

## **The sceptical attack of Dean et al. on astrology**

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There are many sceptical attacks on astrology but in this essay my concern is with the sceptical arguments of Geoffrey Dean and others.<sup>1</sup> Dean has a good working knowledge of astrology which provides a reason to take his criticisms more seriously than other attacks from people who do not understand the subject. My interest is on whether these attacks are valid and on their relevance to the actual astrology currently practiced. Dean et al. pay little attention to the different branches of astrology and tend to treat astrology as a homogeneous subject. I will first distinguish the different arguments that the sceptics use against astrology, then divide astrology into different branches and finally consider the relevance of the sceptical arguments.

### **The Sceptical Arguments**

The sceptical arguments can broadly be divided into five categories.

1. There is no theory explaining why astrology works.<sup>2</sup> “Central notions like ‘as above, so below’ and ‘interconnectedness’ are too poorly developed by astrologers to amount to anything useful.”<sup>3</sup>

2. There is no consensus on basic issues so that astrologers cannot agree on which house system to use, which zodiac to use, or what planets to use. <sup>4</sup>
3. "Astrological symbolism is unsystematic and based on metaphors, analogies, verbal associations, and mythology, all of which are developed in different ways by astrologers with no clear way of evaluating them."<sup>5</sup> With this kind of symbolism it is always possible to correlate any one thing with any other thing.<sup>6</sup>
4. The nature of human judgment is such that it is impossible for astrologers to interpret a horoscope in the way that they claim and there are good, non astrological, reasons why a client will believe what an astrologer tells him. <sup>7</sup>
5. There is no empirical evidence to support astrological claims.<sup>8</sup>

### **Different types of Astrology**

I do not intend to divide astrology by technique, as there are simply too many to make such a division useful. I intend to divide astrology by its practice, what it is used for, and by the type of horoscope or chart that is used to derive the information required. This enables us to use the classic division of astrology into horary, natal and mundane, although further division is required. There are at least three types of horary astrology: interrogations, asking a question to obtain an answer; inception, using the commencement of an enterprise to tell you something about that enterprise; and elections, choosing the time for the commencement of an enterprise. The approach to horary astrology varies from those who follow the rules of the past closely to those who have re-interpreted those rules

in light of their own experience. However, a central feature of horary is that in certain circumstances it is not possible to judge a chart. Before an astrologer judged a chart he had to determine whether it was radical and capable of being judged. These might be astrological considerations,<sup>9</sup> but they could also require a serious intent from the person asking the question.<sup>10</sup> For inceptions this would not normally be an issue because the fact that the enterprise started at a particular time would make it a radical chart for that enterprise. However, a view held by some is that to be radical a chart has to describe the situation so if one cannot see the enterprise in the chart it is not radical.<sup>11</sup> Therefore, we will further divide inception practitioners into those who believe inception charts are always radical and those who believe that under certain circumstances they may not be radical and as a consequence cannot be judged.

Natal astrology can be divided into at least three types – psychological, predictive, and spiritual - which are dependent on the sort of information that the astrologer is trying to give to the client. There are at least four different ways to determine the time for the construction of the required chart: one can use the actual birth time, which is the most common procedure; one can rectify the chart, by using the time of events in a native's life to determine his/her time of birth; one can use symbolic or wrong charts, in which an astrologer uses an incorrect chart by accident or chooses a chart he believes is symbolic or more appropriate;<sup>12</sup> and finally one can construct a consultation chart in which one uses the time of meeting a client or the time a client's problem is discussed on the phone. A final category, for the sake of completeness, is sun sign columns.

Mundane astrology usually consists of making predictions in the world by the study of various charts including those of important

people. Some people will use charts which are based on exact times of events, such as the time of an election or the birth chart of a President, with planetary cycles, such as the exact position of Pluto and Saturn; while others will use ingresses and planetary conjunctions to determine the future, although ingresses and planetary conjunctions do not necessarily correlate with any specific event on earth.<sup>13</sup>

However, there is a second category which tries to relate planetary positions or planetary aspects with events on earth. An example would be looking at the position of Uranus to predict earthquakes or air crashes. If we want to determine whether America goes to war we have to consider the birth chart of the President in power so each situation will be unique; if we want to predict an earthquake we can look at specific aspects over a long period of time because we are not considering charts of individuals.

1. There is no theory to explain how astrology works.

Dean et al. divide possible theories of astrology into theories of accuracy and theories of satisfaction. Theories of accuracy are required "if astrology is to gain the respect of scientists and the academic community."<sup>14</sup> They say that the usefulness of a theory can be assessed by the following four criteria: first, whether it explains the observations; second, whether it leads to testable outcomes; third, whether it improves on existing theories; fourth, whether it contravenes known science.<sup>15</sup> They then go on to criticise all the existing theories of astrology claiming they fail to meet these criteria.<sup>16</sup>

