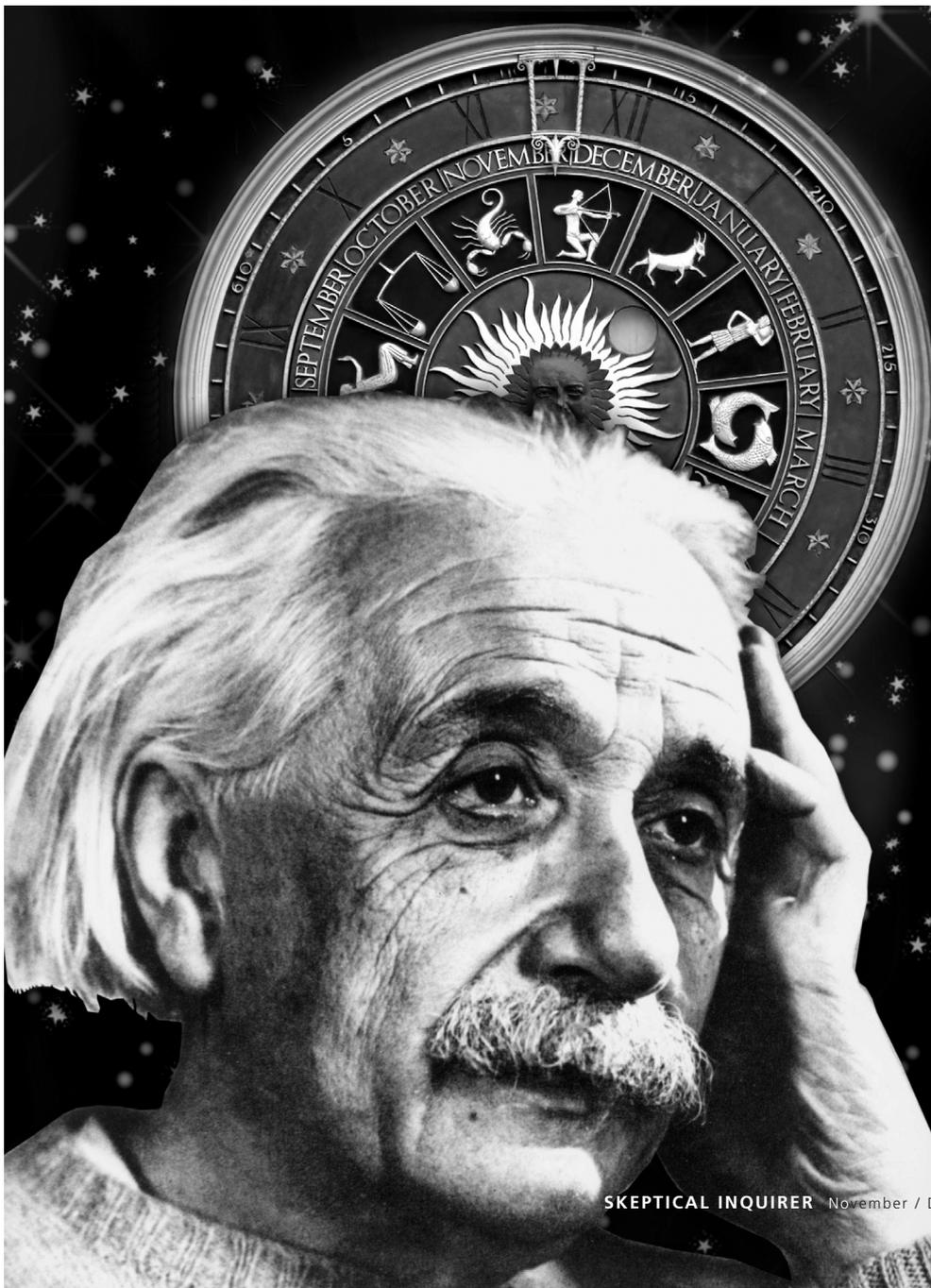


The End of the Einstein-Astrology-Supporter Hoax

Astrology books and Web sites often describe Einstein as favorably regarding astrology. Einstein, however, was known for his negative opinion on the topic. Who, then, is responsible for this hoax?

DENIS HAMEL



In the past it never occurred to me that every casual remark of mine would be snatched up and recorded. Otherwise I would have crept further into my shell. (Calaprice 2000)

I dislike very much that my children should be taught something that is contrary to all scientific thinking. (Frank 2000)

It is difficult to say what truth is, but sometimes it is so easy to recognize falsehood. (Calaprice 2000)

—Albert Einstein

Books and Web sites on astrology often boast a quote suggesting that Albert Einstein thought favorably of astrology. However, his negative opinion of astrology is documented. If Einstein had no interest in astrology, then who is responsible for having forged this hoax?

