This pamphlet briefly but thoroughly debunks astrology’s supposed scientific basis and takes a close look at why anyone would believe in such patent nonsense.
ASTROLOGY

FRAUD OR SUPERSTITION?

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think, and how to feel. Astrology, like other religious beliefs, fills the bill. As a system of preordination ("Oh! You're a Scorpio! You must..."), it gives believers a nice, neat means of interpreting reality and of tailoring their behavior and expectations to fit the prescriptions of their belief system. Astrologers themselves admit this, with some of them maintaining that astrology "controls," "influences," or "can serve as a road guide." (The difference between these descriptions is one of degree, not substance.)

Still, why do so many choose astrology as a belief system rather than Mormonism, Catholicism, Islam, etc.? A probable reason is that astrology meets the desire of many people for a preordination system, yet it does not contain the most unpleasant aspects of conventional religions. It is silly and utterly irrational, and almost certainly influences some to make unfortunate personal decisions. (Consider the effect of articles such as "Birth Control by Astrology" upon those who take them seriously.) In extreme cases, astrological belief may incline individuals toward passivity—after all, if everything is written in the stars, why not just go with the flow? But unlike such religions as Judaism, Christianity, Mormonism, and Islam, astrology is not based upon guilt, misogyny, and sexual repression. It is simply based upon credulousness, ignorance, irrationality, and the eagerness of human sheep to be led.

Astrology is a handy crutch for those who are repelled by the more overtly reactionary, inhumane aspects of conventional religions, but are not yet ready to free themselves from supernatural preordination systems. In itself, this turn from organized religion is mildly encouraging. But it would be far more encouraging to see believers in astrology rise from the Procrustean bed of their irrational beliefs and begin to think for themselves.

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For tens of thousands of years human beings have looked up at the night sky and asked themselves, "What does it all mean?" Many answers have been suggested. One of the oldest is provided by astrology: the belief that the stars and planets are controlling influences on our lives.

Astrology, as even most astrologers will admit, did not arise until the advent of civilization and the concomitant religious/magical view of the world. (Religion and magic were a natural outgrowth of wonder and ignorance; they likely survived, at least in part, because they were useful to the priests and royalty as a means of frightening their subjects into line.) Thus, astrology was the result of combining the ancient practice of observing the night sky with a magical view of the world, specifically what Lawrence Jerome, in the September/October 1975 *Humanist*, calls the "principle of correspondences." He explains this principle as follows:

The omen or magic object has certain physical properties that are related to the external world by analogy. For instance, the reddish color of the planet Mars means to the astrologer that it is magically related with blood, war and metal iron....

After its invention by the Babylonians (whose priests used astrology and the equally sensible practice of reading the entrails of animals to "foretell" the futures of kings and nations), astrology was further developed by the ancient Greeks, who named the planets after their deities and ascribed the qualities of those deities to the planets. (Those qualities are still the ones ascribed to the planets in "modern" astrolo-
Finally, in the second century C.E., Ptolemy wrote his *Tetrabiblos*, the astrological bible, in the city of Alexandria and brought astrology into its "modern" form.

During the Middle Ages, astrology was banned by the church, and it wasn't resurrected until the Renaissance, along with the writings of the Greeks. The rise of science sent astrology into eclipse once again, and it didn't resurface as a widely held belief until the turbulent years of the early twentieth century.

Since its resurrection, belief in astrology has touched all segments of the population, not only in the U.S., but in Europe as well. Most of the top Nazis believed in astrology. Himmler's astrologer, Wilhelm Wulff, even wrote a book on the subject, *Zodiac and Swastika*. Hitler himself, however, apparently did not believe in astrology and viewed it as merely a convenient means of manipulation.

In the U.S., a number of years ago *Time* magazine identified Ronald Reagan as a client of astrologer Carroll Righter, and a recent survey revealed that 15% of college undergraduates believe in astrology. Among the general population, the percentage is far higher. Jon D. Miller of Northern Illinois University reports that 39% of adult Americans, some 66 million persons, believe that astrology is "scientific." These figures seem reasonable in light of astrology's popularity.