What Dean et al. are proposing is that astrology should be split into astrology which is accurate and astrology which is inaccurate but gives satisfaction.<sup>17</sup> Astrology which is accurate is defined as astrology

which can be tested empirically and for which positive test results have been found, while all other astrology is put in the satisfaction category. In effect, the argument that there is no theory of accurate astrology becomes the same as the argument that there is no empirical evidence to support astrological claims. The relevance of empirical evidence to existing astrological practice and the division of astrology into accuracy and satisfaction will be considered later. The point that we can make now is that for Dean et al. one (but not the only) fundamental criterion is that astrological theories must be testable which would make them scientific theories. This will not be relevant for all types of astrology, but it does not follow that other non-scientific theories are unimportant.<sup>18</sup> Spiritual astrology is concerned with spiritual guidance, so a scientific theory will be of no use, but a theory of spiritual astrology may still be worth having because it would be possible to use the theory as the criterion to determine if another type of astrology was spiritual or not. It would not be possible to show that this astrology was accurate, in the way Dean et al. define accuracy, nor would be possible to claim that it was superior to any other kind of astrology, but it would be possible to categorise it. It could be that instead of trying to find one theory which fits all types of astrological practice, one would do better to use different theories of astrology to categorise existing practice.

2. There is no consensus on basic issues so that astrologers cannot agree on which house system to use, which zodiac to use, or what planets to use.

This criticism is correct; astrologers do disagree on what techniques to use but it does not follow that this is a problem. We might want to analyse the housing market; I might say that house prices will fall because unemployment will rise, you might say house prices will fall because interest rates will rise, but perhaps house prices fall because the Government builds millions of new houses or puts up the tax on selling houses. We could reach the same correct conclusion from different arguments and different techniques of analysis. Using different techniques to reach a conclusion will only matter if those techniques are contradictory. The example that Kelly uses is the different zodiacs that astrologers use. Using the tropical zodiac one might believe a certain area of the sky is "intense" as it falls under Scorpio, whereas using the sidereal zodiac one might believe the same area of the sky is "relaxed" as it falls under Libra.<sup>19</sup> For astrology, where a prediction is being made, or where guidance is being given, this is not contradictory because there can be more than one route to the same answer. However, for psychological astrology where one is trying to describe a personality it is more of a problem. If Mars in Aries means aggression, while Mars in Taurus means sluggish, how is it possible to be both at once? But it is possible to be aggressive in the office and sluggish at home, or active in certain areas of life and sluggish in others. If Mars is expressed in one nativity in a certain way it does not follow that it will be expressed in the same way in a different nativity. What will matter is whether the complete system, whether sidereal or tropical, can accurately describe a personality with apparently contradictory behaviour. Given that many of the planets will be in different signs and all the planets can be

expressed in various ways, in principle, there is no reason why this can not be done.

3. "Astrological symbolism is unsystematic and based on metaphors, analogies, verbal associations, and mythology, all of which are developed in different ways by astrologers with no clear way of evaluating them." With this kind of symbolism it is always possible to correlate any one thing with any other thing.

For all types of horary astrology this criticism is incorrect. Horary astrology is specific, and one cannot interpret a horary chart in any way that one wants. If someone asks, 'Will I buy this house from X?' there is a clear way to evaluate the resulting chart. For an election chart or an inception, there are again clear rules of how the charts are to be evaluated. There may be problems in making a judgment, or deciding which of two possibilities is more important, but this is not because the symbolism is unclear. Indeed, for all predictive work, whether mundane or natal, the symbolism is clear if only because it has to be in order to make predictions. Dean et al. seem to be confusing the difficulty in making a judgment with what is fairly straight forward astrological reasoning. If I say, 'Tony Blair has Mars rising and therefore Britain will go to war with Iraq', my judgment may be incorrect because it may not be possible to draw such a conclusion from the simple fact that Tony Blair has Mars rising, but there is nothing wrong with the astrological reasoning. However, if I say 'Tony Blair has Mars rising and therefore Britain will not go to war with Iraq,' even if the judgment is correct the astrological reasoning is incorrect. The example that Dean uses, "Is

Mars unfortunate because red = blood (war) or fortunate because red = blood (life)? Who can believe any correspondence when it is so easily denied by another?"<sup>20</sup> is an extremely poor example. It is incorrect in its astrological reasoning: Mars is significant for wars, probably because it is god of war, and is significant for death not life. To argue that it is significant for blood and therefore life, because there is a correspondence between the two is simply bad astrological reasoning because it contradicts the nature of Mars. What Dean seems to be thinking is that because astrology uses arguments of analogy all arguments of analogy must be acceptable astrological arguments. This is a faulty argument; no argument of analogy is acceptable if it contradicts the nature of the planet. One point that Dean et al. could make is that confusion is caused when two planets are significant for one matter. In the second century Vettius Valens tells us that Mars is significant for blood,<sup>21</sup> but by the Arab period, with the Aristotelian qualities being absorbed into planetary signification, Jupiter rules blood because it is warm and moist.<sup>22</sup> Planetary meanings have changed over the years, but this does not make them any more difficult to use: if I am hit on the head by a fist, the resulting blood may be indicated by Mars; if I have a blood transfusion to save my life, the resulting blood may be indicated by Jupiter. What this shows is that in certain circumstances blood is unfortunate and in certain circumstances it is fortunate. For this reason, it is possible for two planets to rule the same matter. That only one planet should be significant for a given matter is a modern concern: in Hellenistic astrology three planets were responsible for friends.<sup>23</sup>

Dean et al. are primarily concerned with natal psychological astrology. This is the area where it always seems possible to find a

particular characteristic to fit a particular piece of astrological symbolism, or vice-versa. The problem is that it is unclear how to define a personality. I might be impatient in certain circumstances but not in others; some might find me reserved, others might find me friendly. We only have to read different biographies of the same person to realise that it is possible to have a different slant on the same person.<sup>24</sup> If there are so many different parts of my personality that no one, including myself, is capable of defining them accurately, then it should not be a surprise that psychological astrology when it tries to define a personality lacks precision. However, this is a problem, and, until there is a better way to capture the meaning of a personality, we might be better off not to attempt a full character description. If we do we will always run the danger of saying little that could not have been said by someone who knew the person well. But this should not be a problem for psychological astrology which is trying to find some deeper psychological truth. If I want to determine how your relationship was with your parents, then it does not matter how I reach the end result; I could use one technique, you might use another technique.