The year 2005 marked the hundredth anniversary of the publication of three seminal discoveries, among them the theory of relativity, made by an unknown clerk working at the Bern patent office. It also marked the fiftieth anniversary of the clerk's death.

In 1919, during a total eclipse of the Sun, a phenomenon that was predicted by this theory—the deviation of a light ray due to the mass of a huge body (in this case, the Sun)—was verified for the first time. Under the supervision of Arthur Eddington, a team of astronomers aimed their telescopes in the direction of the Sun, took pictures of the surrounding sky at totality, and compared the positions of the stars close to the limb of the Sun with pictures of the same area of the sky taken at a different time. The measured shift in the position of stars near the Sun corresponded perfectly with the shift predicted by the theory of relativity. As soon as Eddington published his results, Albert Einstein was catapulted to his position among the greatest scientists of all time, taking his place beside Galileo and Newton.

To count Einstein among the supporters of esotericism in general, and of astrology in particular, would be quite a coup for

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adepts of those pursuits. Unfortunately for them, Einstein's opinion of astrology was clear—and has been published. Nonetheless, if you open a recent book on astrology, you may find a chapter containing a list of celebrities, writers, kings, popes, artists, and the like who endorse astrology. Among them you surprisingly, if not incredulously, may find the name of Albert Einstein, along with this quote he is alleged to have said:

Astrology is a science in itself and contains an illuminating body of knowledge. It taught me many things and I am greatly indebted to it. Geophysical evidence reveals the power of the stars and planets in relation to the terrestrial. In turn, astrology reinforces this power to some extent. This is why astrology is like a life-giving elixir to mankind.

The same quote appears on many astrology Web sites. With a search engine, just typing “Albert Einstein astrology is a science in itself” will find dozens of sites posting the phrase.

Even at first glance, this sentence contradicts views Einstein espoused on the error of teaching “something that is contrary to all scientific thinking”—which would include astrology. I have gathered convincing information pinpointing the possible author of the false phrase attributed to Einstein.

The Swiss-born Canadian astrologer Werner Hirsig introduced the text as an epigraph to his *Manuel d'astrologie* published in Quebec, Canada, in 1965. However, at the end of his book, a postscript mentions the following: “On the banks of Lemane Lake, February, 1950.”¹ From this, some have incorrectly assumed that the *faux* quote had been introduced as early as 1950.² After some research on the Web and in various library indexes, I found that Hirsig had written a book in 1950 titled *Astrologie moderne (Modern Astrology)*. Thanks to an interlibrary loan system, I obtained a copy of the book from Switzerland and realized that the *Manuel d'astrologie* of 1965 was a reprint of this book. Differences between the two documents are minor, as both books have the same table of contents and pagination. Only the prefaces are different. In the 1965 version, a foreword is added where the sentence attributed to Einstein is introduced for the first time in Hirsig's book. Indeed, I would have been surprised if Hirsig had introduced the quote in a book published while Einstein was still alive.

I contacted Hirsig's former wife, Ms. Huguette Hirsig, to ask her if she knew the source used by her ex-husband, particularly as she had used the same quote in one of her books on astrology, *Prévisions astrologiques mondiales* (1993, p. 15). Unfortunately, she could not enlighten me and instead referred me to a former collaborator of her husband who, as it turned out, also did not know the origin of the quote.

Pursuing my research, I came across a vast compilation of all the unpublished manuscripts, notes, letters, etc. of Einstein, *The Collected Papers of Albert Einstein*. Alice Calaprice, the co-editor of this monumental work, read or perused all documents eventually reproduced in the collection, of which nine tomes of four hundred pages each have been released to date. Each book ends with an index—in which the word *astrology* is conspicuously absent. As a by-product of her work, in 1996 Calaprice published a book comprising quotes by Einstein on various topics (religion, science, politics, etc.). The book, *The Quotable*

Einstein, has a section including sentences “attributed to Einstein.” But still, no trace of the astrology quote.

I contacted Calaprice and, with her permission, here are some excerpts of her reply:

I can't believe that Einstein believed in astrology, and I wasn't aware that he is being quoted on it until I received an e-mail from someone about it over a year ago, and now your letter. . . . Many quotations are attributed to Einstein to give them credence, and one shouldn't believe all of them. . . . But if he were a believer in astrology, I think it would have been apparent *somewhere* in his writings or letters, and I've never come across even a mention of the word.

Calaprice referred me to a book by Einstein as a possible source for the alleged quote, *Cosmic Religion and Other Aphorisms*. I read that short book (twice) and of course, there was no trace of the quote. In fact, in *Cosmic Religion* Einstein is quoted as saying, “By furthering logical thought and a logical attitude, science can diminish the amount of superstition in the world” (Einstein 1931, p. 98).

