

HOW PSEUDO-SCIENTISTS GET AWAY WITH IT

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EACH MONTH more people read astrological journals than read *Harper's*, *The Saturday Review*, *ETC.*, and *Science* combined. Millions of Americans, including many university graduates, guide their affairs at least in part by the position of the stars, juxtapositions of tea leaves, configurations on the palm of the hand, magical verbal incantations, or other occult formulae.

This mystifies the individual who has never gone in for occult and pseudo-scientific endeavors. He assumes that during the past few centuries astronomers have not only charted but depersonalized the heavens. Have not scientific findings become a part of our secondary education? Yet millions of individuals retain the faith that the position of planets at the moment of their birth determine their destiny. Astrology has by no means sunk from view in the wake of astronomy and other sciences.

Need this actually be surprising? Opposition to astrology has been largely by appeal to facts and to reason. It is overlooked that human factors such as interpretations, agreements, satisfactions, and interactions are involved. It is this human side which all too often has been neglected by those who discredit the pseudo-sciences. The beliefs and understanding of an individual involve many semantic factors.

As foolish as people who believe in astrology and numer-

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ology appear to most of us, it is just as foolish to think anything is accomplished by accusing them of being superstitious and naïve. Believers and near-believers are not easily swayed. The human capacity for semantic self-delusion must not be underestimated.

THROUGH the years I have known a considerable array of occultists and pseudo-scientists. There were, for instance, the devotees of the black magic cult in Washington, D.C., who felt they were swaying the destiny of the world. There were the mystics in New York who sent out vibrations on a twenty-four hour basis to save the world from collision with a satellite. Inasmuch as a collision did not occur, they held a victory celebration. Believers in the "Mighty I Am" had their bolts of blue lightning to strike down their enemies. There was the lady who dyed her hair violet, her eyelids green and had a large, devoted following. Then there was the lady who dyed only her cat green and had no followers. Perhaps it was because most people did not think very artistic the satyrs she tried to paint on the doors of her friends' houses. There were the Great White and the Great Golden brotherhoods, who made much of secret initiations which were available to anyone with the price and right cast of mind.

A noteworthy experience with a fortune-teller dates from the late 1930's. One evening I received a telephone call from a woman who said she needed my help, and we arranged to meet. I was filled with speculations and fancies as to what kind of special difficulties the lady might be in. After all, I was a college student with no special qualifications. On the appointed afternoon I went directly from the University of California at Los Angeles to a Beverly Hills hotel where she was staying. She turned out to be a matronly and comfortable-looking person, and, quickly putting me at my ease, she came forward with a proposition.

She was a numerologist and palmist. She was having difficulties in getting the palm prints of distinguished scientists and philosophers needed for an illustrated book on palmistry that she was writing. Someone had told her I was a student

of both Bertrand Russell and Hans Reichenbach, as well as being remotely acquainted with E. T. Bell at California Institute of Technology. Under her flattering persuasiveness my imagination soared. I pictured myself in Reichenbach's office discussing a problem in probability calculus and tossing in, "By the way, would you mind my taking your handprint? Just a collection, you know . . . a hobby."

I WAS brought down to earth upon learning that in exchange for the handprints of several distinguished men I would be given a new middle name—a new middle name selected just for me on the basis of cabalistic and numerological principles. The name would have proper vibrations, she said, which would benefit me in untold ways. And it would be most simple. No need to have my name changed legally. My own knowledge of it would be adequate.

The magnitude of the proposal found me without any of the witty retorts which have come to mind in succeeding years. My wide-eyed stare seemed to be interpreted by the lady as rapt expectancy.

The selection of a suitable middle name for me was not to be taken lightly. I was assured she would spend upwards of several weeks in working out the right one.

Within the preceding year she had found a new middle name for a well-known motion-picture comedian. Shortly after receiving his new name he had signed for his first starring role in many years. I do not recall whether his new middle name had been changed from Alexander to Laughlin or the other way around. As this name change was not a legal affair, neither the courts nor his millions of fans ever learned of it. The actor was happy in what he felt his new name was doing for him, and neither his wife nor he objected to the \$6,000 fee which the lady received for her services.