What is happening here is that astrology is being as specific as is required by the astrologer. If one requires specific results, one will use techniques which provide those specific results; if what one wants to determine is by its very nature vague, the symbolism will become vague. We can see this with Sun sign astrology; it has to appeal to approximately one twelfth of the population, and consequently the techniques used produce general information only and are not related to a specific individual, but it does not follow from this that any technique will do. However, here we must cede the last point to the sceptics. I can say that a particular astrological

technique does not conform to a particular type of astrology, which would be an appeal to authority and practice, but I have not shown that I can appeal to empirical evidence, or some other higher authority, to claim that one technique is better than another technique, or that one type of astrology is correct and another type of astrology is incorrect. If an astrologer says 'this works for me', there is very little that I can say. I do not have a method of evaluating different astrological techniques which are acceptable to the different astrologers practising those techniques. This is an issue for astrology which needs to be discussed in detail, but there is insufficient space to consider it in this essay.<sup>25</sup>

4. The nature of human judgment is such that it is impossible for astrologers to interpret a horoscope in the way that they claim and there are good, non astrological, reasons why a client will believe what an astrologer tells him.

Dean et al. argue that in interpreting an astrological chart, it is necessary to consider a minimum of forty factors, but our short term memory is only capable of "juggling" 5-9 factors at any one time.<sup>26</sup> Given that we cannot consider everything, we become selective and choose a subset of chart factors which we know from experience work, although the subset we choose will be different to the subset another astrologer chooses. This produces obvious problems if we are meant to consider all factors in a chart and not treat them in isolation.<sup>27</sup> The moment that we start to use more data than our short term memory is capable of holding, the moment we try to synthesise a chart to produce an interpretation, we start

to invoke human biases which affects our judgment both as an astrologer reading a chart and as a client. These biases "mistakenly persuade us that astrology works."<sup>28</sup> The result of this is that there are good non-astrological reasons to explain why practitioners should believe in astrology and clients should be satisfied with a reading.

Dean et al. say that type of bias will vary "in effectiveness depending on the situation, and on the application (individual, mundane, horary etc)."<sup>29</sup> However, if we take a horary question there may well be less than nine factors to consider. The question, 'Will I buy that house from John?' may involve looking at no more than the planets significant for the Ascendant, seventh house and fourth house and the Moon. That subset of four planets will probably tell you everything you need to know. If one looks deeper into the chart, perhaps by considering the condition of the fourth, any planets in it, and its ruler (representing the house to be bought) one is creating another subset so there should be no difficulty in evaluating the outcome. All horary questions follow this method. Inceptions and elections are more difficult; there is a long list of preferred positions for the planets at the start of an enterprise which cannot all be fulfilled and the art of choosing an appropriate election or judging an inception is in choosing which are the most important. However, according to Dean et al. counting is something we can do, and it is perfectly possible to list both the favourable positions and the unfavourable positions of the planets. With this list we then make a judgment; we do not "juggle" the factors to reach an outcome, we simply decide which are more important. Obviously, given that there will be factors for and against we may make an incorrect judgment, or we may focus on one factor at the expense

of another factor, but there is no bias involved here which is not involved in any human decision making process.<sup>30</sup>

Dean et al.'s main issue, as with much of their criticism, is with natal astrology. In part they are reacting to the astrologer who complains that individual chart factors, like one's Sun sign, cannot be looked at independently and argue that it is necessary to consider every factor in a chart and synthesise them into a cohesive whole. Their argument is that we cannot look at a chart as a whole because our brains do not have that capability. This may be a problem for the psychological astrologer who considers a chart ten minutes before a reading and then talks through the chart in the next hour, but it is not necessarily a problem in reading a natal chart. In both Greek astrology and in medieval astrology one does not synthesise all the chart factors together, one builds up a series of subsets and then puts those subsets together. These subsets are usually based on areas of a native's life, for example, one might look at the parents, then the siblings, and then occupation. For each subset one looks at a variety of chart factors and make a judgment accordingly, but one does not have to consider the whole chart. If there are contradictions between the different areas of life then one might consider progressions or directions to determine at what time one particular area of life will predominate. The difference here is one is looking at a natal chart in a more predictive manner; one is concerned with what the native will do, what will happen in a given area of life. With psychological astrology one is looking at a personality and one is drawing in all these factors to make a comprehensive description. One wonders if this is possible whatever method is used.