I was able to tell Calaprice that the word *astrology* had most likely been used only on one occasion in print by Einstein, and then it was in order to excuse Kepler for having practiced astrology extensively throughout his life as a means to earn a more decent living. In 1951, Einstein wrote an introduction to Carola Baumgardt's 1951 book, *Johannes Kepler: Life and Letters, with an Introduction by Albert Einstein*. The last sentence of his introduction reads as follows:

The reader should note the remarks on astrology. They show that [for Kepler] the inner enemy, conquered and rendered innocuous, was not yet completely dead.

in the letters. The reader should note the remarks on astrology. They show that the inner enemy, conquered and rendered innocuous, was not yet completely dead.

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Princeton, New Jersey

' 13 '

It was then obvious that the other quote so popular in astrological circles could not possibly have been written by Albert Einstein.

Shortly after its publication in 2000, I purchased *The Expanded Quotable Einstein*. It is with some satisfaction that I realized that Calaprice took into account my communication to her. She created (on page 272) an entry for astrology and reproduced the real opinion of Einstein on the subject, as the “inner enemy.” She also put the false quote that astrologers are so fond of on pages 320–321, in the section “Attributed to Einstein” noting it as “an excellent example of a quotation someone made up and attributed to Einstein in order to lend an idea credibility. Yet several people have asked me to confirm it.”

From June 2001 onwards, I endeavored to contact more than one hundred Web masters I found posting the false quote on their sites either in English, French, or German. Many among them did not even reply to my messages. Others did with classic arguments against “official science” that cannot explain many



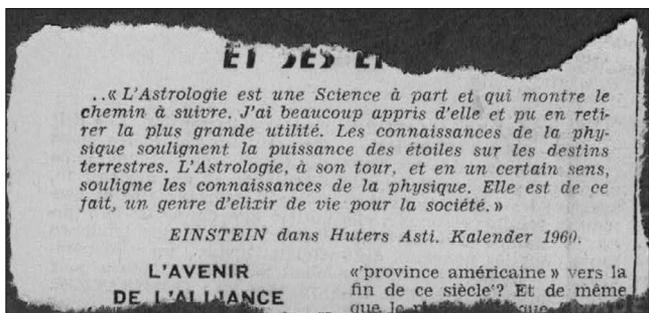
Cartoon designed by Louis Dubé, editor of *Québec Sceptique* magazine from a concept by Denis Hamel.

esoteric phenomena, for example citing the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle. A French astrologer even told me the following: “If this sentence is going around the world with Einstein’s signature, it is the proof that he at least meant it.” However, several people showed some open-mindedness, as with a Canadian astrologer posting on her Web site the following:

It's time astrologers started being a little more intellectually honest and careful where it comes to arguments we offer in support of Astrology. I have removed two quotes from my quotation page because I have reasonable doubts that they are accurate. These two quotes, by Einstein and Newton, are among the most quoted remarks in support of astrology by recognized scientists but no-one can tell us where they come from. They don't seem to be in any of the historical records of these two scientists. I recently received a letter about them that goes into great detail on the subject.³

The Origin of the Hoax

A French astrologer removed the false quote from his Web page after having consulted with André Barbault, one of the most respected French astrologers. The latter recommended he not use it anymore. In July 2002, I contacted Barbault on the subject and provided him with the actual opinion of Einstein on astrology: the “inner enemy” of Kepler. Here are some excerpts of his reply: “Thank you for this convincing documentation on Einstein. I always advised people around me against quoting this sentence as it did not fit Einstein’s character.”



French version of the quote and its source, the *Huters astrologischer Kalender* of 1960 as provided by André Barbault.

Professor EINSTEIN. Von Gegnern der Astrologie wird zu gern unterdrückt, daß gerade diese Kapazität physikalisch bedeutsamer Theorien es war, die den Ausspruch tat: „Die Astrologie ist eine Wissenschaft für sich. Aber eine wegweisende. Ich habe viel aus ihr gelernt und vielen Nutzen aus ihr ziehen können. Die physikalischen Erkenntnisse unterstreichen die Macht der Sterne über irdisches Geschick. Die Astrologie aber unterstreicht in gewissem Sinne wiederum die physikalischen Erkenntnisse. Deshalb ist sie eine Art Lebenselixier für die Gesellschaft!“

Source of the hoax: Quote in German from the 1960 edition of the *Huters astrologischer Kalender*.

Barbault kindly provided me with an old, yellowing clipping containing a French translation of the quote. The source provided in the document is the *Huters astrologischer Kalender* of 1960. By searching on the Web, I found that the *Huters* is a yearly astrological periodical.

Due to this new information, I had to revise my theory on the actual source of the hoax. I obtained a copy of the 1957 to 1960 editions of the *Huters* from a German bookshop. Indeed, the fake quote had appeared on page four of the 1960 edition (released at the end of 1959), but not in previous editions.

