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SAGES

16 October 2014

Science and Pseudoscience

Author’s note: I would like to say that this essay delves into theological beliefs and is not intended to harm, influence one’s personal beliefs, or critique one’s religion. It is instead meant to show, at times, the danger of the relationship between astrology and theology.

The Stars Control Us

Astrology is the study of the influence that distant cosmic objects, usually celestial bodies, have on humanity and mainly our decisions. The position of the sun, stars, moon and planets at the time of people's birth (not their conception) is said to shape their personality, affect their romantic relationships and predict their economic fortunes, among other divinations. However, to the general public, their "sign," which refers to one of the 12 constellations of the zodiac, is the only basic concept of astrology they know. Yet astrology is so much more. Astrologers check to see what sign each planet was in at the time of birth. The planets and signs combine with other elements, such as houses and angles, to form a complex and often very specific profile of a subject's personality, life and future prospects. These profiles are a complex way to guide our future and choices and act as a more precise measurement, per se, but do not represent contemporary astrology as a whole. No, modern astrological predictions are not limited to star maps made by experts, but are commonly produced by a variety of sources. Modern astrology can be found in more so accessible places of media and religious practices. Many times, these forms of popular astrological practices are called into question for their possibly harmful outcomes. If we feel that we're supposed to behave or feel a certain way because someone with the mystical powers of reading the stars tells us so, it could run in conflict with our "natural" or ingrained predispositions. Stripping us of our free will, astrology can control our everyday lives. Contemporary astrology relies heavily on authoritarianism, illuminating it as potentially deterministic, and grossly fatalistic as seen through astrology’s entrenchment in modern media and religious practices.

Contemporary astrology is dependent on media to gain a large following in audience. Sources of media directly, the ones we choose to acknowledge, or indirectly, the ones that don’t concern our attention with, play a large part of our everyday lives. Today, just about everyone depends on information and communication to keep their lives moving through daily activities. The media’s role is a powerful one, and one that can easily gain authority over an individual. Newspapers, for example, are thought of as credible sources. The stories that large brand names, like that of *The Daily Chronicle*, or *The New York Times*, put out are backed by other sources/fact and attempt to tell as much of the truth as is possible. Yet media can also produce a darker side of “truth.” Many of these sources have columns dedicated to your astrological predictions.

These columns are the true form of contemporary astrology. Sun-sign astrology, the simplistic concept aforementioned and the type found in newspapers, is the popular choice of the commoner. However, newspaper horoscopes are also the downfall of astrology: “The common-sense advice itself [the horoscopes] contains… many spurious ‘pseudo rational’ elements, calling for some authoritarian backing to be effective” (Adorno 1994). Popular astrology, if thought of critically, is nothing more than common sense predictions, requiring authoritarianism support to predict a possible future. Astrology, even as an application of common sense predictions, is still closely followed by many. Some people who look for aid will trust a man who “knows neither the person he addresses nor the specific nature of the wishes and complaints…, yet his position of authority forces him to talk as if knew and as if the constellations… provided him with satisfactory, sufficient and unequivocal answers” (Adorno 1994). The author’s column cannot afford to disappoint his readers by not committing himself (being sure in his predictions) and by not compromising his magical authority on which his sales rest. His statements have to be vague so they are not blatantly false. Opposing, predictions that aren’t specific will produce poor results. Many people entrusting their decisions in these false prophets is a frightening reality. These authors clearly have no interest in their reader’s future as the sun-sign predictions are so simplistic that they produce very limited results (Jashow). These limited results have repercussions. Say a women named Betty reads her horoscope, informing her of a lucky day. A vague statement has been made by the author and Betty decides to test her luck. She gambles her life savings and puts her immediate family into crippling debt. If everyone were to follow the footsteps of Betty, economic collapse and anarchy would surely ensue. Even though it may be an over-dramatization and an imaginary situation, Betty is a clear example that vague teachings can have potentially awful consequences. Moreover, ambiguity can be used to confuse the reader to such an extent, it is impossible not believe. Astrologers may speak in astrological jargon the reader cannot understand and use mystical language authoritatively to create the illusion that they are telling high truths, when indeed they may be saying little of significance. Commonly known, many people attempt the use of lesser-known language to appear smarter. The astrologers gain authority through the use of semantics and cause a larger range of harm. The ambiguity in contemporary astrology is detrimental to the well-being of society.

