

## Worldviews Collide - Astrology vs. Science

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## Themes

- Modern science may have been invented by occultists.
- Astrology was never “vanquished” by scientists.
- The modern “skeptical” movement should be seen as a mainly non-scientist consortium of scientism types who oppose astrology on religious grounds.
- There are genuine evidential issues involved in the acceptance of differing viewpoints.

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## 1. History

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## The History: When Astrology was Science

- The term “science” as we use it in the modern context was not coined until the 19<sup>th</sup> c.
- Prior to the adoption of this terminology, what we now know as science was mainly called natural philosophy.
- Astrology had been one field of natural philosophy fairly consistently from at least the 7<sup>th</sup> c. BCE through to the 17<sup>th</sup> c.

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## What happened in the 17<sup>th</sup> c.?

- Catholic Church politics made astrology much less acceptable, even behind closed doors
- The English Civil War convinced monarchs that astrological predictions could be politically incendiary
- The British Royal Society split off occult interests from their mission
- What did *not* happen was any refutation of astrology

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## The Enlightenment & the Development of Scientific Method

- The “scientific revolution” actually had two major components:
  - A series of discoveries and new theories that challenged the world view of Medieval scholars
  - The development of proposals for inquiry, primarily Bacon and Descartes
- Many people afterwards had no idea of the extent to which these methods of inquiry were never designed for all knowledge

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## The Problem of Occult Virtue

- Medieval natural philosophy included a concept which was called occult, or hidden virtue.
- What this actually meant was that there were phenomena that were not understood mechanistically, but where no visible mechanism was evident.
- Magnetism would be an example.

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## The Problem of Occult Virtue

- As the scientific method developed, the idea of “action at a distance” became more problematic.
- The original use of “occult” merely meant hidden; it became more of the modern usage in the Early Modern Period.

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## Does a scientific theory need to have a mechanism?

- Theoretically – no.
- But increasingly, experimental efforts were more common to verify theories about mechanisms
- This made the study of fields which were not likely to have a discernible mechanism became more problematic.

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## The Development of Proto-Science in the Early Modern Period

- What we call the scientific revolution could equally be understood as a rebellion against scholasticism, the established method of argument and teaching.
- As such, it was also a rebellion against Aristotelian and Platonic philosophy

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## Who “invented” Modern Science

- Historians of science until about twenty five years ago viewed the development of science as the adoption of the scientific method followed by the overthrow of earlier “superstitious” forms of knowledge and inquiry
- This is the mythos that is almost universally presented in science textbooks

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## Who “invented” Modern Science

- Thanks to the work of Frances Yates and many others, there has been a major change in the conceptualization of the origin of modern science.
- What changed was the realization that not only were many of the early “fathers” of modern science alchemists, but they were approaching their science by asking alchemical questions.

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## Who “invented” Modern Science

- Extensive research has suggested that both Newton and Boyle were not only interested in alchemy, but that an alchemical “headset” shaped the kinds of questions that they pursued scientifically.
- Thus, a newer point of view has developed within the history of science that hypothesizes that the scientific “revolution” was accomplished by natural philosophers interested in occult matters

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## Who knows Who Invented?

- This newer viewpoint has not yet percolated into scientific circles, but remains only within the history of science circles.

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## 2. Modern Skepticism

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## Atheism as Intellectual Movement

- In a movement in the 19th century that countered the religious quests of Spiritualism, Theosophy, and many other quasi-religious movements, there was a different and antagonistic intellectual strain that favored atheism.
- In many philosophical, literary and scientific circles, it became fashionable to be an atheist.

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## The Triumph of Atheism

- In an en-souled universe, the issue of astrology is whether the Higher Power(s) work in a fashion compatible with astrological principles.
- In an un-en-souled universe, or one that has no intrinsic non-materialistic organizing principle, astrology cannot work, because there is no mechanistic explanation for it.
- Thus, the belief debate changed to whether astrology could exist at all.

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## Religious Debate?

- Thus, the debate about astrology continues to be a religious debate, but with one side in denial about the religious dimension.
- The late 20th c. has seen the development of Skepticism, a movement to “debunk” all forms of “pseudo-science.”
- This movement portrays itself as scientific, and yet many of its founders and most active practitioners are not scientists.

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## CSICOP

- The Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal has been critiqued by two scientists, Dennis Rawlins and George Hansen, for engaging in fraudulent activities

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## sSTARBABY

- Dennis Rawlins published his own very disturbing direct experience of CSICOP's replication of Gauquelin's Mars Effect – and of their cover-up of their confirmation of his work.
- Rawlin's critique was sufficiently stinging that CSICOP suspended any such activities of replication.

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## Hansen's Critiques

- George Hansen portrayed himself as a sympathetic scientist, which allowed him access to the inner workings of CSICOP
- Gaining this vantage point, Hansen then reported on the extent to which CSICOP originated out of prior atheists movements, which had a significant overlap in ranking membership.

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## CSICOP's Organizing Manual

- CSICOP's organizing manual portrays the need to recruit two groups: scientists and women.
- This very fact shows that CSICOP was not being driven by either.
- Nonetheless, they have shown considerable success in becoming a highly visible voice, especially in the media.

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## Astrology's Reaction to Debunkers

- We have to acknowledge this: astrology's reaction the debunkers has been mostly ineffectual, even though individual astrologers have done brilliantly in particular debates.
- I believe that the reason is that the debunkers have applied their passion to driving their point of view into the general population, whereas astrologers have applied their passion to astrology. Astrologers have been mostly politically inept.

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## How Far has it Gone?

- We must not underestimate the extent of the debunkers' passion – it is at least as great as our own.
- One of the goals of the skeptics movement that has been largely achieved has been the systematic re-writing of college textbooks from a debunking viewpoint.
- Thus, modern textbooks in psychology and astronomy often explicitly mention and debunk astrology.

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## 186 Scientists Against Astrology

- In 1975, a petition signed by 186 scientists was published in the Humanist, a debunking publication.
- A number of well established scientists, such as Paul Feyerabend, refused to sign on the grounds that they had no particular expertise in the field.
- Feyerabend went on to publicly state that scientists commenting on anything outside their expertise are not reliable.

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## The Passion of the Debate

- The fervor of the debate also suggests that this is not a mere disagreement over the interpretation of data.
- Why would scientific journals publish articles debunking astrology whose authors have no competency in the field in which they are purporting to study, such as the Shawn Carlson study? (Carlson eventually was awarded a MacArthur Foundation "genius" Fellowship)

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## To Change One's Mind....

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## Society for Scientific Exploration

- The SSE is an organization devoted to the study of fringe ideas in science, whether astrology, cold fusion, reincarnation, or ball lightning.
- One of the long-time officers has been Henry Bauer, who studied the Loch Ness Monster.

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## Bauer's Thesis

- In a two part article in the SSE Journal, Bauer documented the extent to which advocates of two differing sides of a debate adopt different standards of proof – and that this difference precisely results in demanding a higher standard of proof from the opposition than from one's own "side."

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## Whither the Debate?

- First, it should be pointed out that Astrology is not debating or confronting Science, but scientism.
- Secondly, it should be pointed out that astrology is not operating as a political movement, whereas scientism mostly is
- Thirdly, while scientism gets a lot of press, an enormous number of people still "believe" in astrology.

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