



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF PARAPSYCHOLOGICAL RESEARCH, INC.

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THE A.I.P.R. NEWS

Astrology and Psi by Louise Chalmers

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Astrology is the "interpretation of movements and positions of celestial bodies as either omens for or determinants of the course of terrestrial, including human, events"¹ Babylonians, Ancient Egyptians, Australian Aborigines, North and South American Indians, Asians and East Indians, and most likely people of all cultures, have studied the stars and other celestial bodies over the centuries. The development of systems of prediction and

characterisation governed by the galaxy is therefore understandable as a natural progression from purely observing universal patterns, to attributing meaning to apparent correlations between astronomical events and occurrences on Earth.

Horoscopic astrology spread at the beginning of the Christian era, but Christian leaders attempted to eliminate it due to its pagan and fatalistic attributes and associations. Nevertheless, astrology is a modern day interest with a large following. Most people know their 'sun-sign' and charts are available from many websites. Chinese astrology is

very widely followed, with eclipses often influencing how investors will trade on the stock market, thus creating self-fulfilling prophecies as the market seems to act in accordance with those eclipses.

In New York City, the Financial Astrology Association was founded in the 1980s, and it is referred to in financial publications.² The prediction of a stock-market crash in the Northern Hemisphere in the Fall

(i.e., Autumn) 2008 has been evident on various astrology websites for at least a year preceding the event [e.g., 'Black Monday', September 15, 2008—EDITOR]. W. D. Gann, a successful stock market trader, studied astrology, and he proposed that cycles throughout the universe are vital for determining future events. However, studies on astrology and astrologers have found little support for basic and more complicated theories of astrology. In fact, the general consensus currently appears to be that astrology is more of a religion than a science.³ This is a logical categorisation for astrology, as the definition

of 'science' is the "systematic study and knowledge of natural or physical phenomena",⁴ and the attributes of astrology are related to widely accepted yet unsubstantiated claims that are comparable to religious beliefs.

Arguably the most well-known astrological research was conducted by Michel and Francoise Gauquelin. They tested zodiac signs, planetary aspects, transits, and astrologer accuracy at matching birth charts, all with negative findings. Even so, some results

indicated that there is some kind of connection between human events and some planets in our Solar System. The Gauquelin data demonstrated that at the birth of eminent people, some planets were found in certain sectors more frequently than expected by chance, and in some cases less frequently than expected by chance.⁵ There was no effect shown on charts of ordinary people, but various professions showed various relationships with at least one of five planetary bodies (Mars, Venus, Jupiter, Saturn and the Moon). The correlation coefficient of 0.05 was replicated in other studies and although small,

"there is some kind of connection between human events and some planets in our Solar System"

At My Desk

Who's had enough of the so-called Global Financial Crisis? Many keen observers suggest the crisis began in March 2008, but others feel more comfortable with the official start date of September 15, 2008 ("Black Monday"), it being the date that the financial services firm Lehman Brothers Holdings Inc., filed for bankruptcy protection. It was that event that precipitated the downward cycle worldwide. This edition of THE A.I.P.R. NEWS features an essay by *AIPR Certificate in Parapsychology* course student, Louise Chalmers. I was intrigued by her mention of an alleged stock-market crash that had been predicted for the Fall of 2008 based on a number of astrological forecasts. If, as claimed, a psi component is involved in astrology, we may have to concede that many an astrologer draws on their psi skills to help them in their challenging work. That being said, astrologers can still make rational (i.e., normal) forecasts based on readily observable current events, just as many budding and seasoned financial dynamos saw the writing on the wall months earlier in regard to the crisis we're now facing. However, even though both depend on numbers and charts, astrologers and market traders get it wrong too. So my question is: In our current financial climate, who would you trust, an astrologer or a stockbroker? I mean, if you had to choose . . .

* * *

Got something to say about parapsychology or the paranormal? Submit your contribution to:

Dr. Lance Storm,
School of Psychology,
University of Adelaide,
SA 5005

or e-mail me at:

aiprnc@yahoo.com

Enjoy this edition of *The A.I.P.R. News!*

—Lance Storm

Astrology and Psi *(cont'd from page 1)*

it is nonetheless statistically significant.

After performing factor analysis on the Gauquelin data, Ertel confirmed planet-birth correlations, and after performing cluster analysis of eleven professions, a near-perfect match was found.⁶

The planetary studies were independently replicated three times with two correlations found to be positive, and one negative. Ertel tested the data in terms of the second hypothesis Gauquelin had formulated: The relationship increases with eminence and disappears for non-eminant people. Ertel graded eminence and found different professions either correlated positively or negatively with different planetary

bodies. **“statements made by astrologers had to be related to extra sensory perception”** This finding added

another dimension to the second hypothesis. When Ertel wrote his article there were six approaches attempting to explain the Gauquelin data on a physical basis, all of which included unknown or implausible links.

