

<http://www.astrologer.com/tests/divination.htm>

Is astrology a study, a system of divination, a method, belief system, a practice, an art or a craft?

There is a popular misconception that astrology is best defined as divination. However, while divination is seen as a part of astrology, this term does not cover all of the many branches and practices of astrology. In fact, no astrologer, nor any scholar who has studied astrology seriously would define the entire field of astrology as divination.

What is Divination?

Opinions on the nature of divination vary. To some divination refers to judgements based on subjective or random or artificial or arbitrary data rather than objective facts or natural events. To others it is the use of intuition rather than logic. However, the definitions of divination from reliable sources constellate around the practice of prediction based on supernatural means.

== Definitions of Divination ==

Divination, the art or practice that seeks to foresee or foretell future events or discover hidden knowledge usually by the interpretation of omens or by the aid of supernatural powers. Meriam-Websters on line (2011)

Divination, n. the art or practice of divining; seeking to know the future or hidden things by supernatural means; instinctive prediction; prediction; conjecture. Divine vt, to foresee or foretell as if divinely inspired; to guess or make out; to prognosticate; to make divine (Spenser); L. divines from divus, deus a god]. Chambers Dictionary, 11th edition (2010)

Divination, n. supposed insight into the future or the unknown gained by supernatural means. Oxford Compact English Dictionary, OUP (1996)

Divination, n., the practice of seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown by supernatural means. From Latin divinare to predict. Oxford Dictionary of English, OUP (2006)

Divination, n., the ability to say what will happen in the future or the act of doing this. Longmans, Dictionary of Contemporary English, Pearson Education Ltd. (2010)

Divination , n 1. the art, practice or gift of discerning or discovering future events or unknown things, as though by supernatural powers 2. a prophecy 3. a presentiment or guess Collins English Dictionary (2010)

Divination, the art of discovering future events as though by supernatural powers. Harper Collins, Essential Dictionary and Thesaurus (2007)

What is the case for the belief that Astrology = Divination?

Four arguments have been presented to support divination as the term for the entire field of astrology:

1. "Since the mechanism of astrology is unknown, then this must be divination." This is false since the mechanism for many areas of science was not and is still not known (such as Plate Tectonics or Dark Energy) - yet, projections about continental drift or dark energy were and are not considered divination. The follow up argument is that "astrology is different in that the mechanism is not sought". Even if this were true, this has no connection with the definition of divination - this is closer to a definition of an alternative therapy.

2. "Since the claim that astrology can be used to foretell the future is not supported by objective scientific evidence, it can only be divination." There are two problems with this.

a.) First there is some objective evidence to support astrology. Besides natural astrology (see later), the evidence of Michel Gauquelin's research (1955-1991) has been replicated in the sceptical studies by Irving and Ertel (1996) and in subsequent tests by Muller & Menzer (1986), Timm & Kobberl (1986). Plus significant results have come through Ridgely (1993), Hill (1988 & 1996), Fuzeau-Braesch (2007), Jan Ruis (2012) and recent reviews of the Carlson test (Ertel 2009) should not be ignored.

b.) Second, the claim that any prediction or any information acquired that is not scientific evidence can only be divination is false. Is intuition the same as divination? Is anticipating someone's reaction, composing a recipe, devising a marketing strategy or reading an x-ray divination? Such false assumptions are based on a misunderstanding of the act of divination.

3. "The basis and practice of astrology is subjective and therefore essentially divinatory". Geoffrey CorneliusThe most persuasive argument comes from astrologer and lecturer, Dr. Geoffrey Cornelius[1] in his article: Is Astrology Divination and Does it Matter? He points out that it is widely accepted that Babylonian astrology was divinatory as it involved the reading of omens. Since that time, astrology never actually changed but merely adapted to fit in with the prevailing paradigm. So while the astrological model appeared to incorporate Aristotelian spiritual physics, Newtonian physics and more recently the Jungian/Pauli model, this is an illusion.

But even Cornelius does not claim that the entire field of astrology is divination. He proposes categorizing astrology into natural and divinatory astrology. He accepts that astrology has some objective phenomena that are amenable even to our present day science. He argues that this objective astrology of nature can co-exist with subjective intuition.

4. "Astrology is widely defined as divination." This is not correct. It is true that Astrology is defined as divination by Meriam-Websters online and by the Encyclopedia Britannica.[2] Using my own three dictionaries and the full range of those stocked in the largest bookshop chain in the UK, Waterstone's, six sources define astrology as a study: Oxford Compact English Dictionary, OUP (1996), Chambers Dictionary, Chambers Harrap (2010), Longmans Dictionary of Contemporary English (2010), Oxford Dictionary of English, OUP (2006), Essential Dictionary and Thesaurus, Harper Collins (2007) and the

Collins English Dictionary, 3rd Edition, (2010). Only my older Concise Oxford Dictionary, OUP (1987) defines astrology as an art. Though some publications are by the same publishers, only those where the wording has substantially changed, suggesting different contributing authors, were considered. Not one of the current dictionaries in 'English English' include the word divination in their definition of astrology.

As the first three arguments are based on unverified opinion that are not supported by the dictionary definition of divination, the only argument that counts is point 4.

