

## TOP 5 MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ASTROLOGY

by Enid Newberg

If you live in a city, it's easy to forget how magnificent and marvelous the night sky can be. The few stars that are bright enough to be seen pale in comparison to the sparkling array of artificial lights spanning bridges, climbing buildings, or flashing by on the freeway.

But if you're ever lucky enough to be far from civilization on a clear, moonless night, you'll understand the fascination and awe that all cultures and all religions have felt toward the celestial wonder of the stars and planets.

Astrology was born from this wonder. It found order and meaning in the cyclic dance of the planets across the skies and in the regularity of the seasons. It's an art that's been practiced continuously for more than 2,000 years.

But shifts in pop culture over the past few centuries have left both scientists and the general public with many misunderstandings about what astrology is – and isn't. Here are the top five misconceptions about astrology.

Misconception 1: Astrological signs are the same as the astronomical constellations with the same names.

The Zodiac functions in much the same way as longitude on Earth; it helps us locate where things are in the sky. Most Western astrologers today use season-based calculations — called the tropical Zodiac — to map the sky. Zodiac signs are named after nearby constellations, but are not the same as the constellations

Rather, beginning at the Spring equinox, and counting around the wheel of the year, each tropical Zodiac sign is exactly 30 degrees in width. The Earth's seasonal markers – the solstices and equinoxes – are each 90 degrees apart on the Zodiac wheel.

Their names follow the seasons in the Northern hemisphere:

0 degrees Aries – the Spring (Vernal) Equinox

0 degrees Cancer – the Summer Solstice

0 degrees Libra – the Fall (Autumnal) equinox

0 degrees Capricorn – the Winter Solstice

All this also means that if you're an astrologer using the tropical Zodiac, there cannot be a 13th sign – 12 times 30 equals the full 360 degrees in a circle. There is no room left for another sign.

Misconception 2: Astrology is limited to horoscope columns.

The majority of people become familiar with astrology through reading their Sun sign horoscope. But this “simplified” astrology is just the tip of the iceberg of a vast practice that takes into account the entire sky.

While there were earlier examples for using Sun signs, the popularity of Sun sign astrology was cemented in the 1930s. H.R. Naylor, a British astrologer, published an article in *The Sunday Express* interpreting Princess Margaret’s chart shortly after her birth.

The article was wildly popular and Naylor, knowing a good commercial venture when he saw one, began offering a regular column using interpretations of the Sun in a particular sign. The practice soon spread and now there is scarcely a newspaper or general audience magazine in the Western world that doesn’t have its astrology column.

While this type of popular Sun Sign horoscope is fun and gets people interested in the topic, it lacks the richness and depth that can be found in a personal birth chart that includes many other factors.

Misconception 3: Astrology is fatalistic, star worship.

Another misconception is that astrology represents the worship of the stars or the belief that the stars are the architects of our fate, about which nothing can be done. Again, not true.

Astrologers believe that we can discover a meaningful relationship between the position of the planets at a particular moment of time and ourselves. Most do not believe that planets or stars force a person to act in a certain way. Nor do they believe if you “worship” planets you can gain their favor.

Just like a weather forecast may predict a chance of rain in your area, that does not mean you are “fated” to get wet. How you respond to the weather reports makes all the difference to the outcome.

Misconception 4: Astrologers are ignorant, uneducated or superstitious.

Astrologers have always been among a culture’s intellectual elite. Astrology gave birth to astronomy. And for centuries you couldn’t study medicine at a university without learning astrology.

It’s not any different today. Many astrologers are well educated, some with advanced degrees. (For example, among the regular contributors to *Astrology Hub*, we count two PhDs and five Master’s degree holders.)

And, as thinking people, astrologers themselves ask many of the same questions as critics of astrology, including:

Is there a meaningful relationship between living beings here on Earth, the very large environment of our solar system and our visible universe?

Are inner states just correlated with, or are influenced by, planetary position and relationships?

Is astrology merely a type of word play that uses a dense set of symbols?

What parts of astrological interpretation can be measured through research that uses the scientific method?

Is astrology a type of divination? Is astrology both scientific and divinatory?

Is prediction in astrology more like a psychological diagnosis, a weather or economic prediction, a psychic prediction, or just an intuitive guess based on the astrologer's understanding of human nature?

Astrologers may not agree on answers to these questions. However, they do agree that the questions are worth asking. They see enough evidence in their practice of astrology to concur that something interesting is happening, something useful that deserves deeper consideration.

Misconception 5: Astrology has no relevance to a modern world.

Whether you view astrology as a vital, living tradition, or a relic from our past, it is inescapable that astrology's development and symbolism have enriched our culture for more than 2,000 years.

The development of philosophy, psychology, astronomy, mathematics and science all owe a great debt to astrologers. The symbols of astrology have shaped much of the world's great literature and art – from the Bible to Shakespeare to Renaissance painters. The meanings of these symbols are embedded in our language.

Astrologers have always been masters of keeping records of calendars and time. Astrologers named the days of the week after planets. Astrologers' records are even embedded in the code that makes computers, smartphones and the Internet work.

Therefore, regardless of what one believes, there is value in exploring how astrology has been and is being used.

Taking it a step further, researching astrology — which sits exactly at the crossroads of material phenomenon, mathematics, and consciousness — we may come to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the nature of reality itself.

Various astrologers have proposed different descriptions of how astrology might work.

Some describe it as a synchronistic activity, that there is simply a meaningful correlation between celestial movement and terrestrial events;

Some state there is an as yet unknown physical mechanism which creates a relationship between planetary motion and human events; and

Some state that regardless of whether or not there is any reality to astrology at all, there is a strong functional, psychological value to the use of astrological symbolism.

Human understanding progresses by contemplating questions for which we do not yet have answers. That's why the greatest breakthrough in understanding often come from the fringes, where people are still working with open, curious minds.

-Kepler College misconceptions about astrology