Dean examined whether planetary effects could be man-made.⁷ In order to do this, he analysed the Gauquelin data in its social context in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries in Western Europe. Births during this period were verbally reported by parents; occupation and eminence tended to run in families; popular almanacs gave diurnal information for visual planets (rising, setting, culminating times). He concluded that fake effects could occur because of role playing, parental tampering and perinatal control. Dean then tried to find evidence of tampering effects within the Gauquelin data. Clear evidence indicated that certain days were desirable or avoided according to prevailing beliefs—e.g., witching days had less eminent births and auspicious days had

more.

Additional support for the Mars effect being a social effect is given by the fact that Gauquelin was unable to find planetary effects in births recorded after 1950.⁸ However, as previously mentioned, the planetary studies have been replicated with contemporary data.⁹

Ertel disagreed with Dean's theory of parental tampering with birth times and dates for two reasons: First, parents were not aware of correlations between planets and eminent birth times and dates, and second, the almanacs of the day were not sufficient enough in planetary information to support the theory of parental tampering.¹⁰

Research on astrology is further complicated by the possibility of psi phenomena contributing to predictions or personality descriptions. Dean and Kelly investigated the relevance of astrology to psi.¹¹ Their article includes detailed results and explanations of empirical studies. It explains that astrologers are unaware of so-called 'hidden persuaders', known technically as statistical artefacts and inferential biases. The hidden persuaders evident in astrology include: (i) reading specifics into generalities (the Barnum effect); (ii) seeing what you believe (cognitive dissonance); (iii) being guided by body language and other non-verbal cues (cold reading); (iv) non-falsifiability; and (v) operant conditioning.

However, there is also the possibility of astrologers having psychic ability and using astrology either consciously or subconsciously as a forum for their abilities. Freud believed in the possibility of thought transference and Dal Lee believed the specificity of statements made by astrolo-

gers had to be related to extra sensory perception at least part of the time.¹²

Another relevant issue is the claim that help is given to astrologers from spirit guides. This is explained as seeing the horoscope or birth chart of an individual as a mandala or magical diagram, and planets as really being spirit energies guiding the astrologer to know or sense the required information.¹³ Astrologers describe an aspect of the chart as jumping out at them, and astrologers have sometimes dedicated books they have authored to their spirit guides.¹⁴ No evidence for these claims has been found as yet, and the discrimination between spirit guides and psi may be fuzzy, or as Dean and Kelly put it, spirits could be psi in disguise.

Astrologers tend to rely on experience or personal validation as opposed to understanding found through studies.¹⁵ Henry Weingarten, the financial astrologer, admits he does not know how it works, yet he believes it does and time and time again he has accurately predicted market crashes around the world with a high degree of accuracy.¹⁶ The problem with astrologer's reliance on experience is that it is from experience that hidden persuaders can operate.¹⁷

Rudolf Smit, the founder of the website: www.astrology-and-science.com, is no longer a professional astrologer, but he does still do readings with the premise that he is offering "a Grand Illusion" and "if it is helpful, it is not because astrology itself is helpful, but because astrology sets a scene that helps me to be helpful."

Ertel also suggests that paranormal activity may be present in astrology.¹⁸ In his article he examines Arno Muller's research on the Gauquelin data which included a finding correlating early childhood death and the position of

Astrology and Psi (cont'd from page 2)

Saturn at birth. Ertel eloquently questions how the future can be ascertained by the time of birth when he asks "whose mind . . . might predict or 'pre-feel' or 'pre-conceive' a child's future professional success or a child's early death? No human mind would have such super-human power."¹⁹

In light of the discussed research, it would be naive to state that the astrological findings have no implications for science. Indeed, if anything, further scientific research into the Gauquelin data—although not strictly astrology—could prove the planetary bodies have more significance in the lives of humans on Earth today. Even so, the practical applications of this knowledge may be limited, as part of the great mystery of life is the unexpected joys and sorrows

the future may hold.

Ψ

Notes:

