

The Mars Effect Cannot Be Pinned on Cheating Parents

SUITBERT ERTEL

The Mars Effect exists. This is premise A of one of the world's leading critics in astrology (Geoffrey Dean: "Is the Mars Effect a social effect?" SI May/June, 2002). *Mars Effect* only means correlations between birth frequencies of athletes and Mars positions at birth hours, as reported by the Gauquelins. The term as used here does not imply any astrological endorsement, as it usually does in public discussions. Planet-birth correlations, the statistics, have been the center of disputes over several decades. Dean long since confirmed their reality, a stance based on his own careful scrutiny of the Gauquelins' and the skeptics' birth data files.

Yet his message about planet-birth correlations, message (A), perhaps shocking for some, is immediately followed by message (B) reassuring for the shocked: Forget about astrology altogether. All Mars, Moon, Jupiter, and Saturn effects ever reported by the Gauquelins and confirmed by others can be explained by human manipulation, not by Gauquelin's manipulation as many skeptics suspected in the past, but by cheating parents. The parents dutifully reported birth dates and hours at their registration offices, but some of them adjusted, less dutifully, birth hours of their children in order to make them coincide with favorable planetary positions.

I for one endorse Dean's message A (see Ertel in SI, 1992), but not B. Let me explain why I reject B, the parental tam-

pering hypothesis. Two reasons are straightforward, more technical issues, intertwined as they are with tricky statistics, have been addressed elsewhere.¹ First, Dean's hypothesis implies that nineteenth century parents were already aware of birth/planet connections uncovered through Gauquelin's research in 1955. How could the parents know at that time, e.g., that their kids'



Dean long since confirmed the reality of planet-birth correlations, a stance based on his own careful scrutiny of the Gauquelins' and the skeptics' birth data files.

chance at age twenty or so in athletics would be better if they had been born with Mars rising or culminating? Or that for their kids as actors twenty-five years after birth, a rising or culminating Jupiter at birth would be an advantage, or that for their fame as scientists, at age thirty-five or later, natal Saturn in that position would count, etc.—to name three of fifteen confirmed planet/birth connections. Such beliefs had never been documented in pre-Gauquelin times.

Why should they have been documented? Suppose that Gauquelin's "neo-astrology" (which I will abbreviate as GN) came into existence as belief early on. In that case GN would have clashed with astrology's core traditions, based

Suitbert Ertel is professor emeritus at Georg-Elias-Müller-Institut für Psychologie Göttingen, Germany. E-mail: sertil@uni-goettingen.de.

primarily on Ptolemaic astrology and its derivatives. Consider, for example, that in traditional astrology a planet passing through the *house* immediately after its rise ("house"—that is, sector, one-twelfth of the daily circle) was considered as weakly positioned while for Gauquelin's GN this sector was one of the two strongest. Consider further that for Ptolemaic astrology planetary *aspects* (that is, pronounced angles between planets) are of paramount importance while for GN angles between planets are entirely irrelevant. More contrasts between traditional astrology and GN exist. Had GN ever become an astrological belief, then disputes over that heresy by proponents and disbelievers would have found their way into written works. Dean did not and certainly cannot provide any document proving that GN-beliefs existed before 1955.

ble through books, magazines, journals, conferences, TV, and the Internet, yet such widespread awareness of the Gauquelin heresy did not effect noticeable changes in existing astrological belief systems—mini-concessions to GN notwithstanding. How then could GN, an elaborate astrological system, ever conquer the minds of masses of nineteenth century people all over Europe, without modern media technology, without teachers, and even without using available means of publicity in those days: leaflets, pamphlets, booklets?

Dean faintly acknowledges the problems. Ptolemaic astrology was "dead" since the seventeenth century (Dean, p. 36), so it is difficult to attribute to nineteenth-century parents astrological motivations. But Dean simply fills the lacuna of beliefs with

Ptolemaic descendants even under most favorable conditions today. And why didn't the time-tampering parents of modern film stars or Olympic winners found in the data lists of Gauquelin's 1955 book not react by shouting in public, "Wow! He found out!"

My second point of dissent is Dean's presupposition that parents were sufficiently informed, by almanacs, about planetary positions. Only one third of the best of Dean's historical periodicals provide information about the rise of Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn, and if at all, then for only one or two days of a month.

Moreover, almanacs were considerably biased in favor of sights at night, they dealt with *visible* planets. Also: parents without almanacs, dependent on viewing conditions, could see planets at night only. So if the parents fudged their children's birth time, one should find more effects among night births than among day births. But when I tested this I found that daytime planetary effects were significantly *more*, not less pronounced than night-time effects (see table 1, day 26.5 percent, night 24.6 percent). This contradictory result alone, I posit, disproves convincingly what Dean purports to be "so simple, so obvious" (p. 37).

So what to conclude? Dean's message (A) stands (planet-birth correlations), but his message (B) (parental tampering) must be renounced. No suitable explanation for (A) has yet been offered. Tolerance of ambiguity, a scientist's strength, is still demanded.

Table 1
Planetary effects, day and night births compared

From Dean's total (N=15,942) daytime and nighttime births were selected. "Day" means the sun is above the horizon, "night" below the horizon (Paris calendar). Dean's workable total for this test is based on professions with significant birth surplus in rising and culminating sectors of Moon, Jupiter, or Saturn (Mars excluded because of "dawn effect" intrusion) (N = 10,457). Percent chance expectation obtained from a control group of Gauquelins' ordinary people (day N = 8,685; night N = 9134).

	Total	G-sector	% G-sector	% Expected
Daytime births	5,234	1,393	26.6	22.3
Nighttime births	5,223	1,281	24.5	21.3

Problems accrue. The Gauquelin data show that GN planetary effects occurred 1800–1950 all over Europe, from Italy, France, Germany, to Belgium and Holland, without significant variation. Dean's tampering hypothesis thus presupposes that GN ideas spread evenly among societies, overcoming all linguistic, national, and cultural barriers—all this occurring in obscurity. Dean's speculation seems preposterous.

More is on file. Since 1955, the Gauquelin findings have been accessi-

ble through books, magazines, journals, conferences, TV, and the Internet, yet such widespread awareness of the Gauquelin heresy did not effect noticeable changes in existing astrological belief systems—mini-concessions to GN notwithstanding. How then could GN, an elaborate astrological system, ever conquer the minds of masses of nineteenth century people all over Europe, without modern media technology, without teachers, and even without using available means of publicity in those days: leaflets, pamphlets, booklets?

Dean faintly acknowledges the problems. Ptolemaic astrology was "dead" since the seventeenth century (Dean, p. 36), so it is difficult to attribute to nineteenth-century parents astrological motivations. But Dean simply fills the lacuna of beliefs with

Note

1. See "Scrutinies of Geoffrey Dean's Parental Tampering Claim," a series by S. Ertel in *Correlation*, of which are published: (1) "Tampering with birth dates should occur more often among rural than urban people," 2001, 19(2): 37–46; (2) 2001, "Births of priests should abound on feasts," 2001, 20(1): 30–36; (3) "Superstition should decline over time," 2002, 19(4): 39–48; Submitted: (4) "Three tests, three failures," (5) "Whence midnight avoidance?" These studies could not confirm Dean's idea that Gauquelin planetary effects have anything to do with superstition (belief in witching days, ghost hours etc.). In his SI article Dean missed referring to this work. □