

leaving sufficient evidence that would force science and society to believe what a majority of humans are presently unprepared to believe.

(A lengthier review, by Michael Swords, is to be found in *Journal of UFO Studies*, 4 (1992), 201-205.)

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The Case for Astrology by John Anthony West. London & New York: Penguin/Viking, 1991. 515 pp. \$25.

(JAW wrote a book with the same title in 1970, but this is substantially a new book, taking into account recent developments.)

"Astrology is true because it is a system of magic" (p. 223).

West believes firmly that astrology works, and he is angry with those of us who fail to share that belief. This failure he attributes to prejudice: because we are a priori convinced that astrology cannot work, we are reluctant to study it seriously. If we did, we would realize that our criticisms are beside the point, because we are judging astrology as if it were a scientific system, when in fact it is a magical one.

If West had the courage to keep to this bold approach, the critic who ventured to question the viability of astrology would be effectively disarmed. Instead of evaluating it by the cause-and-effect yardsticks of the mundane world, for which the scientific method—or indeed, everyday common-sense—might be considered sufficient qualification, a critic would need to verse himself in the occult "sciences" before he would be qualified to venture an opinion.

However, West has chosen not to abide on the high ground of his magic-or-nothing approach, perhaps because he knows that although the occult is a safe refuge, it is also likely to be a lonely one, into which few skeptics will venture. Instead, he descends into the plain to do battle with his critics, seeking to persuade us that even his magical system can be seen as scientifically acceptable if we will only view it in the right way. But in so doing, he allows his demonstration to be flawed from the outset by a fatal ambiguity—an ambiguity which is to be found in a great many discussions of astrology: the failure to distinguish between the system of ideas which constitutes astrology per se, and the premises on whose basis that system is constructed.

The possibility that there may exist some kind of correlation, direct or (more probably) indirect, between the position of the celestial bodies at a given moment and the character (and consequently destiny) of a person who happens to

emerge from his mother's womb at that same moment, is one thing: but the system of ideas which astrologers have elaborated to explain and exploit this correlation is quite another.

That correlation, if it exists, would be a fact of nature. It may not be one which the critic of astrology is prepared to recognize, but neither is it one whose possibility he is in any position to deny. The most he has the right to say is that he does not see sufficient evidence for its existence.

The astrologer's system of ideas, on the other hand, is one that the critic has every right to condemn if he believes it to be unsound.

West unfortunately perpetuates this confusion throughout his book; nor can he be excused on the grounds that he isn't aware of the distinction, because he obviously is. On p. 216 he blames the critics for opposing astrology as much on account of its premises as for its procedures, and on p. 496 he admits that his defense is "mainly concerned with astrology's premise, rather than its practice."

But it is not the premises which constitute astrology, it is the practice. The premises either are, or are not, matters of objective fact. There are, he tells us on p. 229, two types of positive evidence supporting astrology—there is statistical evidence for correlations between births and planetary positions, and there is physical evidence for relationships between celestial and terrestrial events. Well, maybe so: but even if such evidence were ultimately to prove valid, it would be evidence only for the correlations themselves, not for any ideas anyone might have about those correlations. The finding might bring comfort and joy to the astrologer, but it would not of itself validate the system of thought which is astrology.

However, consistency is not an attribute of this author. He attacks skeptics—whom he supposes all to be scientists—for their selective portrayal of the "believer":

Believers . . . are invariably portrayed [by scientists] as unevolved, irrational types, incapable of facing up to life's harsh realities, unaware of the immutable truths discovered by science, and therefore taking refuge in fantasy and the supernatural (p. 4).

Yet he, in his turn, selects his own image of his critics to suit himself. Over and over again, West depicts his opponent (and it is characteristic of West's tiresome belligerence that anyone who is skeptical of astrology he labels an "opponent") as a root-and-branch materialist who believes in pure reason and in nothing else. This bogeyman does, admittedly, have his counterpart in real life: the bigoted scientist who makes *ex cathedra* assertions is no figment of fiction. But it is just as silly for West to take such a straw figure as representative of those who are skeptical of astrology's claims, as it would be for the scientist to suppose that the authors of syndicated "This week in your stars" columns are representative of astrology.

Likewise, West makes the classic mistake of equating science with technolo-

gy (e.g. on p. 46). But the "electric toothbrush" which he quotes derisively is not the end-product of science, it is at most a spin-off; it was science which on the basis of observation and experiment was able to formulate the principles which enabled the electric toothbrush, for better or worse, to be manufactured, but neither the credit nor the blame for the invention can be laid at the scientist's door.

Such childishness is one of the features which make this a very distasteful book to read. Worse, and more important, is the fact that the author is just as prone to dogmatic assertion as are the opponents he is continually attacking. This is seen most clearly when he tells us about the magic which comprises astrology.

"Magic," he tells us (p. 220) "is a name applied to the human endeavor to consciously make use of the creative powers of nature. It is the attempt to master or mimic the fundamental laws of resonance that have produced the cosmos . . . the basis of magic is the Principle of Correspondences . . ."

The more he elaborates along these lines, the clearer it becomes that magic is whatever one thinks it is. West has his own ideas as to what it is, and does not hesitate to present his views as statements of fact. "It is magic that makes possible creation, indeed, all conscious, organic life" (p. 221): "The Principle of Correspondences is universal" (p. 223) and much more of the same kind.

