

Astrology – WTF?

(Part Two)

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In last week's first installment of this series, I discussed how the question of astrology's validity arose in my life, and I wrote about some of the ways it has remained an unresolved mystery and followed me throughout my 50-year career. Now, in Part Two, I want to delve deeper into what is obvious to me and so many others who study astrology, namely, that it does indeed work. Also, I'll discuss why I believe that the debunkers are barking up the wrong tree with their accusations of deceit and fraud.

The ability of astrology to define the timing of many significant changes within a person's life and reveal provocative information about the content and meaning of those changes is completely downright amazing to me. Amazing, mysterious, and disturbing. *[The disturbing implications are what this whole series of posts is leading up to. But that's down the road some. For now, I'm still setting up the game board, so those disturbing implications will have to wait.]*

Consider, for instance, the many important personal transits of outer planets to natal points that occur over an individual's lifetime. These are some of the most provocative events in all of astrology. How can it be that significant Uranian transits accurately indicate the timing and nature of unexpected developments in our personal lives that have the potential to challenge (and ideally awaken us out of) our existing habitual states, pushing us to change the status quo? Yes, such experiences are often upsetting, and on rare occasions they may be disastrous, but what other system builds in such shocks for the presumed symbolic purpose of refreshing and renewing our consciousness?

Similar questions apply to major Plutonian transits, with their symbolic indications of significant endings to chapters or relationships in a person's life. How can such information about a single individual possibly be coded into the perceptual framework of the solar system viewed from a certain perspective? Is some sort of holographic sleight of hand going on? Nothing we know in science, rationality, or practicality suggests that such a thing could be possible, but here it is, available to anyone who masters the application of astrology's tools with sufficient intelligence, sensitivity, technical skill, creativity, and grace.

I accept that the revelations I listed above and a thousand others are possible because time and time again I've seen charts reveal them and then had the information confirmed from people's actual lives, either at the time or after the

fact. The “Holy Crap!” bottom line here is that astrology does indeed work — not perfectly, of course, and not simply or straightforwardly, either. Those are qualities that many people want from astrology — perfection, simplicity, and straightforwardness — but in reality, the system doesn’t work that way. It’s imperfect, complex, and twisty. Having admitted that, however, and despite the many caveats, it’s nonetheless plain as day to me (and others) that astrology “works” remarkably well.

Yeah, I know — the doubters, deniers, and debunkers would come back with “that guy is full of shit.” And you know what? They’re right, sort of. I am definitely full of crap about a great many things — my life has embarrassingly mirrored back to me so many of my self-delusions. It does this over and over, relentlessly, and refuses to stop and let me off the hook. Without question, I have feet of clay, just like every other human being. But however much I’m full of shit about some things, I’m clear as a bell and dead on correct about others. One of those other things I’m right about happens to be astrology. Something real and true is definitely going on with astrology. I almost feel apologetic about that, because it debunks many of modern society’s most sacred cows and shared illusions. Jesus, how much more evidence do we need that the emperor has no clothes???

Astrology charts are not generically universal. A particular chart won’t necessarily address all the questions that people want to ask. Clients sometimes say to me, “*You did a session with a friend of mine, and you told her all about [fill in the blank — relationship, career, education, health, whatever]. I’d like you to do the same for me.*” Well, that person’s chart may have nothing in it about what the friend’s chart revealed in depth and detail. Each chart shows the astrologer which kinds of life experiences are important for that individual. Basically, we have to allow the chart to speak to us. We can’t interrogate it.

The debunkers love to assert that astrologers don’t read the chart at all, that we cheat by concentrating instead on watching our clients for subtle reactions and response cues, then altering whatever we say to fit the cues. Well, yes and no. To some extent, *all* human social interaction involves sensitivity to cues — tone of voice, pupil dilation, body language, galvanic skin response, emotional resonance, etc. So yes, astrologers do pay attention to clients’ reactions. But that doesn’t mean that we make up what tell clients out of whole cloth, with no regard to the chart. What we see in the chart starts out as purely symbolic information. The techniques of interpretation we learn within the technical system of astrology help us to begin refining that information. However, to truly custom-tailor what the chart tells us requires information from beyond the chart, usually from the client. That information may be overt, in terms of verbal sharing, or it may be more covert, as in the subtler non-verbal languages of physical or emotional resonance and attitude.

For instance, if I don’t have a name on a chart, I don’t know what I’m looking at. Astrological charts are simply maps of our perceptual heavens, a snapshot from a certain moment in time and space. And yes, any chart can be “interpreted” on

a purely symbolic basis. But if I want the interpretation to apply to whatever the subject of the chart is, I have to get that information from outside. Is the subject a person, a country, an event, what? If it's a person, is it a man or a woman, and what culture are we referencing? Where people are born is not always where they grow up. Is it different to be born in mid-20th century America than it is to be born in early-21st century China? You bet. Do charts account for that kind of cultural difference? Nope. We have to get the information from beyond the chart. Astrology is not and never was a stand-alone, self-contained system.

Biology and culture are not the only factors that charts don't indicate. Charts do not contain assessments of the consciousness of the native. They talk about the types of experiences that may lead to consciousness for a given individual, but they can't tell us whether that individual has walked those roads, paid attention, learned, and matured. And consciousness, like biology, culture, education, and many other variables, matters a great deal. Charts essentially reveal our hard-wiring, the "machinery" of our psyches. They tell us about the vehicle we're driving — engine, transmission, brakes, steering, appointments, style, etc. But they don't have any information about who's driving.

