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Incorporating Science News Letter

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COVER: Did you see the red barn? Did you see a red barn? Research shows that questions asked immediately after a specific incident can affect memories of that incident. See p. 269. (Illustration: Dale Appleman)

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LETTERS

Science/astrology (cont'd)

Insofar as the statement of objections to astrology by 186 leading scientists advises caution against unquestioning acceptance (SN: 9/13/75, p. 166), it is admirable. However, as scientists, they should back up statements by evidence or facts. Therefore I find it hard to accept phrases such as, "It is simply a mistake . . ." or, "Neither is it true . . ." when these are not supported by evidence. As far as I know there is no firm evidence against the basis of astrology.

James S. Kolodziej
Poughkeepsie, N.Y.

Part of the trouble between scientists and adherents of astrology is, of course, the fundamental scientific view of cause and effect—this has been pointed out by numerous commentators. In the scientific view, either heavenly bodies can be demonstrated, via concrete evidence, to have an effect on people's lives in accordance with their relative positions, brightness, movements, etc., or they cannot.

However, men have been looking at the sky probably since the differentiation of the species; and only in the last few hundred years can this observation be considered even vaguely scientific. The aim of the early observers was also to explain, but their explanations were necessarily anthropocentric and value-oriented.

In any case, the subject would seem a better ground for comment by social/behavioral scientists than by physical scientists. This is itself unfortunate, since the social sciences are not terribly far ahead of astrology—and far more jealous of their bailiwicks.

R. Savino
Park Ridge, N.J.

I agree that man, even if a rejection of logic is necessary, consistently strives for psychologically comforting frames of thought. The survival of religious thought is testimony to this fact. But to say that astrology or any other metaphysical dogma is the proper satisfaction of this "hunger" is not the answer.

One recent letter writer accused science of not putting forth any notions concerning a meaningful relationship between man and the cosmos. Why must such a relationship exist? We are surely a *part* of the "cosmos". Our bodies are built of its atoms and we are as much a part of the universe as a mineral, a star, or any other cosmic entity; and we, no doubt, possess a rather peculiar distinction in our ability to think. But to say anything truly objective about a purely subjective entity such as meaning is in itself meaningless.

It is my antithesis that science *does* put man in his proper place with respect to the universe (place does not imply meaning). The problem is that cold reality may not be the comforting thoughts required by our needs; but to reject what follows from logic and the scientific method and adhere to faith in some metaphysical ideals is not only missing the mark of achievement of true meaning, it is to lose one's self of the only foothold one possesses: reality.

Philip Candela
Staten Island, N.Y.

I am very disappointed at the statement against astrology made by leading scientists. It seems to be saying nothing more than "don't believe it because we say so, and we are wise people" (embellished by some historical narrative and psychological interpretations)—a very medieval declaration. I would have expected that such a collection of leading scientists would recognize the need to use the scientific method to support their objections. Rather than simply state that astrology has "no scientific foundations," they should have summarized the evidence against astrology. Such evidence should probably take the form of statistical comparisons between extreme and identifiable predictions of astrology and observations.

Jack Calman
Department of Oceanography
Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Cambridge, Mass.

(As our article pointed out, and as apparently needs reemphasized, the brief statement on astrology was followed by two articles totalling 11 pages in the same issue of THE HUMANIST summarizing the scientific and statistical case against astrology.—Ed.)

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