

Astrology—Part Four

By Dr. John Ankerberg and Dr. John Weldon
(excerpted from *Encyclopedia of New Age Beliefs*, Harvest House, 1996)

Astrology and the Occult

Astrology is related to the occult in four main ways. First, dictionaries often define astrology as an occult art because the practice employs occult divination. Second, astrology appears to work best when the astrologer himself is psychically or mediumistically sensitive, what most astrologers term “intuitive.” Third, prolonged use of astrology leads to the development of psychic abilities and the contact of spirit guides. This was admitted by the majority of astrologers we interviewed at the July 4-8, 1988, fiftieth anniversary Las Vegas convention of the American Federation of Astrologers, the oldest and most influential of U.S. astrological societies. Almost all those we interviewed admitted they had spirit guides.¹ Fourth, due to its history and nature, astrology often becomes the introductory course to a wider spectrum of occult practices. In spite of these connections, astrologers often claim that astrology has nothing to do with the occult.² Nevertheless, many occultists today use astrology, and many astrologers practice other occult arts.³

Historian, philosopher, and occult authority Dr. John Warwick Montgomery points out what everyone who has studied astrology knows: that astrology is “found virtually everywhere occultism is to be found.”⁴ Examples are everywhere. Astrologer Daniel Logan admits he is involved with mediums and spirits.⁵ Astrologer Marcus Allen is involved with a spirit guide and studies such esoteric disciplines as yoga, Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, and the Western magical traditions.⁶ Astrologers have admitted that astrology is “the key to all the occult sciences,”⁷ and that “almost all occultists use astrological timing in their work.”⁸

Without question, astrology is the most publicly acceptable occult practice. Perhaps no other activity today provides an introduction to occultism so easily. For astrologers to claim that their craft has no associations to the occult is either the result of ignorance or deliberate deception.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS

Astrologers claim that their practice really works, which convinces them of the truth of astrology. Indeed, this is the case for all forms of divination. They seem to work enough of the time to be credible, and thus both practitioners and clients may become convinced of their validity. But as we saw earlier, scientific testing absolutely undermines any legitimacy to the astrological craft. So how can astrology work, or seem to work?

Many times in life we discover that things which seem to be true really aren't. This is why astrology has to be carefully evaluated, to see if it functions according to its stated principles. Since it does not, we must look to other reasons for its success, or seeming success. The reasons are many, but they can be categorized under two broad headings: psychological factors and spiritistic power. In the former, astrology only appears to work; it really does not work. In the latter, astrology provides supernatural information to a client. Yet even astrology's “success” at this point has nothing to do with the truth of astrology, only with the power of spiritism that the astrologer has tapped into. We will begin our evaluation of these topics with a look at some of the psychological reasons why astrology seems to work.

Client Needs

Astrology seems to work because clients want it to work. True believers in astrology do not wish their faith in astrology to be shaken because they may have emotional, financial, or other investments in astrology already in place. As a result, they look for ways to confirm astrology. Even common coincidences may become astrological “confirmations” for such persons. Chance events may become imbued with cosmic “meanings.” Thus clients often “read in” relevance and meaning to a chart when it is not there. People may accept general or vague statements as applying uniquely to them when they would apply equally to other people. In essence, those who wish to believe in astrology tend to consciously and unconsciously assist the astrologer to counsel them effectively. Astrologer Richard Nolle concedes that astrologers can take advantage of most clients’ faith in astrology: “Most people who come to an astrologer want the astrologer to succeed in reading their charts. They are therefore generally sympathetic and cooperative.”⁹

People who believe astrology may also fall into the trap of self-fulfilling prophecy. This takes place when seeds of hope or despair are planted in the person’s mind by the astrologer. As a result, the client eventually “arranges” or permits the events to be fulfilled. If the astrologer’s words are positive, as they usually are, this provides all the more incentive to fulfill the prophecy. Given a poor self-image, pessimism, or a fatalistic outlook on life, even the negative prophecies of the astrologer can become positive when they are self-fulfilling. But whether the astrologer’s words are positive or negative, in neither case is it the astrologer who has been successful. It is the client, who has self-fulfilled the astrological predictions.

But what do astrologers and their clients do when the astrological information does not come true, or worse, when it is clearly contradicted? Then they tend to remember the things that are supportive of astrology and ignore or rationalize away the rest. For the most part, those who desire to believe in astrology will not listen to criticism because of the emotional tie or investment which has developed between the person and the practice.