A couple of years later I read a newspaper account of this comedian's death. I have sometimes wondered whether his widow ever attributed his early and unexpected demise to her husband's new middle name.

All is All

IN A LEADING astrological journal we find a forecast for one born under the sign of Capricorn: "A sound business investment or a wise policy change should prove advantageous for you. Be understanding, rather than critical, and try to be helpful to those around you. Do not let your thoughts divert your attention from practical work." Also we are informed in this journal that one born under the sign of Capricorn will, on Sunday the 18th of May, be ruled by Neptune, have as associated number 952, should wear appleberry color, and have as a best period of action 3:18 p.m. to 7:12 p.m.

Another magazine contains a discussion of crystal-gazing, in which the author candidly points out, "The psyche of the psychic must contact the universal psyche, then isolate and concentrate on the psyche of the consulting querent. In the case of the crystal-gazer, nothing whatever takes place within the ball itself. The images are reflections of the psychic's mind as induced by his psyche and seen by him alone."

A metaphysical journal contains these gems: "The yogi believes that since God is All and is in all there is, that God, manifested as the aspect of individualized spiritual Life Force, exists in every cell and center of himself . . . The Yogi becomes Self Realized . . . What is the meaning of The Silence? There is nothing but God . . . Getting out of the fourth dimension into cosmic consciousness."

It may be pointed out that these are not regarded as metaphysical expressions but statements for which truth is claimed.

You can follow someone who will show you how to "change yourself into gold." Your dream of having a "simplified idealistic philosophy, reducing the universe to mind and showing Mind in Nature and God in Mind" can be fulfilled. Perhaps you would prefer a system based on "the demonstrated fact that the surface upon which we live is concave, which constitutes the fundamental premise of a new system of Science, involving the solution of all of the problems of life and creation." You can have your "aura psychoanalyzed" or your destiny revealed by the way you crumple a piece of specially

blessed paper. You can be put in tune with the infinite through certain mantras and meditations, or you can be brought face to face with your God and talk to him. There are opportunities to meet the "Dean of the World philosophers who will show you how to control your emotions, pain, blood circulation, infections and heart beat." His demonstration will be more impressive if you do not notice the handkerchief concealed in his armpit to stop the arterial flow of blood. Or, if you really want a tip about the metaphysical-mystical world, here it is: "The Goddess Kali is now living in India in a human form known as Anandamagi."

From the Himalayas

MANY INDIVIDUALS who look skeptically at the occultists and pseudo-scientists they meet in America and Europe feel that the real mystics are fellows living in the Far East, often in legendary areas in or bordering the Himalayas. It matters not to them that the tracking down of these men of superhuman powers has proven fruitless.

One of the most amazing stories to come out of the Far East concerns a seer and a Maharajah. This man went to the Maharajah's palace and said, "Noble Sire, Time and Space are as nothing to me. Thoughts are ever present in the stream of existence. All that was and is and will be is now. There is not a man in your kingdom about whom I cannot tell you more than you already know. Give me the name of anyone in your kingdom, give the name also that his friends call him, and I will reveal much that is hidden. You too will see, for much that I will tell you will know to be true."

The Maharajah scrutinized the simple appearing man before him and thought this an excellent opportunity for sport. He selected the name of some one he was sure this seer did not know, and chuckling, he gave the affectionate little name that some used, partly in derision, partly in playfulness, for this friend. The seer closed his eyes. He took a deep breath and slowly his arms unfolded and his eyelids opened. Hesitant at first, he started telling about the individual, and the Maharajah recognized that his friend was being described.

Marvelous! The Maharajah was delighted, for here was a man with miraculous powers. He gave another name and the seer gave insights which seemed true and remarkable.

The seer, a man of humble origin, was added to the royal household, and came to wield great influence. As his gifts were precious they were available for but infrequent use. That is the story as I have heard it many times. One version had it that occasionally there were bad atmospheric and psychic conditions when adverse radiations were at work in the state. At such times the seer saw but darkly and would blunder.

