

Comment on Ertel (2007): Hopeful Findings Unduly Neglected

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I am prompted to comment on some issues raised by Suitbert Ertel's 2004 paper reprinted in *Australian Journal of Parapsychology* (Ertel, 2007).

The first of his hopeful findings raises the question of a physical mechanism for parapsychological effects in general, an issue to which Spottiswoode (1997) and May (2001) have attached great importance. While looking at possible geophysical mechanisms we should not forget the equal need for a neurochemical pathway to explain such phenomena.

In the case of SIDS this is particularly relevant because it has recently been definitively established that multiple Serotonin deficiencies in the brain stem are of key importance (Paterson et al., 2006). This particular neurochemical pathway is of further interest because the production of Melatonin, for which Serotonin is a precursor, is influenced by Geomagnetic Activity (GMA; O'Connor & Persinger, 1997). As Persinger (1985, 1993) also points out it is important to recognize that different geophysical conditions may encourage different phenomena. Thus while telepathy seems to be favoured by low GMA, post-mortem hallucination of recently deceased relatives is associated with disturbed GMA conditions.

A wide-ranging review of the biophysical effects of GMA, and Extremely Low Frequency (ELF) waves is provided by Cherry (2002, 2003).¹ He offers detailed examples of how GMA can shift the Serotonin/Melatonin balance. One of the things that strikes me in reading this is how GMA and related phenomena seem to be linked to issues of timing, whether it is heart rate, or the time of birth and death, and of course time is an issue in many psi phenomena.

¹ Available for download from: www.salzburg.gr.at/Cherry_Schumann_Resonances.pdf

Following this train of thought it may be supposed that GMA is a useful variable to investigate in cases of astrological readings, especially those that involve prediction. However this leads to an interesting question, because if astrology works in any context at all (as a map of planetary interactions) it may do so because of the link between GMA and planetary cycles (see below). This in turn implies that psi may be integrally linked with many astrological phenomena.

Although Ertel conjectures that such effects occur in M.G.'s astrological performance, the observations he describes do not distinguish between the use of psi ability and the possibility of erratic astrological interpretation for whatever other reasons. Also in his mention of the ball-selection test it is not clear exactly what the deviations were and if the analyses made were post-hoc.

In Ertel's final comment he says that psi and astrology may be irreconcilable (in the case of the SIDS findings) because there is no way to conceive of a "mind" which might be the creator/receiver of precognitions about the future life span of an infant. This seems to assume a controlling role for psi, in which all other phenomena have to pass through a psi 'gateway'. Why not consider an alternative in which GMA (and/or ELF waves) is the gateway and psi, astrology and Anomalous Cognition (AC) are a variety of phenomena which are affected by GMA? In this case cycles may be the key concept. PK, for example, could be construed as an ability to predict the influence of an ongoing GMA cycle on a psychological/physiological process (or even narrative to generalize further) in which the subject is embedded.

The astrological interpretation of cycles (to be tested) is direct, whereas in the case of AC more investigation is needed even to know what cycles might be important. In this context the often-quoted results of Spottiswoode seem anomalous to say the least. Why should a pattern in Local Sidereal Time (LST) exist in isolation when others in Universal Time (UT) or seasons, for example, have not been investigated? In the perspective of evolutionary biology assumed by Cherry (2002), we would have to view psi and sensitivity to GMA as processes that have evolved over long time spans and confer survival value. In which case those processes closest to the earth, rather than the galactic centre are more likely candidates.

GMA and its correlations with solar and planetary cycles feature prominently in theories of astrological causation (Seymour, 1997, 2002), so I would like to speculate that the system of neuro-modulators should be considered as a sensitively-connected system capable of a variety of responses to GMA. