Astrology Group Discussion

Group Assignment

Meet with the other members of your group. Assign group roles. Print names below. Your name must appear below in order to receive credit.

Recorder - writes down groups ideas

Timekeeper - keeps the group on task within time allowed

Mediator - helps group arrive at a consensus, oversees voting on issues

Clarifier - reads while Recorder writes, makes sure everyone understands

Encourager - makes sure everyone contributes, encourages group members to talk

Speaker - proposes any group questions to TA/Instructor

(In groups of 5, the Encourager is also the Speaker)

Reporter - summarizes groups findings (at the end of the discussion time anyone in the group may be asked to serve as the Reporter)

1. Take a poll of your group members. How many believe that astrology has some validity? How many do not?

   For - Number of students = _____   Against - Number of students = _____

   Share your individual results of the Astrology Exercise that was due today. Discuss and list arguments given for and against the validity of astrology.

      FOR                      AGAINST

Most people have read a horoscope. Some people consult them daily and plan their lives based on astrology. These newspaper horoscopes are based on the twelve signs of the zodiac (the constellation that the Sun appeared in on the day you were born), and give a general prediction of what a person should expect on a particular day.
Now consider the following questions. Discuss and have the Recorder write a group response on these sheets.

2. There are 12 signs. Assuming an equal number of people in each sign, what is the likelihood that one-twelfth of the world's population is having identical experiences? Explain.

3. You know what kind of a day you had yesterday. On the overhead are yesterday's horoscopes - Try to match your day with one of the horoscopes. When your TA puts up results after all groups have completed #3, come back to this question and record group results. Comment on the accuracy for your group.

Since the beginning of astrology (over 2,000 years ago), professional astrologers have based a person's horoscope on not only where the Sun was positioned at the time of birth but also on the positions of the planets at the time of birth and the current planetary positions.

4. For horoscopes based on the positions of the planets as well as the Sun, are all horoscopes done before the discovery of the three outermost planets incorrect? (Uranus - 1781, Neptune - 1846, Pluto - 1930) Explain what your group thinks.

5. People who believe that astrology works usually cite their personal experiences with valid predictions. They have faith in an astrologer's ability to predict events in their lives based on the position of objects in the sky. What is your group's reaction to the "faith/it works for me" argument?
6. What assumptions do astronomers and scientists make in applying the scientific method to astrology? Discuss.

7. During the 1980s there was a small study in Germany that showed an interesting correlation between male athletes and the position of Mars at the time of birth. Mars spends approximately 2-3 months in each constellation over a 2 year period. Other studies using larger samples, show randomness. Has anyone in your group heard of any systematic experiments done to test the validity of astrology? Discuss.

Some interesting facts and questions to consider:

(a) If the astrological influence is carried by a force, why do the planets dominate? For example, the obstetrician who delivered a child would have several times the gravitational pull of Mars. Gravity depends strongly on distance. Mars is more massive but the doctor is much closer. If astrological forces exist, why unlike the other forces observed in nature is it independent of distance? If it doesn't depend on distance, why is there no astrology associated with faint stars, galaxies, or quasars?

(b) Astrologers suggest that a person's Sun sign is related to his/her choice of a profession. A study of 6,000 politicians and 17,000 scientists found no correlation between profession and Sun sign.

(c) In a 1985 study, 28 professional astrologers volunteered to participate in an experiment. They were asked to match a horoscope with one of three personality profiles. The astrologers were correct 34% of the time. This is what would be expected from random guessing.

(d) In another study, 150 people were sent a horoscope that was created for a French mass murderer and 94% said that the horoscope pertained to them.

(e) Out of 3,000 specific predictions made by professional astrologers that appeared in publications over a five year period in the 1980s, only about 10% came to pass.

(f) In 130 BC Hipparchus discovered that due to the precession of the Earth's axis, the location of the Sun against the zodiacal signs is changing. Currently, the Sun is shifted one month off of where it was when astrology began (over 2,000 years ago). This means that the Sun was in the previous sign, or in some cases 2 signs earlier, on your birth date. Therefore, everybody is reading the wrong sign.
8. Which of the items on the previous page does your group feel is the strongest argument against astrology? Explain.

9. Comment on at least one other numbered item from the above list.

10. Are there any facts that your group feels have not been included in this discussion which strengthen the argument for the validity of astrology? If so, write them down below.