Another issue is the time an astrologer spends on a chart. For financial reasons most chart consultations last about one hour to one and a half hours. It would seem an impossible task to give a full description of someone's personality in such a short time. In the past, when astrologers had patrons much more time was spent on a natal reading. Cardano spent one hundred hours on the chart of Edward VI<sup>31</sup> and even then missed out certain important progressions; Robert Schmidt has estimated it would take two weeks' work to prepare one natal chart in the Hellenistic manner. This criticism then becomes less a problem for astrology but more a problem of the amount of time an astrologer can afford to spend on a birth chart. If one had sufficient time to spend on each chart one could, perhaps, build up a picture of a personality based on a series of subsets each of which tell us something about the native. However, whether it is even possible to build up a recognisable picture of any personality remains a problem.

The most complicated form of prognostication is mundane astrology. If I want to predict whether America will go to war with Iraq in 2003 I have to consider the charts of President Bush, the USA, the United Nations, Saddam Hussein, Iraq, Tony Blair, the European Community, recent ingresses, current transits, etc. If I want to consider whether America will go to war in 2010 theoretically I would have to consider every chart of every country, as America could go to war with any of them, and every potential candidate for Presidency. If I was able to consider all these charts then I would first have to make a judgment on whether America was likely to go to war in 2010 and then I would have to compare the American charts with the charts of other countries to determine with whom America might go to war. I would inevitably bring my

own personal biases into the judgment. In 1960, I would have looked at Eastern Europe as potential aggressors, today it would be Muslim countries, and by 2010 it might be China again. My astrological decision would be influenced by my current political views. I would in effect be doing what Dean et al. say I would have to do: I would be making a subset. It is difficult to understand what could be wrong with this process. The human bias I introduce is inherent in what is essential in order to reach a judgment. If the judgment is complicated I am more likely to make a mistake; if I am good at making this sort of judgment I am more likely to be correct. It is as if Dean et al. believe that there should be a pure objective astrology which will give an answer to this sort of question and that I should be able to pluck out the answer without using human bias. However, this is not what mundane astrologers actually do in their practice.

The other side of the Dean et al. argument is that there are good non astrological reasons why a client will believe what an astrologer tells him. Therefore, even if an astrologer is inaccurate, reads the wrong chart, gives the wrong information, the client will still believe it applies to their own life and will be satisfied with the reading. This is a criticism that can only apply to natal psychological or spiritual astrology. For any predictive astrology the native cannot know whether it is accurate until later in his life when it is either proved to be accurate or inaccurate. But in reality the criticism is irrelevant. A car mechanic can tell me whatever he wants about my car and I will believe him because I know nothing about cars. The only conclusion one can derive from Dean et al's argument is that just because a client believes in astrology, or because a client says

that this chart describes him accurately, it does not follow that astrology works or that the chart does describe him accurately.

5. There is no empirical evidence to support astrological claims.

Of all the criticisms of astrology that Dean et al. make, that there is no empirical evidence to support, it is for them the most important. According to Kelly there are probably “well over two hundred person-years of research” into the basic claims of astrology, and the result “is almost uniformly negative.” Kelly admits that “much of this work is neither widely known nor easily accessible.”<sup>32</sup> This creates a problem in assessing the material especially as some of the research which is well known turns out upon close examination to contain errors.<sup>33</sup> However, to determine whether we have to accept this kind of general statement by Kelly is not my immediate purpose. What I am concerned with is whether the research that has been conducted, assuming it has been conducted correctly, has any relevance to the astrology we currently practice.

For Dean et al. what matters is whether astrology is accurate; if it is not accurate it should be tested for satisfaction which does not require accuracy. They are clear about what is required to show that astrology is accurate. Dean and Loftson say that “we need to perform experiments” which “preclude alternative explanations,”<sup>34</sup> while elsewhere they say that no conclusion can be reached about a client and his chart unless tests are done on (i) the client and his chart; (ii) the client and a control chart; (iii) the control person and the client’s chart; (iv) the control person and the control chart.<sup>35</sup>

Therefore we must first consider whether astrology can be tested in accordance with these requirements and once that has been determined what the implications are. We will take each type of astrology in order.

An integral part of horary astrology, as we showed in our definitions above, is that the chart may not be radical; it may not be possible to use it to make an astrological judgment. If there are horary charts which cannot be judged it is difficult to see how this kind of astrology can be tested for the kind of "accuracy" that Dean et al. require. There is no way to determine whether a chart is radical, capable of being judged, in advance, because ultimately a chart is radical if it describes the matter being sought after. The astrology itself determines whether the chart can be judged, so the argument becomes circular. It is the same with inception charts where the astrologer first considers whether or not the chart is radical. However, it is possible to empirically test inception charts where the astrologer does not first consider whether a chart is radical and simply takes the time a particular enterprise or event occurs. It would be possible to take the time when every cargo ship built in a given year is launched, and from these charts determine which ship was more likely to have engine failure or other problems at sea. The statistical likelihood of engine failure is well known from Lloyds so the astrologer's ability to predict engine failure could, in theory, be tested against a set of control charts. However, the test is rather useless because if the astrologer was incapable of predicting better than the control person all he would have to do is to say, fairly enough, is that not all charts are radical which would put this type of astrology into the untestable bracket. However, it would mean that there was no empirical justification for believing

that inception charts are always radical. Elections are also impossible to test. In elections, you choose a time for the start of an enterprise, but there is no way of knowing whether the enterprise would have done better if one had not chosen the time. Indeed, even if the enterprise would have done better with an unelected time, it could be that the astrologer made a mistake and astrologically the unelected time was better than the elected time.