THIS ACCOUNT may well be authentic. The seer could have done his work without the use of electronic devices, informers, encyclopedias, social registers, or even trickery. Then how did he do it? This I do not know positively, but I am willing to say that at least one-tenth of the readers of this article could within a month develop comparable skill and do as well as the seer. The explanation for this, however, may be surprising. In this situation, information about someone depends in large part upon what the hearer reads into what he is hearing. This is particularly noticeable when the fortune-teller uses very abstract words such as good, pretty, happy, and general concepts such as unfortunate childhood, complex character, and fulfillment of destiny.

If your credulity is a bit strained I strongly urge that you transform yourself temporarily into a seer. While this might involve a month's study and practice, it takes only a few minutes of thought to understand how the listener falls into traps of language and allows himself to be victimized. You will note that I am recommending plunging in and trying to duplicate the achievement of the most talented of seers. It is unnecessary to limit one's self to the usual level of performance of the palmist, numerologist, or astrologer.

Some evening when you are with friends and time is dragging, tell them that you would like to demonstrate your psychic power. You may tell the story of the Indian seer, and add that recently you have become aware of having strange insight. You could mention that this is not a Bridey Murphy exhibition,

nor are you going into higher states of consciousness. By then you will very likely have your friends' attention. They will be receptive, for they know you. And if they are highly verbal and live in a world perpetually flowing from verbalization, you probably will soon find yourself hailed as clairvoyant, even though you might feel you were doing poorly.

START BY SAYING to one of them, preferably the least skeptical in the group, "Give me the name of someone you know very well, whom I do not know, and I will tell you about him or her. There are so many people in the world, you had better tell me whether it's a man or woman, for sometimes many people have the same name. And to help my subconscious locate the individual, tell me what nickname the individual goes by. I can't promise entire success in picturing the person, for this power seems to come and go in waves as my states of consciousness vary."

When the individual gives you a name, pay attention to his reactions, and especially note the nickname. If he says for instance, "He never is called anything other than" you already have a substantial clue. It is very helpful to try to figure just how well the individual knows him and what kind of person this individual is likely to choose. The names of sweethearts, relatives, and persons who have made a strong impact are selected most frequently. Remember that you have said it should be someone the individual knows well. This helps in getting clues. It is worth keeping in mind that the person to be described is probably very much in the thoughts of the one who has proposed his name. If by chance the individual chooses someone not well known to him it permits you an even wider margin of error. Rack your memory for bits of information seen in newspapers or garnered from other sources. Do this with your eyes closed and your face passive.

After a minute's pause say, "Yes. He is coming in more clearly now—I will give some facts—ten facts about him—" A sample monologue, interspersed with long pauses, could be along these lines: "He's a remarkable person—one you are not likely to forget—a remarkable person indeed. He hasn't

exploited all of his abilities—there's an evil shadow hovering too close to him. Fact number four. He isn't satisfied with things as they are now—but his frustrations haven't got him down—yet. *There's* a clue! He feels he is less understood by those close to him than he should be—and in a way that is true. Fact seven. His father didn't understand him . . . yes, there are dark shadows in his childhood. Perhaps this accounts for his sometimes carrying things too far. But those who know him well know a different person. It isn't enough to know him casually, for that is misleading. Even though he's considered outgoing by some, he is both an extrovert and an introvert—his real self is not the appearance, the surface. A truly cosmic person is he”

SO FAR you have given ten “facts,” yet each statement is relatively safe. Any of these points could be challenged, yet each is at least accurate in part when applied to most persons or could be upon further elaboration. A weakness in this list is that there isn't a definite statement such as “He owns his car,” or “He has recently been in jail.” If you find you are on the right track and have determined the economic status of the individual, you probably would be safe in tossing in a couple of these more definite statements, bearing in mind that almost everyone has a health or psychological problem, and disappointments, and on the other hand some capacity for rebound. In this way the vagueness of your other remarks is more likely to be overlooked. Then there may be a good chance to comment as an aside that mathematically it is beyond the possibilities of chance to get ten items right consecutively. You might point out that if you could do this in gambling, Las Vegas, Reno, and Monte Carlo would be your oysters. If a friend should point this out for you, it would enhance still more the esteem in which you are now held as a yogi or mystic.