When I do a session with a client, I bring the tools of astrology. The client brings a real life. Together, we co-create the conversation to reveal and refine the information about the person's life, so that it's more insightful than either of us might be able to reach alone. In other words, charts need real life to give up their secrets, and real life needs systems like astrology to flesh out the meanings. Sometimes those expanded meanings are deeper than we might go on our own, but other times they're bluntly obvious in ways we've missed.

The same debunkers who accused astrologers of being con artists are also fond of asserting that our clients are little more than easy marks who are untrained in logic or clear thinking and particularly vulnerable to suggestion. In other words, rubes or fools. My experience as a professional astrologer is that this has been true at times, to one extent or another. Not all the time by any means, but sometimes. (However, I'd add that charts are really quite good at identifying those vulnerable people who are easily convinced and/or inclined toward magical thinking. On the other hand, knowing that hasn't always helped me to get through to those clients. Everyone twists my words at least a little to fit into whatever paradigm they embrace, but the dreamers and magical thinkers do that with extremely broad brushes.)

What I'm admitting here is that ALL the "con man" arguments of the astrology haters may at times play a role in deluding clients, astrologers, or both, but the mere fact that we are all indeed vulnerable to various kinds of delusion doesn't prove that astrology is bogus. Heck, scientists are also sometimes dead wrong in their presumptions or interpretation of data, but that doesn't lead people to conclude that science is invalid, only that humans are fallible. The history of science is filled with mistaken theories and misinterpretations, some of which have lasted a long time before being debunked.

Another gripe I have with the astrology debunkers is that the challenges they want to apply to test the system are usually not fair at all. They seem to feel that astrology should be able to make predictions about character, behavior, or events that are obviously true or false because those tested traits are physical, tangible, and material. For instance, as an astrologer, I would never claim that personal natal charts can predict the color of the native's eyes — black, brown, blue, green, whatever. And yet, some debunkers might insist that if astrology fails that "test," then it must be invalid.

A very important and fundamental truth about astrology is that it rarely if ever operates in the realm of tangible facts. Instead, astrology lives and works in a space that is symbolic, poetic, and artistic. We could call astrology many things — mythic, metaphysical, a system of archetypes from the human zeitgeist, and a brilliantly eloquent language of symbols — but one thing it's definitely NOT is science.

OK, if astrology isn't science, then what's it good for? For starters, astrology is really terrific at revealing information about some of the most basic paradoxes — both psychological and social — in human experience. An example of such a paradox is the duality of "alone or together," "singular or collective," "freedom or security," or perhaps "iconoclastic or socially conforming."

On the one hand, the quality of identifying with a group to provide the feeling of "belonging" makes some people feel safer and more secure. Not only is there strength in numbers, there's also certainty of belief or correctness of behavior. Some people love this, and need it like they need air. On the other hand, there is individuality, uniqueness, and the wish, desire, or need to discover the self without reference to or regard for whatever others may believe or do. To at least some extent, life in bodies on the earth as individual animals means that we will necessarily go it alone. Both perspectives are contained within the pantheon of human experience. They are not the same, but they intertwine and dance.

Astrology has various symbolic indicators for each of the two contradictory orientations, and every chart contains both. In some charts, the proportional balance may be roughly equal. Other charts, however, may be skewed more definitely in one direction or the other, toward either stronger and more emphatic individuality or deeper commitment to conformity, social acceptance, and belonging.

Also, the proportionality of these apparently contradictory and mutually exclusive orientations may be defined in charts in quite different ways — as desires, needs, ambition, structural qualities, or even unconscious beliefs. One way that complexity might take shape is that a person could experience a strong desire to be independent, but feel an equally compelling need to socially conform. To feel torn between conflicting impulses is a common human dilemma, and astrology accounts for that effectively. Most charts aren't overwhelmingly unified about anything, but instead tend to be composed of many divergent strands

of meaning. Stated another way, charts without any conflicts, contradictions, or paradoxes are as rare as hens' teeth.

How are we to devise simple tests to prove or disprove astrology's ability to reveal all these different dimensions of individuated human experience? Well, I don't know for sure if we can or can't, but so far, no one has.

I would strongly suggest that the debunker's insistence on statistical testing as a way of falsifying astrology is wrong-headed and a fool's errand. It amounts to attempting to squeeze astrology into the wrong box, then claiming that it's invalid because it doesn't fit in the box. Basically, anyone who believes that astrology either does fit or should accommodate easily verified and tangible information is wrong. The irony is that not only do astrological deniers and debunkers seem to believe that, but many true believers in astrology also apparently hold the same belief. In my view, all of them — debunkers and true believers alike — are barking up the wrong tree.

My basic point in all this is to assert that astrology works in a manner that is much more subtle than most of its opponents and even its proponents would like. For the opponents, that means concluding with false certainty that astrology is bogus. For the proponents, that means expecting astrology to be magical in ways that reflect the wishes and desires of human egos. For me, that translates as fake magic.

So, I have very little interest in either the debunkers who routinely assert that astrology is nothing more than silly superstition or in astrology's true believers who assume that it will answer all of their most cherished questions. Half a century of immersion into the path and discipline of astrology has demonstrated to me that it's not superstition, but also that it doesn't offer the easy answers so many people want.

The true magic of astrology is much more shocking and disturbing. And that's what I hope to at least begin to discuss next week in the third episode of this open-ended series.

End Part Two