less to do with my being a good astrologer than with my being a good person" (Ashmun 1984).

This explains the conflict between critics and astrologers: Critics see a lack of factual evidence and conclude it doesn't work, whereas astrologers see that it helps people and conclude it does work. Both are right—and both are guilty of not wanting to know what the other is talking about. The situation is not helped by the typical astrologer's attitude toward factual evidence so well described by Levy (1982), who runs Australia's largest computerized chart calculation service: "I often get the feeling, after talking to astrologers, that they live in a mental fantasy world, a kind of astrological universe where no explanations outside of astrological ones are permitted, and that if the events of the real world do not accord with astrological notions or predictions, then yet another astrological technique will have to be invented to explain it."

In such a situation the crucial question is not whether astrology is true but whether it *needs* to be true. We have already seen that, at the trivial level, the answer is no (Skafte 1969). But what about the real thing? To find out we must first understand some more about birth charts.

The Importance of an Accurate Birth Chart

Astrology postulates a correspondence between birth chart and person. Or as above, so below. Some astrologers, like Charles Carter, hold the traditional view that the birth chart indicates character and destiny. Others, like Dane Rudhyar, see it pertaining only to the individual's potential. (Here I will ignore the problem that, because potential can never be determined, it is impossible to know whether such astrology works.) Either way, an accurate birth chart is essential—a point confirmed by astrological organizations in their codes of ethics, as shown by the following typical example from the American Federation of Astrologers (1978b): ". . . A precise astrological opinion cannot honestly be rendered with reference to the life of an individual unless it is based upon a horoscope cast for the year, month, day and time of day plus correct geographical location of the place of birth."

If an accurate birth chart is essential, then the wrong chart should ruin everything. But if the chart makes no difference, the rationale for astrology disappears—and astrology does not need to be true. So let us now put this point to the test.

Right Charts vs. Wrong Charts

Right and wrong charts have been compared in seven independent studies, nearly all of them made in the past five years, in which subjects had to decide which of two or more chart interpretations fitted them best. One interpretation was of their own chart, the rest were those of other subjects picked at random. Care was taken to ensure that direct clues, such as birth data, were excluded and that indirect clues, such as sun-sign descriptions, were either excluded or were the same in all interpretations. According to astrology the subjects should certainly tend to pick their own charts. But the results (Table 1) show that in every study the subjects performed no better than chance. In other words, they were just as happy with wrong charts as with right ones. This suggests that the perceived validity of astrology is an illusion.

The results cannot be explained by poor interpretation. Thus, in the study by Dwyer (1986), who at the time was a tutor in the internationally known Mayo School of Astrology, the method had previously been progressively refined via a panel of 30 control subjects to maximize accuracy. And in the Carlson (1985) study the interpretations were individually prepared by experienced professional astrologers judged by their peers to be highly competent. Yet in both studies the results were at exactly chance level.

Nor can the results be explained by the subjects' not knowing themselves. Thus, in the study by Tyson (1984), the test was also given to someone who knew the subject well (usually a parent), but the results were just as negative—3 hits vs. 3 expected by chance. Ianna and Tolbert (1985) tested the ability of U.S. astrologer John McCall to pick the correct chart out of four from the subject's face and build, which of course avoids the problem entirely. McCall

TABLE 1

Can Subjects Tell Right Charts from Wrong Charts?

Study	Note	No. of Subjects	Charts per Subject	No. Picking Own Chart Observed	No. Picking Own Chart Expected By Chance
Cummings et al. 1978	1	12	3	4	4
Neher 1980	1	18	6	3	3
Lackey 1981	2	38	2	19	19
Dwyer & Grange 1983	3	34	3	10	11
Tyson 1984	1	15	5	2	3
Carlson 1985	1	83	3	28	28
Dwyer 1986	3	30	2	15	15
Total		230		81	83

Answer: Unanimously no. The overall trend is not even in the right direction. The interpretations were prepared by (1) one or more professional astrologers; (2) the experimenter, from books; or (3) a computer. They were usually based either on the whole chart or on the whole chart minus long-term factors, such as the sign position of planets beyond Jupiter.

was confident of success (he had previously put an ad in the *Washington Post* challenging scientists to test him) and was completely satisfied with the test conditions. Yet he scored only 7 hits for 28 subjects, no different from the 7 expected by chance, and scarcely better than his score of 1 hit for 5 subjects obtained in an earlier test (Randi 1983).

We may note that, if subjects do not know themselves, then valid personality questionnaires could not exist; see Cronbach (1970). Nor could astrologers ever know that astrology works. Or as one indignant correspondent to *American Astrology* put it, "I believe that I know myself better than that conceited Virgo astrologer did" (Shivers 1983).

And, indeed, when the approach used in Table 1 is applied to personality inventories, the correct profile tends to be chosen; for example, see Greene et al. (1979) and the results of Grange (1982) cited in Part 2. This shows that, while self-knowledge may not be 100 percent, it is sufficient for the present purpose. At any rate, the results of Table 1 are consistent with examples in the astrological literature where the interpretation fits the subject perfectly but the chart is subsequently found to be wrong (Dean and Mather 1977, pp. 28-31). Such examples are often very telling, as this one from the late Piet Hein Hoebens (1984) demonstrates: "In my newspaper column in *De Telegraaf* I have occasionally discussed astrological topics. Mr. Gieles, a well-

known astrologer in The Hague, responded to my critical writings by publishing my horoscope, which, not surprisingly, revealed that the stars and planets had conspired to make me a critical journalist hostile to Mr. Gieles's claims. Everything fitted beautifully except one detail—poor Mr. Gieles had used the wrong birth date!"

The Problem of Words

One problem with testing astrological interpretations is that they tend to be wordy and rambling. For example, the interpretations tested by Carlson (1985) averaged just over 1,000 words each, of which the following excerpts are typical: (1) Emotions tend to be erratic especially when communications break down. (2) You want to belong and fit it, at the same time you want to be noticed. (3) You can hold jobs of singular authority when in command. (4) You have a deep mind but tend to daydream when bored and need the discipline of education to stimulate your versatility. [Total: 56 words.]

Trying to choose between three 1,000-word interpretations in such a style is conducive to mental paralysis; the mind cannot cope. This does not invalidate Carlson's study—the interpretations were prepared by highly competent astrologers, so it is a fair test of actual professional practice. But it does leave us wondering what would happen if (1) wrong charts were used in an actual consultation, and (2) the interpretations were made especially concise to facilitate detection of their wrongness. Would the client notice? I decided to find out.

Part 2, with more tests of the real thing and more bad news for astrologers, will appear in the next issue. We will gain insight into why astrology is not likely to go away. And a famous legal case will be demystified.

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