Ambiguity is how horoscope authors trap their readers; they prey on the retrospective determinism of their victims: the argument that because some event has occurred, its occurrence must have been inevitable beforehand is this specific fatal flaw. *Psychic* notes a common way readers start following their horoscopes is because an event has taken place that supposedly confirms an author’s mystical power. A person who may experience a poor day may look to a horoscope and find that it had correctly predicted a way to prevent their sub-par day. And like that, a believer is born. The astrologer has encouraged his client that to have good fortune, his advice is needed.

Even though ambiguity is a powerful tool for these authors, there are many separate ways they can pose a danger to society. One I shall discuss deals with projection. Projection is, in psychological terms, the placing of thoughts or ideas of one’s self onto another person. An astrologer’s own fears concerning certain planets and signs may influence their interpretation and result in their pronouncements which could become destructively self-fulfilling prophecies of the astrologer’s followers. One such case of this happening can be found in President Reagan’s term. *People Magazine* criticizes Reagan for his appointment of an astrological advisee. An entire country was being run with the aid of man who could read the stars, not something the people had voted for. Decisions, like that of the Star Wars program, which could have provoked the start of a third world war and the death of millions may have been influenced by the coincidental position of celestial bodies. Had Jupiter, the planet of wealth and glory, been the deciding factor for the advisee, you and I may be dead. It is this fact that life threatening decisions can be influenced by the stars that makes astrology a deadly weapon and grossly fatalistic.

In an opposite setting, astrology is also very prevalent throughout religion and with this prevalence comes a new set of dangers. Astrologers may pass their own values and ideas under the cloak of astrological authority. A priest, monk, etc. may claim a higher power has shown the future in the stars. The gods are casual representatives of the world. They become moderators in the drama of the physical world, and their interest in our welfare has them sending us important messages in the stars (Lehoux 2006). If our gods are loving, and they know our future, and they know the knowledge of the future would be helpful for us, then they can communicate with us. Common Christian and Islamic belief is God is loving and he will be our Shepard, so many put their faith towards God’s signs in the stars as a way to look for help. We trust an entity that we aren’t entirely sure exists with our day to day lives. Our fate is entrusted by our faith? It’s an illogical ideology and fallacy to believe in one thing that isn’t certain, and then use this uncertainty to prove another point. Not to mention, that theological astrology has started the longest waging wars in humanity. I shall focus more closely on Christianity as it is the major practice of western culture. Astrology in Christianity comes in a few examples. The story is told of three Magi from the east who have seen a special star. The Magi understood this star as a sign which announced the birth of a new "king of the Jews." This child would turn out to be Jesus and create an amazing change of events over the course of history. Wars would be fought over the belief that a star marked the arrival of a new king and history would be forever changed.

Religion and media are the driving forces of the rather ridiculous and dangerous contemporary astrology. Appealing to power, astrology needs the reinforcement to make a firm effect. It has many, flaws, be it that many messengers of the stars are vague in their preaching, or the irrationality of the concept of star reading itself. Modern astrology significantly changed over the years and many can still believe in it as truth. These people, or ultimately astrology itself is a great danger to others’ lives. The stars within constellations and planetary positions are sometimes thousands of light years apart and their connection to our everyday lives is arbitrary. Yet many still swear it to be truth. They will live their lives following the warnings of a man, sitting behind a desk, and relates in no way to his reader, specifically. These people will eventually slip up, and their mistake will be on you.

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