Natal astrology which is spiritual in content cannot be tested empirically and is put by Dean et al. into the satisfaction category. Equally natal astrology which allows for symbolic or 'wrong' charts, by which we mean a chart with an apparently incorrect time, must be put into the satisfaction category. A wrong chart is in effect a client with a control chart so even if an astrologer believes that under certain circumstances this will produce effective astrological prognostication this claim cannot be tested in accordance with the rules laid down by Dean et al.<sup>36</sup> A consultation chart, which is effectively a horary chart, can only be tested if the astrologer takes all consultation charts as radical. It is possible that he would routinely use a consultation chart but drop it during a reading if it failed to describe the issue bothering the client. In other words it would not be radical. This type of astrology cannot be tested. It is also impossible to test rectified charts. Charts are rectified using astrology so they cannot be used for empirical test work; the argument would be circular.

We have argued that there are four different types of chart an astrologer may use in natal astrology but that only the birth chart is fit to be tested. We will now consider astrology using accurate birth charts first for predictive and then for psychological astrology.

There are two approaches one can take to predictive astrology. The first approach is to say that although one is fated, by working with one's fate, one is able to change it. Therefore, by discussing a chart with a client, the client is able to understand when certain actions might be favourable and when certain actions unfavourable and incorporate this knowledge into their behaviour. For example, the client may have been offered a new job and might want to know whether or not to accept it. If one outlines the favourable or unfavourable indications of the moment, the client is then able to make a decision in accordance with this information. The possibility that the client will make a different decision as a result of meeting the astrologer makes this type of astrology impossible to test empirically in accordance with the requirements laid down by Dean et al. If one might change one's behaviour because of what the astrologer tells you, then one cannot empirically test whether it is astrology that is working.

To pass the empirical test, blind test work is required, so one will have to remove the astrologer. This would be the second approach: that I can predict what will happen and there is nothing that one can do to change what will happen. This sort of astrology is practised. It is possible to buy a report giving predictions for one's future life without meeting the astrologer making the predictions. But this is a narrow form of astrology. It is a fated approach, allowing little room for choice. One is saying that one's life is fated, and that one will inevitably make certain choices at certain times in one's life. However, to hold a view of fate along these lines is a religious position implying that there is a God who has power over your destiny and if God has power over your destiny he can change it, which implies that even this astrology cannot be tested. If God

does not want his work to be tested he may choose to change your fate making the tests untestable.

In theory, psychological astrology which is trying to describe a personality can be tested. However, in practice these tests are very difficult. It seems that people are very bad at describing themselves and at recognising descriptions of their own personalities. According to Nature magazine, "we believe there exists presently no scientific evidence from which one can conclude that subjects can select accurate descriptions of themselves at a significant rate".<sup>37</sup> This quotation is taken from 1985 and possibly there have been developments since then, but unless Dean et al. can show that this can be done, and they do not attempt to do this in the articles in *Correlation* or the *Astrology and Science* website, then there is clearly no way that an empirical test of psychological astrology can meet the criteria that they have set. If a client is unable to select a description of himself or herself, then there is no point in trying to test whether a client will be able to tell the difference between their own chart and the control chart, nor is there any point in the control person evaluating the control chart and the client's chart. The other approach to psychological astrology, in which one is trying to obtain psychological truth rather than describe a personality, cannot be tested. Psychological truth is a subjective concept which could be true to the client and to no one else.

We divided mundane astrology into two parts. Mundane prediction involving event charts can be tested. One simply has to correlate the events, like earthquakes, with the charts for the time of those events. Mundane predictions involving event and natal charts and symbolic charts are more complicated. Astrologers will

be looking at several charts to make their predictions, and the charts they consider will vary from situation to situation and from astrologer to astrologer because there are so many factors that could have an impact on an important political matter. It will also be impossible to remove the astrologer from the equation. The astrologer will use his non-astrological knowledge to make a decision. "All astrological indications occur in an historical context."

<sup>38</sup> Therefore the sort of blind test required by Dean et al. will not be possible. It would be possible to measure the success of an astrologer making predictions against a political commentator or against chance, but this would not meet the criteria for accuracy laid down by Dean et al. The reason it cannot meet these requirements is that it is possible the mundane astrologer will be using non-astrological knowledge to reach their conclusions; they will not be using astrology alone, and therefore we cannot be sure it is astrology which is working.

There is empirical evidence which shows Sun sign astrology cannot be accurate in accordance with the Dean et al. definitions, and good astrological reasons for believing that it will fail to pass their tests. These will be considered in the next section.