This new information proves that Hirsig could not have been the source of the original hoax. In his book of 1962, *Votre destin par l'astrologie* (*Your Destiny through Astrology*), Hirsig did quote the great French writer Honoré de Balzac on the subject of astrology, using a phrase whose beginning is identical to the one attributed to Einstein: “Astrology is a huge science and which did reign over the greatest minds” (Balzac 2000).

It seems he would definitely have included Einstein's quote alongside Balzac's if he had been the author of the false quote, or even aware that the quote existed. As Barbault collaborated with Hirsig in the 1940s,⁴ I contacted him to verify his opinion as to whether Hirsig could have been the author of the quote. He replied with the following: “It looks quite unlikely that Hirsig could have created such a forgery . . . Hirsig was an honest and sober man. It is most likely that we should incriminate a crank astrologer—there are so many among them—Hirsig's responsibility having been to take seriously that person by publishing his/her text.”

I asked a friend whose mother tongue is German to check the language of the *Huters'* quote to find out if it was proper German (and so likely to have been originally written in German) or a bad translation into German from a foreign language. She confirmed that the text was indeed in “good German.” It is interesting to note that there is only one German version of the quote. However, two versions of the French translation exist, and the version mainly disseminated in esoteric literature is the one used by Hirsig.

Relativi-tea

Given the evidence I've shown above, it is obvious that the phrase so popular among astrologers is an invention, and one most

likely put forward by Carl Heinrich Huter. From reading his yearly almanacs, it's quite clear that he did not work with collaborators. As I've noted above, Einstein had a negative opinion on astrology, which he characterized as an “inner enemy” of Kepler.

However, if one absolutely wishes to link Einstein with the world of esotericism and soothsayers, I recommend reading an article that Einstein published in 1926 on the “cause of meander formation” according to Baer's law. It provides a scientific explanation for the fact that rivers from the northern hemisphere tend to dig banks to their right sides, whereas rivers in the southern hemisphere erode their left sides. To illustrate the forces involved in this process, taking into account the turmoil generated in the current with the shape of the rivers, Einstein used the example of a tea cup stirred with a spoon. “The rotation of the liquid causes a centrifugal force to act on it. But in the neighborhood of the walls of the cup the liquid is restrained by friction, so that the angular velocity with which it rotates is less there than in other places nearer the center. In

particular, the angular velocity of rotation, and therefore the centrifugal force, will be smaller near the bottom than higher up.”⁵ This is confirmed by the accumulation in the bottom of the cup . . . of tea leaves!

Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Ms. Marie-Annick Moreau, who kindly revised the English translation of this paper.

Notes

1. “Sur les Rives du Léman, février 1950.”
2. From *Skeptic's Dictionary, Refuge Mass Media Bunk 12* (<http://skepdic.com/refuge/bunk12.html>)

April 18, 2000. I received an e-mail today from Ivan Kelly, renowned expert and critic of astrology, regarding a widespread claim among astrologers that Albert Einstein once wrote: “Astrology is a science in itself and contains an illuminating body of knowledge. It taught me many things and I am greatly indebted to it.”

Ivan contacted Geoffrey Dean, another renowned expert and critic of astrology, who wrote the following:

Dear Ivan, Re that Einstein quote. This is a good example of astrologers quoting each other nth hand, but with nobody ever checking the original quote.

In a letter in *Correlation* June 1991, 11(1):35–36, I chased it back to a book (in French) by the late Swiss-Canadian astrologer Werner Hirsig, *Manuel d'astrologie*, where the quote appears in the preface, but with no source given. From there it was quoted by Solange de Mailly Nesle (1981), from which it was quoted by Tad Mann (1987) and Percy Seymour (1988), and from there ever onwards seemingly without end.

The Hirsig book ends with a postscript dated February 1950, so the quotation must date from before that time (Einstein died in 1955). Hirsig's widow did not inherit his papers, so she was unable to check them to see if they gave the source. Various people including Solange, Percy, and myself have checked Einstein's writings and biographies but have been unable to verify it, so Solange and Percy have deleted it from later editions of their books. His biographies contain nothing to suggest Einstein had any interest in astrology, and its style differs from that of authentic Einstein sayings.

My letter ended “Accordingly, until the quote is authenticated, it should be ignored lest it add to the blight generated by Newton-Halley, Evangeline Adams, and other famous-but-wrong quotes.”

Hope this helps.
Regards, Geoffrey

3. Available at www.astrology.ca/library/jasmine/quotes.html.

4. Foreword of his *Destin de l'homme* of 1943.

5. Einstein, Albert. *Ideas and Opinions*, pp. 249–250. Text published in *Die Naturwissenschaften*, vol. 14, 1926 and read to the Prussian Academy on 7 January 1926.



Cover page of the 1960 edition of the *Huters astrologischer Kalender*.

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