

Astrofraud

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In libertarian law one of the most common ideas is that the consumer should be safe against fraud. If a producer promises a specified good and does not deliver, he can be held liable. In a libertarian society, as in other societies, you have to choose if the product offered is better than the competition in price or quality, and if you really need the product or can use the money for something better. There is however, a category of services that can never live up to the standards you as a consumer should rationally expect. In this category you will find astrology.

A Pseudo-Science

Astrology is one of the more common pseudo-sciences but, unlike most of the others, it should be considered dangerous: first, Astrology is popular, second, Astrology seems plausible to the man in the street; lastly, Astrology is sometimes the basis for decisions in business, health and politics and, in these cases, it can damage your well-being.

But astrology does not work and rationally it cannot be expected to work. What follows should be remembered as a case study when it comes to other pseudo-sciences like Ufology, Scientology and the rest. Think seriously before you allow the like into your life!

The main idea in Astrology is that some kind of power or energy from the celestial bodies affects you at the time of birth and that this defines your personality and even your fate.

Weaker than Man-made Light

What known powers are emitted from the planets and stars? Most apparent of course is light. Yet most of humanity is born in buildings and the light from the stars, and the reflected sunlight from the planets, never reaches the newborn child. Even if it did, through windows for example, it would be weak compared with the light from the

artificial lighting most modern obstetric clinics have.

Another power that astrologists like to point to is gravitation. They stress the truly awe-inspiring power that the moon has on the tides. If it can have that kind of power on the sea, what would be its (and presumably the other planets' power on us who are, after all, 70% water?

The truth is however, that the tides are a result of gravitation working on an immense area of sea. On a small body such as that of a human being, the effect would be too small to be of interest. Gravitation works by the inverse square principle which means that the gravitational effect from other planets is small, even if they themselves are large. As a matter of fact, the gravitational effect from this paper at normal reading range is more than a million times as great as that from Mars when it is at its nearest to Earth. Those who believe in the effect of gravitation on the newborn ought to trace the doctors' movements in the wards. They might even check the baby's position in relation to this *Free Life* if they want to have a better chance of interpreting the future course of world events.

When both light and gravity proved wanting, the astrologists vainly turned to magnetic fields and radio waves. It was not until recently that we could get highly sensitive instruments near the planets to measure their magnetic fields. It turned out that the magnetic field from a stereo loudspeaker was of a higher intensity than the effect from all the planets put together. The same is true of radio waves. The waves from radio and television broadcasts are a million times stronger than the small amount that reaches us from the planets. You need a large dish to even find them. There is more reason to expect *Dallas* rather than Mars, to determine your newborn child's future (and isn't that a worrying thought?).

Into the Unknown

The last, somewhat desperate way out for astrologists is to try to make us believe that some as yet unknown form of energy is

reaching earth from the heavenly bodies. But when you set up the rules for this unknown energy, you find yourself in trouble. It can have different effects depending upon which planet it comes from, and the effects are also influenced by the position of the planet in relation to the stars at a particular moment. These effects are not dependent on mass or distance (the asteroids, the planet Pluto, the moons of the planets and most comets are ignored in astrology), and they affect some but not all things on Earth. In short, it is a form of energy which contradicts the fundamental laws of physics.

Another interesting thing to note is the spring solstice. This is the time of the year when the sun passes the equator on its way north. If the earth's axis were fixed in relation to the stars, this would happen at exactly the same time each year. Due to the gravitational stresses from the moon however, the axis is moving in a circle that takes around 25,730 years to make a full round. This shift in position means that the sun moves a little bit further west every spring solstice, and that it will have passed through every sign of the zodiac in 25,780 years.

The Shift

When the Sumerians came up with the idea of astrology the sun was in what we now call Taurus. When the Greeks started their astrology the sun was in Aries, since that time the first sign of the zodiac.

Today's astrologers are using the same system as the Ancient Greeks without realising that the spring solstice has moved into Pisces. All the other signs have moved into different months too. In the near future, the spring solstice will move into Aquarius and that means that a given day will be two signs from where the astrologers say it is. This means that for the last 2,000 years nobody has been born under the sign that they think they have. Not that it really matters, but it shows what a good thing this kind of business is. No matter how much garbage there is in a system, it still has its believers.

When the Sumerians, and later the Greeks, split the night sky into 12 signs and gave to the signs the names of animals and other

things the signs looked like (admittedly, you have to have a vivid imagination), they did it as a convenient way to chart the movement of the celestial bodies. That they thought that the animals in the zodiac and the planets (Gods) gave special attributes to children at birth (lions gave bravery and strength, Man. fighting spirit) might be excusable considering the state of science at that time. Yet, if we are to believe a survey by G.O. Abell and B. Singer, almost a third of the people in the West believes in astrology. That is not really excusable.

Science versus Nonsense

The hallmark of the scientific search for knowledge is the empirical method. What happens if you give an astrologist the birthdates of two large groups of people and ask him to tell who belongs to which group? It has been done a few times and the results have been well within the statistical margin for pure guesswork. But the astrologers are not daunted by this. There is always something for believers which invalidates the test.

Humanity stands today at the best position it has ever reached. We can travel further than ever before and it is not unrealistic to hope that we can eliminate most of the problems we face today. In fact, we stand on the threshold of leaving Earth and taking the first major steps into the universe. One of the preconditions for this is that we improve our technology and maintain a healthy scepticism towards irrationalism in all its forms. It would be a pity if these magnificent possibilities were to be in any way crippled by the purveyors of astrononsense.