### **Satisfaction vs. Accuracy**

What we have found is that the only astrology which can be empirically tested, in accordance with the rules laid down by Dean et al., is one type of mundane astrology and inception charts when it is assumed that they are always radical. If a satisfactory personality test is developed then in the future it may be possible to

test psychological astrology, but nothing else can be tested. There is an obvious problem here; the accuracy tests of Dean et al. imply a definition of astrology which excludes an astrologer whereas, in nearly every case, the astrology that is actually being practised requires an astrologer. One might conclude that if the accuracy test is testing a type of astrology fundamentally different from the astrology currently practised, then it is of little use. However, the sceptics would argue that astrology's inability to be tested in this manner shows that it is not accurate; it is subjective and not objective. From this they would argue that it should be tested "not on the actual beliefs but on how people use them and are affected by them...subjective astrology should compete with other forms of counselling on an effectiveness scale determined by scientific investigation;"<sup>39</sup> "this would mean that astrology is not a reliable source of information or knowledge about ourselves,"<sup>40</sup> and there would be no reason to believe in it. If we do not believe it, then it is doubtful it can work even as a form of satisfaction as satisfaction may require a belief that astrology is true.<sup>41</sup> What we must now consider is whether this line of reasoning is correct.

Dean et al.'s definition of accuracy is much narrower than the way we use the word in every day language. If I ask a horary astrologer a question and I'm given an answer which turns out to be correct, then in this particular case that horary astrologer was accurate. It may not be possible for me, from that individual case, to make a universal law about the accuracy of horary astrology, but that still does not take away the fact that in that particular case the astrologer was accurate. This is a legitimate use of accuracy. It is also a source of knowledge. Whether it is a reliable source of knowledge does not depend on whether or not it can pass the

accuracy test of Dean et al. but on whether my experience of the astrologer, or other people's experience of the astrologer, is that he or she is accurate. Dean et al. cannot argue that I might believe a horary astrologer is accurate when they are inaccurate: I either buy the house or I do not buy it. They could argue that I believe they are reliable when they are not reliable, but we will all have different views of what is reliable which will depend on many factors including the subject matter, as some matters require more accuracy than other matters. It is no good for Dean et al. to say this reliability is something we can test, because, as we have already argued, owing to the nature of horary astrology an attempt to test it may result in the chart being non-radical which will make such attempts to test it impossible. However, it does not follow that by being impossible to test, any knowledge derived from this type of astrology is of no use; it only means it is not accurate in accordance to their definition of accuracy. It would perhaps be better to call their definition of accuracy 'empirically certain' knowledge. It should be clear that inceptions, where the radical test is applied, and elections follow horary astrology. The knowledge they provide is not 'empirically certain', but it may be accurate within the context of the relevant matter.

We have argued that it is not possible to test empirically the "accuracy" of astrology where the native has the opportunity to change his behaviour in light of the astrological advice he has received. However, the information provided may be important for one's own way of life; one may believe it will be helpful or that it has been helpful, and it may enable one to lead a more satisfied life. It may also be accurate: an astrologer may tell you it is a favourable time to accept a new job and the job turns out to be an

extremely good one. To label this as "satisfaction" is to miss the point. The actual experience of seeing the astrologer and acting on their advice, is an astrological experience. This astrological experience is either worthwhile or is not worthwhile. If it is worthwhile then that has a value in its own right; it is not necessary to show that this experience is 'empirically certain' or "accurate" or that it produces "satisfaction" to show that it has a value.

Mundane astrology is not dissimilar to economics. The astrologer will be using astrology as a tool and will use non-astrological factors in his/her predictions, so it will not be possible to test empirically whether astrology is working or not. Equally it is not of any importance that one astrologer makes a correct prediction and another astrologer an incorrect prediction, because one is not trying to "prove" astrology. All that matters is whether or not the predictions are useful, and one would expect some astrologers to be better than other astrologers. We can see that for this type of astrology the distinction between "accurate" astrology and astrology producing satisfaction completely breaks down. The only purpose of mundane astrology is to make accurate predictions, but Dean et al.'s "accuracy" test cannot test it. One wonders if their accuracy test would be able to test economics, meteorology or any other form of forecasting which involves human judgment.

Spiritual astrology, helping people evolve or becoming closer to God, and psychological astrology, helping people understand themselves or helping them cope with psychological problems, have a value to the client if the client values the experience. Dean et al. may argue that it is not accurate astrology implying it is therefore inaccurate, or in some way incorrect, but this is not an argument that they can make. It does not follow that from failing the Dean et

al. accuracy test that in a specific case between astrologer and client the information given is therefore inaccurate or without worth. In the individual case it may be accurate. No amount of experiments can disprove this individual case because it is unique and cannot be repeated. This does not mean that a universal law can be made out of this experience, but the lack of a universal law does not invalidate the individual case.

In a long article, Dean and Mather detail the empirical test work conducted on Sun sign astrology.<sup>42</sup> They do not give details of the tests but list the conclusions. Forecasts for our own signs are no more valid than forecasts for other signs; "reader's social class was a better predictor of the advice offered than was their Sun sign;"<sup>43</sup> it is possible to produce fake Sun sign columns that people will believe; and the columns disagree. These results are what any astrologer should expect. The Sun is not the only important planet in astrology, the Moon and the Ascendant are equally important. For this reason a few years ago various astrologers started using Moon signs instead of Sun signs or as well as Sun signs,<sup>44</sup> and this is also why many people read their Sun sign, Moon sign and Ascendant sign, because all can be relevant. It is not clear what relevance a test showing that social class is better at making predictions than Sun sign columns has. All it shows is that social class determines behaviour; it says nothing about the validity of Sun sign columns. Similarly, the fact that someone can produce a fake Sun sign column has no relevance: a fake doctor will be able to persuade me that I have a problem with my blood whether I have that problem or not, but this tells me nothing about the ability of my G.P. to make a diagnosis. Finally, inconsistent Sun sign columns are not surprising given that Sun sign astrologers have several different

astrological points they can insert into a column, and they will not all use the same one. Of course these tests show that Sun sign columns fail the Dean et al. accuracy test, and of course it means that astrologers should not make extravagant claims for Sun sign columns which cannot be upheld. However, I can say that Sun sign columns have a value because people find the experience of reading them worthwhile. I am not saying that 'a thought for the day column' would not be valuable and I am not making any comment about the accuracy of Sun sign columns. If Dean et al. want, they can scientifically study why people find them of value, but it is not necessary to define that value scientifically or compare it to any other type of value to show that it has worth.