Theoretical Self-Justification

Astrology seems to work because it satisfies the human need for friendship, personal security, or dependence on others. Given various psychological needs or insecurities, astrology can prey upon anyone’s need for certainty about the future or control over life. Astrology warns about the future and advises about problems that may be encountered. People also go to astrologers so that someone else (the astrologer) or something else (the stars) will make the important or painful decisions for them. Other people are lonely or insecure and desire the friendship of someone who seems to be privy to “cosmic” or “divine” wisdom. They feel important by being associated with someone of importance. Others are simply attracted to the astrologer more than to astrology itself.

Persuasive Power

People want astrology to work because it fits their lifestyle. Astrology per se is without moral values; the impersonal heavens offer no advice on ethics or how to live one’s life morally. Thus, any person seeking to justify selfish or sinful behavior can find a logical reason for doing so in astrology. Astrologers themselves seem willing to tolerate, rationalize, or even encourage any behavior, sexuality, or morality the client deems personally important. Their desire is to please the client’s wishes, and it is amazing how often the “stars” agree. Whether people convince themselves that the stars have

either “compelled” or “inclined” their wrong actions, they feel they can dismiss their guilt, or were not fully responsible for their behavior.

Astrologer Skill

Astrology seems to work because it is increasingly a New Age psychology. Astrologers who become good counselors, but who attribute their success to astrology, are wrongly accrediting astrology, not good counseling procedure, with their success. Many astrologers encourage other astrologers to take courses in counseling. One astrologer has confided: “Any astrology student planning to use astrology directly with people is advised to enroll in one or more counseling courses, to read books on the counseling process itself, and to gain experiential supervised practice with counseling skills.”¹⁰

Some astrologers argue that it makes sense first to understand a person’s background—heredity, upbringing, marital status, interests, occupation, and so on—rather than to begin with a chart. One reason for this, as we saw, is because the chart itself is so complex and subjective it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to interpret it accurately.¹¹ So, first gathering information on a client is certainly helpful. Of course, this is opening the doors more to psychological counseling than to astrological revelations. And to attribute one’s success in psychology to astrological theory is deceptive.

There are many other reasons people grant validity to astrology. When this occult practice is called a science, it is granted credibility by association with science. Astrology is also universally applicable; that is, it can offer advice for virtually any situation, and sooner or later the astrologer will hit on something in the chart that a person feels is personally relevant. And astrologers always have seemingly reasonable explanations for failures. Finally, astrology may seem to work because of the astrologer’s attentiveness or seductiveness. In other words, good astrologers are able to “read” a client through physical or verbal clues and can feed back this information to the client as “revelations” from the stars. Other astrologers are adept at psychological manipulation, so that an otherwise meaningless session can seem amazingly relevant.

But what about those times astrology really does work, when it predicts the future or reveals secret knowledge about the client and known only to him? If a form of intelligence beyond the astrologer really is at work here, what is it?¹² It’s certainly not the stars.

Notes

1. Statements made by instructors in courses at the American Federation of Astrologers Convention, Las Vegas, NV July 4-8, 1988: cf. John Weldon, “Astrology: An Inside Look, Part 2, *News & Views*, October 1988.
2. *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1975; Charles E. O. Carter, *The Principles of Astrology*. Wheaton, IL: Quest/Theosophical Publishing House, 1977, p. 14; Bernard Gittelson, *Intangible Evidence*, New York: Simon & Schuster, 1987, p. 350.
3. Sepherial [sic], *A Manual of Occultism*, New York: Samuel Weiser, 1978, p. 3; Doreen Valiente, *An ABC of Witchcraft Past and Present*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2973, pp. 21, 23; Dane Rudhyar, *The Practice of Astrology as a Technique in Human Understanding*, New York: Penguin Books, 1975, p. 21; Henry Weingarten, *The Study of Astrology: Book 1*, New York: ASI Publishers, 1977, p. 77.
4. John Warwick Montgomery, *Principalities and Powers*, Minneapolis, MN: Bethany, 1973, p. 96.
5. Daniel Logan, *The Reluctant Prophet*, 1980, pp. 63-66, 169-70.

6. Marcus Allen, *Astrology for the New Age: An Intuitive Approach*, Sebastopol, CA: CRCS Publications, 1979, pp. 2-6.
7. Sepherial, *A Manual of Occultism*, p. 3.
8. Weingarten, *A Study of Astrology: Book 1*, p. 77.
9. Wim van Dam, *Astrology and Homosexuality*, York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1985, p. 83.
10. Tracy Marks, *The Art of Chart Interpretation*, Sebastopol, CA: CRCS Publications, 1986, p. 143.
11. Ibid., p. 87; Robert E. Leichtman, Carl Japiske, *The Life of the Spirit, Vol. 2*, Columbus, OH: Ariel, 1987, pp. 20-21.
12. John Ankerberg, John Weldon, *Astrology: Do the Heavens Rule Our Destiny?*, Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 1989, pp. 185-200.