The technique involved in this demonstration is the use of statements which can give rise to many interpretations or values. This, like almost all fortune-telling, depends for success upon what meanings persons read into what they are told. For instance, if you tell someone, “You are generous and kind;

that is, the real you is generous and kind," he will, through his own evaluations, contribute to its meaning. Incidentally, such a statement about generosity is almost always received by most persons as a statement of fact. The less semantically literate a person is, the less he is aware that he is contributing to the fortune-teller's success.

Logosantics

LET US TURN to a cult based purely on words, sounds, and letters, without any appeal to revelations or spiritual factors. I do not know if this cult, which flourished twenty years ago in Los Angeles, is still in existence.

It was concerned with names and what we can learn about a person from his name. It proceeds along this line: if a man is called Jack, he is, of course, the go-getter type, or if he is a John he is honest and reliable. A Mary is loving and kind; and so it goes for different names. You view individuals in terms of what their names signify, and soon you find that you understand them, really know them, better than those who do not know the mysteries of names.

Now these people know that not all Johns are good leaders and open-faced and honest, so they say that there are also adverse qualities present. For instance, if he is under bad influences, John is one who refuses to be a leader, one who refuses to be outgoing, one who is not being as honest as he really is.

In this system the letters in a name are considered individually. The letter "E," for example, stands for change, so if one's name is Evelyn, there would be a great deal of changeability in one's personality. "V" stands for versatility and virility and "A" for alertness and animation. Let us take the name Mary again. "M" stands for an outgoing nature, affectionateness, "A" for alertness and animation, "R" for general capability and understanding, and "Y" for inventiveness and resourcefulness. Now of course each of these has its negative or adverse aspect. In the case of "Y" it is introversion. Thus we have a whole system based on sounds and letters. By use of positive-negative reasoning you are bound to be right.

A man who took name meanings of this kind seriously sent a book manuscript to Korzybski "for correction." Korzybski sent it back saying that as it made no sense there was nothing to correct.

Many years ago at a Hollywood soiree there were several persons present who belonged to this name cult. They felt, moreover, that not only could names tell you much about a person, but that success in life depends on having the right name. Enjoying any kind of a game, I invented "logosantics" on the spot. "Have you ever heard of logosantics?" I asked them. "It enables us to strip away the coverings from our lives and get to the true meanings of life and the world. They are there if we only look." There was almost electric interest. I can still recall a middle-aged man who said with awe that it did not surprise him to learn this, for he always knew that God's works were visible if we but saw clearly.

Thus, with a flourish, logosantics developed. Dictionaries? Why bother? Meanings are easily discernable. Logosantics takes the word *space*, for instance, and asks, "What is it?" Well, it's made up of *s* and *pace*. "S," we all know, has dangerous overtones, like the *s* of a hiss of a snake. And *time*. Nobody knows what it really is. Isn't it best understood by *tie* and *me*? Or take *emotion*. We have *e* and *motion*. *Justice* becomes *just-ice*—something frozen, hard and unchanging. Or *truth*—*t-rut*. Or *logic*—*log* and *ic*. How the party pulsed in excitement over the "revelations." Fantastic? Well, take the word "fantastic." *Fan* and *tas* and *tic*: a breezy *tic*. Is that fantastic enough?

If this is too much for your credulity, well and good. But again, try it out on some of your own acquaintances. I recall the intelligent young lady who was skeptical and ventured as a challenge the word "camelopard." But to a logosantician the inner meaning here was most obvious. The word signified a tall animal with spots.

DO PSEUDO-SCIENTISTS, including astrologers, close up shop when their predictions turn out wrong, that is, when they occasionally venture into making specific predictions which

can be checked? There was the soothsayer, Norvel, famous astrologer of the movie colony, who predicted for *Look Magazine*, April 1939, that Hitler would be killed early in 1940, and probably Mussolini also. Japan would not enter the war on the side of Germany and Italy. President Roosevelt would not run for office in 1940. The United States would not enter the European war. When, through the passage of time, these predictions were shown to be wrong, Norvel was defended by an astrological devotee with the argument that he was really right because he was entirely wrong. He had just got his positives and negatives mixed.