## **Conclusion**

The five main criticisms of the sceptics can be reduced to three: first, that astrological symbolism is contradictory, unclear and imprecise; second, that we are incapable of reading a chart in the manner that astrologers claim it should be read; and third, that astrology (and the theories of astrology) cannot be empirically proved. We can conclude as follows:

1. The sceptics are mainly concerned with natal astrology, and at times natal astrology can be vague, but this is because the personality, which natal astrology is often trying to describe, is a vague concept in itself. Predictive astrology and horary astrology are not vague; they are extremely precise and astrological symbolism is capable of being extremely precise. It is not clear whether the sceptics understand these other types of astrology.

However, astrologers have not yet shown that there is a method, generally accepted by those practising astrology, to evaluate between the different techniques.

2. Problems with human judgment bias will only cause a problem when analysing a natal chart if a whole personality is being synthesised into a comprehensive whole. Horary astrology, natal astrology conducted along the lines of Hellenistic or Medieval techniques and mundane astrology will not have a problem with human judgment bias because they look at various segments of a life separately in order to build up a picture of a life rather than synthesising the life into a 'holistic' whole. Any problems in making the resulting judgment are no different from any other human occupation.

3. The only kinds of astrology that can be tested according to the definition of "accuracy" laid down by the sceptics is mundane astrology, which does not involve the judgment of an individual astrologer but attempts to correlate events with specific planetary combinations, and inception charts, in which it is assumed that the chart is radical. This should be no surprise because the Dean et al. definition of "accuracy" implies a definition of astrology which removes the astrologer whereas actual astrological practice usually requires an astrologer to make an astrological judgment. None of the other types of astrology can be tested. According to the sceptics this would make them by definition not "accurate." However, the sceptics choose a narrow definition of accuracy and there is no reason why we should accept it; a better description of their "accuracy"

test would be 'empirically certain'. All these types of astrology, even if they cannot be shown to be 'empirically certain', can provide an astrological experience which may be accurate and may have a value which no amount of experiments can disprove.

Finally, we can say two things. The sceptics are correct to complain when astrologers claim empirical backing which does not exist or insist that astrological statements are universally true.<sup>45</sup> Equally, astrologers can complain that the sceptics do not consider large areas of astrological practice and behave as if all astrologers believe that there is an objective astrology which can be assessed without the astrologer. This is not something which most astrologers believe, nor is it something which they practice.

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<sup>1</sup> The others include Suitbert Ertel, Ivan W.Kelly, Rudolf Smit, Arthur Mather, and Peter Loptson.

<sup>2</sup> Dean, "Key Topic 3: Theories of Astrology," *Correlation*, Vol 15, No 1 Northern Summer 1996, pp17-52.

<sup>3</sup> Kelly, "The Concepts of Modern Astrology: a Critique," Summary, [www.astrology-and-science.com](http://www.astrology-and-science.com)

<sup>4</sup> Kelly, *ibid*, Section 4.1

<sup>5</sup> Kelly, *op.cit*, Introduction. Also see *Correlation*, "Key Topic 3, Theories of Astrology", Northern Summer 1996, Vol 15 No 1, p28.

<sup>6</sup> See Dean et al. *Correlation*, "Key Topic 3: Theories of Astrology," Vol 15 No. 1 Northern Summer 1996, p28, where they say "it is impossible to specify any two things, no matter how dissimilar, that do not show some kind of correspondence."