At present, two-thirds of U.S. daily newspapers carry horoscopes. There are at least 10,000 full-time and 175,000 part-time astrologers in the country. And astrologically related books and magazines are glut on the market. A few sample titles: "The Astrology Way to Stock Market Profits," "Birth Control by Astrology," "Astrology: Judging Compatibility," and "Choosing by the Stars: Appropriate Perfumes."

(A number of years ago I wrote a "horrorscope" for a humor magazine in which I listed among my credits an article in *Motor Trend* titled, "Astrology and MPGs: Tune Your Car by the Stars." After reviewing the available writings by astrologers, my only question is WHEN *Motor Trend* will get around to publishing such an article.)

Grist Peter Glick of Lawrence University and Mark Snyder of the University of Minnesota, published in the May/June 1986 *Humanist*, concluded that skeptics are "fact-oriented," while astrological believers are "theory-driven":

[S]keptics paid close attention to the information they gathered... while believers largely ignored what targets told them when it came to pass judgment on how well the astrological horoscope had predicted the targets' personalities.

A study of credence in another occult belief, ESP, published in the March 1980 *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, tends to confirm that occult believers ignore contradictory evidence much more often than skeptics. In that study, skeptics and ESP believers read articles with which they agreed and with which they disagreed, and then answered questions about the articles. Approximately 90% of the skeptics correctly remembered the conclusions of articles regardless of whether the articles were pro- or anti-ESP, while fewer than 40% of the ESP believers correctly recalled the conclusion of the article which debunked ESP; a large majority of the believers "remembered" that the article concluded that ESP exists.

Another of Gauquelin's experiments provides a more amusing example of the self-deception of occult believers. He took out a newspaper advertisement in which he promised free personalized horoscopes to all who answered the ad. One hundred fifty persons responded. Gauquelin then sent out the same horoscope to all 150 and asked them how well it fit them. Ninety-four percent replied that they recognized themselves in it. The horoscope was that of Dr. Michel Petiot, a mass murderer.

Why do occult believers have such a reluctance to face facts? Glick and Snyder concluded that, "in order to maintain the sense of being able to predict events, the believer makes the facts 'fit' the theory whether or not these events are consistent with the theory's predictions." The reason for this blindness is obvious.

It's an unfortunate fact that a great many people do not want to go to the work of making their own decisions. They want someone or something to tell them how to act, how to
The fact that millions of astrological believers claim that they "feel" astrological influences in their own lives and "see" astrological influences at work in the lives of others is a prime example of wishful thinking, and nothing more. Believers in astrology, like other religionists, want so badly to believe in their preordination system that they "feel" and "see" effects where none exist. Similarly, a great many born-again Christians claim to "feel" the presence of Jesus or the "holy spirit" and to "see" the hand of Satan at work in astrology and other occult beliefs. (Most born-again Christians really do believe that Satan exists.) And if believers in astrology want us to accept their feelings as evidence supporting their beliefs, they must, to be consistent, grant the same evidentiary value to the feelings of born-again Christians, which in some ways directly contradict the feelings of astrological believers—all of which demonstrates the unreliability of personal feelings as "evidence" in matters of this sort.

Why would anyone believe in anything as patently absurd as astrology? Probably for reasons similar to those of persons who believe in such patent absurdities as transubstantiation or their own "personal savior." One particularly disturbing aspect of this belief in the absurd is that many astrological believers not only do not use logical (scientific) reasoning, but they do not want to use it. Their "reasoning" is that of a stubborn child: "If I want it to be true, it must be true!" So, they adopt (probably unconsciously) a completely dishonest intellectual attitude, clinging obstinately to anything which seems to confirm their belief, while ignoring the plethora of inconvenient facts which call it into doubt. The pathetic clamoring about Gauquelin's since-disproven "Mars effect"—while other similar studies indicated that no such effect existed, and the above-listed objections to astrology went unanswered—is a case in point.