Prior to the 1956 presidential election another distinguished astrologer, Myra Kingsley, was willing to make specific predictions. In the Sunday newspaper supplement, *This Week*, she predicted that the presidential nominees would be Estes Kefauver and Milton Eisenhower. Sixty-seven out of a hundred leading American astrologers who were polled in 1956 stated definitely that Stevenson would defeat Eisenhower. Chester A. Arthur III, a most humane astrologer, has explained this fiasco in prediction by pointing out that most astrologers had falsely made the assumption that the nominee with the better horoscope would gain the presidency. Errors do not diminish the enthusiasm of those who want to believe.

Tentative Explanations

THESE EXAMPLES may seem only preposterous. To appreciate what is involved usually requires personal experiment. Then you will realize more clearly than ever before how much of our everyday knowledge is but a matter of words and the projections built around them. We see the fortune-tellers and religious mystics tending to make things out of processes and abstractions. Love and goodness become entities with separate real existences totally disconnected from human nervous systems. The language barrier is lowered and one crosses into an unreal world from which escape comes very late or never.

In the traditional linguistic framework in which we do our

daily thinking, there is a separation of the material from the spiritual, as though these exist in parallel and distinct realms. Activities in one realm are thought to be possible without observable effects in the others. So we find that it is our language habits which make it possible for the pseudo-sciences to flourish. Throughout the ages there has been a feeling that our mental hopes and fears, our human consciousness, are so important that they supersede and are more fundamental than our physical structure. Not only is the abstraction, consciousness, thought of as more fundamental than the body but for some it becomes the measure of the universe. When consciousness is considered to be thus separated from the human nervous system, and freed from any checks or balances, one can expect almost anything.

Because of this language situation one cannot feel that all pseudo-scientists are charlatans. I regard only a minority of the fortune-tellers I have known as individuals deliberately practicing trickery and deceit. The majority are well-meaning and, at least in part, fooling themselves as well as others.

PALMISTRY, numerology, and astrology were in some ways the attempts of ancient and medieval man to attain exact knowledge. The strong persistence into the present of these pseudo-sciences has sometimes been given as an argument for their authenticity. In a widely read astrological journal we find, "A belief in astrological theories which is so widespread can scarcely be without some basis in fact, and, in so far as astrology is true, it cannot really be evil. Such evil as may arise in connection with an astrological study is due, not to the subject, but to its regrettable abuse." Here are hedging and self-deception, further imprisoning the mind.

Those who have the fortune-teller's cast of mind are given to misinterpreting science. They believe that inasmuch as modern science sees the world in dynamic terms anything is accordingly possible. They tend to regard a scientist's statement that something is possible as meaning that something is true. What might be and what is are confused.

One of the tricks of the occultists is to lump into the

single category of occult-mysticism all that is strange or as yet little understood. When a person objects to their verbal nonsense the occultists are likely to accuse him of being blind to the fact that there is much in life which is not yet understood. Indeed, there are many strange and little understood phenomena. But as these become understood they are found to be explainable within the framework of the natural world. There is still no discoverable duality between natural and supernatural, spiritual and material.

The semanticist remembers that we should beware of bringing too many things together into a single generalization. It is too easy to criticize that which is unfamiliar. Not all graphologists, for instance, are the same. Nor are their interpretations. Many aspects of what is ordinarily called graphology are sound. I used to laugh at ghost-laying until I was faced during World War II with having to lay a ghost in a house in southern England. So that I will not be misunderstood, let me assure you that I have yet to encounter a ghost who exists separately from the minds of the individuals who see, feel, or know it.

THERE ARE STUDIES of Extra-Sensory Perception which cannot be dismissed lightly. Some first-rate scientists, including Gardner Murphy, have undertaken serious studies of ESP. As yet we do not understand these phenomena, but it is reasonable to assume that some day we will. There is no justification for attributing what is now not understood to any mystical realm.

Care has to be taken not to confuse the pseudo-sciences with meditation. For when a Christopher Isherwood, an Aldous Huxley, or a Gerald Heard go to an Ashram to meditate, who can call that nonsense? One of the most brilliant editors in America, a man of great breadth of learning and humanity, has at times attached the label "theosophist" to himself.

It has seemed to me that many of those who have gone into fortune-telling have done so in the sincere conviction that they are thereby able to help people. Many an interpreter of horoscopes or the lines on the palm endeavors to perform serv-