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- <sup>7</sup> Dean et al, *Correlation*, "Discourse for Key Topic 4: Astrology and Human Judgement." See p39 for astrologers' inability to judge a chart and p45-47 for clients' inability to comprehend a chart.
- <sup>8</sup> Dean et al. Quoted in Phillipson, *Astrology in the Year Zero*, p153.
- <sup>9</sup> See Lilly, *Christian Astrology* pp121-123.
- <sup>10</sup> See Bonatti, *The Astrologer's Guide*, pp1-2.
- <sup>11</sup> See Company of Astrologers, *Bulletin* No.46. The first thing Maggie Hyde determines, in her commentary of the inception chart for the Cultural Astronomy and Astrology course at Bath Spa University, is whether it is radical.
- <sup>12</sup> See the story of Princess Diana's two birth charts in Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology*, pp245-257.
- <sup>13</sup> It is worth noting that the Arabic writers, who introduced these techniques and were the first to use Saturn-Jupiter conjunctions to determine what would happen for the following twenty years, could not calculate this conjunction with sufficient accuracy to use a horoscope erected for the moment of conjunction. Instead they used the previous Aries ingress which they could calculate accurately so that this ingress became responsible for the following twenty years. Therefore, although they were describing history through the Saturn-Jupiter conjunctions the actual position of this conjunction was of little consequence.
- <sup>14</sup> Dean et al. *Correlation*, "Key Topic 3: Theories of Astrology," Vol 15, No 1 Northern Summer 1996 p20.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>16</sup> *op cit*, pp17-52.
- <sup>17</sup> This point is made throughout their work but note in particular two articles in *Correlation*. "Key Topic Debate 1: Is the Scientific Approach Relevant to Astrology?" p 16, Northern Summer 1994, Vol 13 No. 1 and "Discourse for Key Topic 2; Some Philosophical Problems for Astrology," p34. Northern Winter 1995/96, Vol 14, No 2.
- <sup>18</sup> It would be incorrect to imply that Dean et al. think only theories of "accuracy" are important. For astrology which is satisfaction, we should consider theories of satisfaction. These theories were meant to be covered in KT5 but as this was never published we do not know what they are.
- <sup>19</sup> Kelly, "The Concepts of Modern Astrology: a Critique," section 4.1.
- <sup>20</sup> Dean et al. *Correlation*, *Key Topic 3: Theories of Astrology*, Northern Summer 1996, Vol 15, No 1 p29.
- <sup>21</sup> Vettius Valens, *The Anthology Book 1*, trans. R.Schmidt, p4.
- <sup>22</sup> Al-Biruni, *The Book of Instruction in the elements of the art of Astrology*, p247.
- <sup>23</sup> Vettius Valens, *The Anthology Book 1* pp1-7. The Sun, Jupiter and Venus are responsible for friends; only different types of friends.
- <sup>24</sup> A.N.Wilson in his Monday column in *The Daily Telegraph* has more than once said that there are aspects of Iris Murdoch's character, as described in the book *Iris* by her husband, which he does not recognize. John Baylis says that Iris Murdoch disliked going to the theatre, but A.N.Wilson remembers several discussions with her in which they discussed how much they enjoyed a particular play.
- <sup>25</sup> Dennis Elwell, quoted in Phillipson's *Astrology in the Year Zero*, p182, takes the position that empirical tests are possible and that they can be used to evaluate different techniques and symbolism. However, no one has yet shown how this can be done in a manner which is acceptable to astrologers in general.
- <sup>26</sup> *Astrology in the Year Zero*, p161.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, pp162-163
- <sup>28</sup> See Dean et al, *Correlation*, "Key Topic 4: Astrology and Human Judgment," Northern Winter 1988/99, Vol. 17, No 2 pp46-48.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p47

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<sup>30</sup> One example of an election with an unexpected side effect is the time chosen by the Burmese to set up their own state independent from Britain. Mars is close to the MC, perhaps because they wanted the new state to be independent, strong, and not subject to more foreign occupation; in this they were successful, but Mars on the MC has coincided with an authoritarian military regime.

<sup>31</sup> Grafton, *Cardano's Cosmos*, p122.

<sup>32</sup> Kelly, "The Concepts of Modern Astrology: a Critique," Section 1 p3.

<sup>33</sup> An example of this to be found in the double blind test in *Nature* Vol.318 5 December 1985, in which, astrologers failed to match natal charts with CPI Profiles. However, as the subjects of the test also failed to recognize their CPI profiles it is unclear why astrologers should be able to recognize them. Yet the conclusion drawn is that "we are now in a position to argue a surprisingly strong case against natal astrology as practiced by reputable astrologers".

<sup>34</sup> Dean and Loptson, *Correlation*, "Discourse for Key Topic 2; Some philosophical Problems for Astrology," Northern Winter 1995/96, Vol, 14, No 2, p39.

<sup>35</sup> Dean et al. *Correlation*, "Discourse for Key Topic 4 Astrology and Human Judgment," Northern Winter 1998/99, Vol. 17, No 2, p49.

<sup>36</sup> That a wrong or symbolic chart can be a radical and valid chart for astrological judgment is a position held by The Company of Astrologers. See Cornelius, *The Moment of Astrology*.

<sup>37</sup> *Nature* Vol 318 5 December 1985.

<sup>38</sup> Quoted from Rob Hand, *The Great Conjunctions and the World Trade Centre Attacks*, The Mountain Astrologer April/May 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Dean et al. quoted from *Astrology in the Year Zero*, p 164.

<sup>40</sup> Kelly, "The Concepts of Modern Astrology a Critique," Conclusion.

<sup>41</sup> Dean et al. *Astrology in the Year Zero*, p156.

<sup>42</sup> Dean and Mather, "Sun Sign Columns: History, Validity, and an Armchair Invitation," [www.astrology-and-science.com](http://www.astrology-and-science.com)

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>44</sup> For a short period of time Jonathan Cainer used Moon signs in his column in the Daily Mail.

<sup>45</sup> An example is found in Julia Parker's 2002 Carter Memorial Lecture in which she says, "Because astrology has such a long recorded history, it is very reassuring that we can confidently tell any sceptic or client that every statement we make has the backing of empirical research, whether its finding were published in BC or 2002". Astrological Association Journal, "Carter Memorial Lecture: the Planets-Myth and Reality," p8, Sept/Oct 2002.