The counter argument is that divination is a subordinate term for astrology - a hyponym. It would be like defining a swan as a white bird - a swan can be categorized under white birds, but a white bird is not an adequate definition for swans in general. Astrology can be divination, but it is not correct to say that all astrology is divination. Divination is not sufficiently comprehensive for astrology.

"If astrology is divination, why is it incapable of assessing such fundamental features as sex and race?"

Dennis Elwell, astrologer and author of the Cosmic Loom (Astrology 60(1), 46, 1986)

Why Divination fails as an inclusive, neutral and unambiguous definition of astrology.

1. Astrology is not widely defined as divination by expert sources Through standard definitions vary with astrology defined as an art, study, practice, method, system and divination, 'study' seems to be the predominant dictionary definition. In addition, scholars and astrologers rarely label the field of astrology as divination. As Cornelius concedes in his lecture advocating astrology as divination "Lecture after lecture and book after book, I almost never encountered the word "divination" in relation to astrology."

In a survey of 7 published dictionaries from the most reputable UK publishers (3 from my private collection and 4 from my local bookshop), 6 defined astrology as a study and 1 (the oldest) defined astrology as an art. None defined it as divination.

2. Divination is too contentious and misleading as a definition. The use of the term divination to define astrology is controversial and this is most notable within the astrological profession as per Cornelius's comments. Divination is also open to misunderstanding and confusion. It is customary to define topics from a neutral point of view and ideally without confusing or specialized terminology. Since there are alternative independently verified terms for astrology, why not use a term that at least corresponds to how the profession defines themselves?

3. Divination is one of several models and is not the claim of most astrologers. Astrologers consider various models from the Hermetic Maxim (as above, so below), the Aristotelian spiritual physics with a prime mover, the Newtonian causal model and the Jung/Pauli synchronous accausal model are paradigms - which do not require supernatural forces. This is explained in the Wikipedia Astrology page under mechanisms.

4. Divination fails to address all branches of Astrology.

Many areas of astrology such as Natal Astrology, Psychological Astrology or Locational Astrology are not primarily about prediction or forecasting, though it is arguable that future potential represents a forecast. However some parts of astrology are either explicitly down to natural forces or do not involve any form of forecasting.

i. Natural astrology is the study of the correlation between natural phenomena such as the tides, weather (astro-meteorology), seismic activity and Solilunar and planetary cycles and sunspots. Like the tides which operate by resonance from gravitational pull of the Sun and Moon, natural astrology is not accounted for by supernatural forces even in the frontiers when the mechanism is fully known.

ii. Electional Astrology does not involve "foretelling future events or discovering hidden knowledge" as it requires an astrologer to select a date to launch a project.

iii. Historical astrology where astrologers analyze archetypal patterns in history in relation to astrological cycles. An example is the research of Professor Richard Tarnas, *Cosmos and Psyche* (2007).

iv. Rectification may not be a branch of astrology, but it is an important astrological technique. It involves calculating an unknown time of birth from known information about the life of the client.

5. The etymology and current use of divination could mislead. The origin of the word divination comes from Latin *divinare* to predict or be divinely inspired which comes from *deus* (god). While this applied in a polytheistic society like Babylon, astrology has had a long tradition of not being divinely inspired and many astrologers are agnostics or atheists. In this way, labelling an atheist astrologer as practitioner of divination is to assume that his or her beliefs are not valid. Though the meanings of words change from their origin, divine inspiration is still part of the definition in Chambers Dictionary. In addition, many of the dictionaries explicitly and implicitly associate divination with prediction, which does not reflect the full range of astrological practice and is therefore misleading as a catchall definition.

Is Astrology a Belief System like religion?

Some sceptics define astrology as a belief system (like a religion). This is specious for the following reasons:

While astrology may be a belief system for some people, this definition is undermined by the claim that astrology can be tested empirically see (Carlson Test 1985). Falsification is by definition impossible with any system that is based on faith.

Astrology is not limited to events. It can describe phenomena such as personality or potential or emotions or styles.

Astrology is not confined to the human world. Natural astrology involves the study of animals, plants, seismic activity, climate and tides in relation to cosmic patterns.

Belief System is not a widely supported definition in dictionaries or encyclopedia.

What do the polls say?

When asked whether free will can modify planetary influences, 97% of 250 astrologers surveyed said yes.

Source: Moore, Marcia (1960) A Socio-Psychological Survey Astrology Today

In a survey of 783 astrologers at conferences in UK, USA, Serbia, Norway, Argentina and Brazil during 1999-2011 elicited the following responses:

56% Astrology predicts the future

87% Astrology is a language

50% Astrology is a science

42% Astrology is divination

8% Astrology is a religion

Source: Campion, Nicholas (2012) Astrology and Popular Religion in Modern West pp.175-178

Is a 'study' exclusive to science?

If astrology is defined as a study does it make a science? No, many fields like philosophy or theology are defined as a study and are not sciences.

References

[1]^ Geoffrey Cornelius has practiced and taught astrology for many years. He has been teaching courses on astrological and divinatory practice and theory at the University of Kent since 2003, and the subject of his Ph.D. is the hermeneutics of divination.

[2]^ In a separate listing, the Encyclopedia Britannica also define the nature and significance of astrology as a "method of predicting mundane events based upon".