Of course West has every right to interpret the universe whatever way he finds congenial. What he does not have the right to do, on the other hand, is to blame the rest of us if we for our part find his absolutist statements unacceptable. What offends me, and will probably be offensive to many others, is that his magical system is a closed system. We are invited to believe that it is true, not because it connects up with other things which experience has shown to be true, but by some inherent truth of its own which will have it that the planet Saturn symbolizes contraction whereas Jupiter symbolizes expansiveness, and that a trine aspect will be harmonious whereas a square aspect will be disharmonious.

If the system worked, we might be more favorably disposed. But it needs more than a reference to magic to convince the doubter confronted with, say, the case of two twin brothers, born ten minutes apart, who will have wholly different characters and destinies because, during those ten minutes, the planetary configuration has shifted: the result being that Twin 2 is born in a different sign, with corresponding changes in all the relevant houses, so that all the benign circumstances which smiled upon his brother's birth are changed to baleful ones as though cursed by the Wicked Fairy whom everyone forgot to invite to the ceremony.

And really, fairy-tale logic is more akin to astrology as West presents it than any other. His astrology is not an experience-based structure of knowledge, but a fabricated system bound only by rules of its own making, though it is possible they are of divine origin (p. 40 et seq.). Like the teller of fairy tales, he asks us to accept a scenario which is as devoid of infrastructure as those theological belief-systems which impose on us dogmatic propositions concerning the na-

ture and intentions of God. The signs of the zodiac, the planets and their interactions, each element in the astrological scenario possesses its own attributes; but the best he can do to explain to us how they came to acquire them is to refer us to "complex numerological considerations" (p. 27).

He tells us, too, that their relationships are governed by the "laws of harmony" (p. 26) without any indication as to whose laws these are; when, where and by whom they were formulated; and what grounds there are for supposing them to have any universal validity, apart from the fact that they are embodied in a corpus of "ancient wisdom." West gives his game away when he says (p. 38):

The point we wish to make here is that this system . . . is a whole. No amount of aimless observation, no matter how accurate or painstaking, could develop willy-nilly into such an elegant and internally consistent system. In the realm of man, nothing evolves mindlessly. No coherent body of knowledge—such as astrology—simply accumulates, taking form as it goes.

In other words, astrology is an artifact, constructed as a system rather than accumulated as a fund of experience founded on observation. Once again, there is no harm in that, if this is the way West likes to look at the universe. But I would take issue with his statement, which seems to me to be in flat contradiction of the truth in more than one respect.

First, scientific knowledge does do precisely what he says it doesn't—"simply accumulate, taking form as it goes." And second, his description of astrology as an "elegant and internally consistent system" is quite simply laughable in the light of the contradictions, inconsistencies and controversies which he himself admits (on p. 201, for example). Apart from not being coherent, it is hardly appropriate to describe astrology as a "body of knowledge"; we do not know any of the propositions of astrology, at best they are working procedures which may or may not be validated by their results.

Astrology, like homeopathy and dowsing, is not supported by what we know of the way nature works; like them, its best hope of winning friends and influencing people is to come up with results. West believes that astrology's batting record is sufficient to convince the skeptic: on p. 318 he writes: "Thanks to Michel Gauquelin, astrologers now know that in principle astrology is justified."

But no, they know nothing of the sort, because yet again West is confusing premise and practice. Gauquelin's findings, meager though they are, are certainly thought-provoking; they may well constitute evidence for a correlation of some kind; they may give astrologers comfort and encouragement. But in no way can they be seen as a validation of the magic which West sees as the appropriate way of dealing with the question.

Finally, what are we to say of West's handling of the hoariest of arguments, the argument by longevity?

If the scholars are right, and the meanings assigned to both the signs of the zodiac and the planets are utterly arbitrary, without even a grain of truth, then the historical fact that in two thousand years these meanings have gone unchallenged stands as a psychological enigma too great to ignore (p. 81).

Well, yes, and indeed the scholars have not ignored it—as evidence, the fact that this book is being given serious attention in these pages. The psychological enigma, why people continue to believe in astrology, is a question which has puzzled them for almost as long as astrology itself has existed.

But implicit in West's statement is the suggestion that no proposition can survive for 2,000 years unless it is true, and this is patently not so. The truth of a proposition is less likely to ensure its survival than its convenience or its expediency. The teachings of the Christian church have survived for 2,000 years, though there are good reasons for questioning a great many of them. If they have survived more or less unchallenged to the present day, it is because they were useful or convenient for some.

Just as West is mistaken in thinking that his critics have ignored the enigma of astrology, so he seems to be unaware of the intense interest currently being taken in the inter-relationships operating in nature. On every side there are indications that informed inquirers are willing to contemplate possibilities which challenge accepted paradigms. The propositions of homeopathy, Sulman's work on weather-sensitivity, naturalists' findings in regard to sensitivity to sensory signals, work on allergies and electromagnetic radiation, these and many more are active research forays into what are still largely uncharted frontiers of reality. It is an area which may also yield some measure of confirmation for the celestial correlations which astrologers believe to exist.

But should any such correlations be found, they will not constitute an affirmation of West's mystical system. They will go to enlarge and enrich the ever-diversifying body of scientific knowledge, not to validate the Magic Art of Astrology.

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Parapsychology: A Concise History by John Beloff. New York, St. Martin's Press, 1993, 330pp.

Parapsychology is not a discipline that can be accused of ignoring its history. Symptomatic of this circumstance is the fact that decades-old investigations