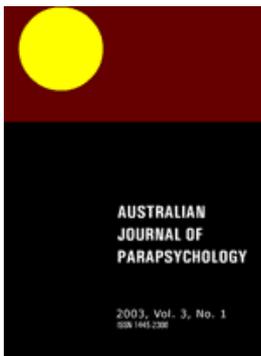
1. W. M. O'Neil, *Early Astronomy: from Babylonia to Copernicus* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 1986), p. 9.
2. H. Weingarten, *Investing by the Stars* (New York: Traders Press, 2000).
3. R. Smit, *Astrology My Passion: My Life, My Personal Disaster*. Retrieved August 18, 2008 from <http://www.rudolfhsmit.nl/a-pass2.htm>.
4. *Collins Mini Dictionary* (New York: Harper-Collins, 2006).
5. S. Ertel, "Update On The 'Mars Effect'" [Electronic version], *Skeptical Inquirer* 16 (1992): 150-160.
6. Ibid.
7. G. Dean, "Is the Mars effect a social effect? A re-analysis of the Gauquelin data suggests that hitherto baffling planetary effects may be simple social effects in disguise" [Electronic version]. *Skeptical Inquirer* 26 (2002): 33-38.
8. Ibid.
9. Ertel, Update.
10. S. Ertel, "The Mars Effect Cannot Be Pinned On Cheating Parents" [Electronic version]. *Skeptical Inquirer* 27 (2003): 57-58.
11. G. Dean & W. I. Kelly, "Is Astrology Relevant To Consciousness And Psi?" [Electronic version]. In J. Alcock, J. Burns, & A. Freeman (Eds.), *Psi Wars: Getting To Grips With The Paranormal* (Charlottesville, VA: Imprint Academic, (2003): 175-198.
12. D. Lee, "Impact Of ESP On Astrology", *Astrological Review* 36 (1964): 12-17; 37 (1964): 9-16.
13. Dean & Kelly, *Is Astrology Relevant*.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid.
17. Weingarten, *Investing*.
18. Dean & Kelly, *Is Astrology Relevant*.
19. S. Ertel, "Hopeful Findings, Unduly Neglected, In Stars And Human Affairs" *Australian Journal of Parapsychology* 7 (2007): 52-71.
20. Ibid, p. 9.



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The *Australian Journal of Parapsychology* features research articles on ESP (extra-sensory perception), PK (psychokinesis), and the afterlife.

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The Australian Institute of Parapsychological Research is a non-profit community association. Based in Sydney but with a world-wide membership base, it was established in 1977. The aims of the organisation are:

- To collect, assess and disseminate factual information about claims of psychic (paranormal) phenomena.
- To support and encourage parapsychology (the scientific study of paranormal phenomena).
- To undertake or promote activities (e.g., fundraising, social activities, etc.) in support of the above.

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The Weird and the Wonderful by Hannah Jenkins

Psi, PR, and a New Year's Resolution

Psi has some serious PR challenges—we're scoffed at by skeptics, lumped in with New-Agers, and barred from publishing in journals by ignorant gate-keepers.

It seems that the best and brightest in the field are constantly on the back foot defending their work from opinionated skeptics in the mainstream press. Just recently, for instance, Rupert Sheldrake had to send in a response to a piece in the *Guardian*¹ written by Adam Rutherford of the famously gated anti-psi community at *Nature*.² The original article was a review of Rupert Sheldrake's book³—it was scathing and unfounded. Rupert Sheldrake's response was as eloquent, thoughtful and reasonable as ever. I admire his patience.

But why, we must ask ourselves, does the press so often favour the skeptical point of

view. Irrational scientific skepticism continues to dominate the voices of reasoned research into the topic. More importantly, what must we do?

Perhaps at the nub of the issue is that, when it comes to PR, the skeptics go where most psi researchers fear to tread. For instance, the vocal skeptic Susan Blackmore has appeared on the 'reality' TV show *Big Brother*,⁴ not just once, but numerous times. Would we? And her CV lists countless more TV and radio appearances than research grants.⁵ The energy she puts into PR pays off though. She's also gone where we apparently haven't been invited—to do a TED talk.⁶ Why her, and not Dean Radin or the like?

Do we need professional help? A make-over for the discipline? I can see the reality show now: from the Cinderella of the Sciences to Queen of the Campus. I jest, of course.

But perhaps we do need to rethink our approach to how the discipline is represented in the media and create our own bank of productions. Shows or documentaries that are well-produced and present the fascinating story of the study of psi with thoughtfulness, integrity and humour. We need to stop relying on Discovery Channel or Horizon documentaries vainly hoping that this time they'll give us a fair run and make us look good.

Psi research has an amazing story to tell; there's a history filled with brave and curious people working on areas in science that will impact greatly on how we live in the future. And there's huge public interest in this area. The public deserve more than trashy misguided documentaries like *Enemies of Reason* that give dogmatic muddled opinions, or conflate the supernatural with the paranormal.

So, I've made a New Year's

resolution: I am going to try to turn my radio show, the *Edge of Reason*,⁷ into a TV show. I want to create a platform that gives psi researchers a voice, and shows how we are genuinely more sceptical than the skeptics. And we can have fun to boot.

Stay tuned . . . Ψ

Notes:

1. www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/belief/2009/feb/09/psychology-science-morphic-sheldrake.
2. See Ed May's paper published in the *Proceedings* of last year's Parapsychology Association Convention for a revealing example of vain attempts to get psi results published in that illustrious journal.
3. *A New Science of Life*
4. <http://us.imdb.com/name/nm1830341/>
5. www.susanblackmore.co.uk/media.htm
6. www.ted.com/talks
7. www.utas.edu.au/philosophy/postgradpubs/Hannah/edgeofreason.html

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