

Thought Experiments

Astrology can be fun, but it is not science (Unpublished Response)

Tim Philp Thursday, July 17, 2014 7:38:12 EDT PM

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This is a draft of a response to the article that was submitted but for no apparent reason was 'lost in moderation'.

The claim of the article "*Astrology can be fun, but it is not science*" is quite reasonable. Astrology is not a hard science such as physics, chemistry and molecular biology. By this measure, sociology, psychology and nutrition are not sciences. Most astrologers do not claim their field to be a science in this sense of the term.

However, the assumption that because astrology is not a science that it is "*patent nonsense*" and astrologers are charlatans is not a scientific deduction. It is not science but scientism – the belief that only scientific knowledge is valid.

"*There has never been a scientific test on the powers of astrology that has proved it is better than chance in any significant way.*" This is incorrect: see <http://www.astrologer.com/tests/basisofastrology.htm#scievidence> for a list of published scientific experiments that support astrology. I have challenged many critics of astrology to find any scientific tests that show that astrology is no better than chance. Obviously tests that are either flawed, anecdotal, sun sign only, use a tiny sample or a magic trick are not acceptable.

The claim that scientists were unable to find significance in the Sun signs of Nobel Prize Winners is in fact false. I checked the [paper](#) and the researchers clearly state:

"Using the χ^2 test, we found a general association between zodiac sign and the likelihood of having received the Nobel Prize in Medicine and Physiology ($p = 0.042$). In particular, the odds of having won a Nobel Prize were increased for people born under the sign of Gemini (odds ratio [OR] 1.90, 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.12–3.24, $p = 0.017$). Conversely, the odds of having won a Nobel Prize were decreased for those born under Leo (OR 0.35, 95% CI 0.16–0.82, $p = 0.011$)."

These figures show that there were statistically significant results that support the traditional association of the sign of Gemini with intellectual endeavour. However, while the test supports astrology, the results do not validate the practice of astrology. Even though the results are in line with astrological tradition, no astrologer was consulted in advance to predict which zodiac signs they would expect to produce extreme results. The fluctuations could be as a result of long term transits of the outer planets that may favour certain signs over others. The experiment would have been fairer if both the experimental group and the control group were not made up exclusively of medical researchers and full timed birth charts were used. Also, the paper did not refer to the work of Michel Gauquelin who found a significant correlation between planetary positions at birth and scientists in France.

"*There is no mechanism that has ever been proposed that could account for astrology's magical predictive power and nobody is doing research into this area.*" This claim which is repeated almost verbatim in two paragraphs is incorrect. Mechanisms have been proposed from [Dr Percy Seymour and others](#). Research is ongoing and published in several peer reviewed journals; Correlation, ISAR Journal and NCGR Journal.

Astrology is "*patent nonsense that does not deserve any significant research.*" This is known as a proof by assertion fallacy and suggests that the author's personal beliefs take precedence over science. This refusal to investigate evidence is reminiscent of the hard-line sceptics who ridiculed Galileo's discoveries but refused his invitation to look through his telescope.

"*While astrology may seem harmless nonsense, it actually fosters a mindset that discourages critical thinking and logic.*" This is also incorrect – critical thinking requires an individual to question conventional wisdom and to investigate a subject before making an opinion. The author's research seems to come from secondary sources like Wikipedia – where the astrology pages are [controlled by sceptical groups](#) and any evidence that supports astrology is suppressed.

"*Astrology is simply primitive "magic" that does nothing to help solve the practical problems we face.*" We do face some serious problems notably rising rates of depression and suicide in the western world. Scientific solutions including brain surgery or psychoactive drugs have dangerous side-effects. We need to look for human solutions to human problems and no good scientist should rule out traditional systems of knowledge.

"*Sadly, there are many people who reject science for this nonsense.*" People do not reject science in favour of astrology. There is nothing in astrology that contradicts science. Unfortunately, a few people have a negative view about science because of articles like this push personal beliefs without evidence or fact checking under the pretext of science.

Robert Currey 18 July 2014