The standard reply of astrologers to this is the childish, "You're one too," which evades the question of their own dishonesty by implying that skeptics also ignore inconvenient facts. Unfortunately for the astrologers, that does not appear to be the case. A study of information evaluation by psycholo-
the radiation. For example, the amount of light reaching a ship four miles from a lighthouse will be only one-quarter (per unit of surface area) of that reaching a ship two miles from the lighthouse, and one-sixteenth of that reaching a ship one mile from the lighthouse. But laws of physics do not matter to astrologers, and they don’t care whether Mars is 40 million or 100 million miles away. They only concern themselves with the apparent position—to a viewer on Earth—of Mars in relation to the backdrop of the zodiac constellations and the other planets. So, if the astrological “radiation” (“vibration”—choose your own nebulous term) of the planets does influence human beings as astrologers claim, it would have to be a most peculiar type of radiation, one which disobeys a fundamental, well-established law of physics.

Fifth, many astrologers ignore precession. The Earth’s rotational axis is not stable, and the Earth wobbles like a top—but much more slowly. So slowly, in fact, that it takes approximately 26,000 years for the Earth’s axis to complete one rotation around the 47-degree-diameter circle it describes. This slow wobbling is called precession. It means, among other things, that the stars we now see in summer will be seen in winter (and vice versa) 13,000 years from now. It also means that the sun has receded almost a full sign along the zodiac since the Tetrabiblos was written nearly two millennia ago. So, the calculations of astrologers who rely on that hoary source are now off almost a full sign.

Sixth, the most popular type of astrology is natal astrology, in which astrological forces supposedly leap into action at the moment of an individual’s birth, imprinting her or him with certain characteristics. But the choice of the time of birth as the moment of supposed astrological imprinting makes no sense at all. Astrologers choose the time of birth purely because it’s convenient. They might object that a mother’s body shields her baby from astrological “radiation” until birth, but that argument ignores the fact that almost all babies are born indoors, and it would be illogical to think that this “radiation” could penetrate wood, concrete and steel, but not a few centimeters of human flesh.

Some astrologers, especially the “humanistic” variety, attempt to discount criticisms such as these by claiming that the planets and stars do not produce astrological effects, but, rather, that the positions of astronomical bodies only serve as “indications” of astrological forces. This is a transparent attempt to evade questioning of astrology’s supposed causal mechanism by retreating into a fog of ever-vaguer claims. By taking such a position, astrologers are saying in effect that for unknown reasons the positions of some of the stars and planets are indications of the undetectable effects of unknown types of undetectable forces emanating from unknown, undetectable sources. Such a proposition is even more ludicrous than the traditional astrological view that the stars and planets—never mind how—influence our daily lives.

Finally, there is absolutely no empirical evidence, absolutely none, that astrology has any value whatsoever as a means of prediction. What scientific testing has been done indicates that there are no astrological “effects.” For instance, former Michigan State University psychologist Bernie Silberman asked astrologers to list compatible and incompatible signs. Silberman then inspected the records of 478 couples who divorced and 2978 who married in 1967 and 1968 in Michigan. He found no correspondence beyond that of random chance between the astrological signs predicted to be compatible or incompatible by astrologers and the signs of those getting married or divorced.

French statistician Michel Gauquelin has conducted far more detailed tests which also have discovered no astrological effects. (Gauquelin’s early, highly publicized report of a “Mars effect” on professional athletes was the result of an error in his calculations, and similar studies conducted by others showed no such effect.) In one test he examined the signs (moon, zodiacal, planetary, ascendant, and mid-heaven) for 15,560 professionals from five European nations in 10 different occupations. He found no evidence of any astrological effects. His calculations showed that the correlation between astrological signs and occupations to be that of random chance.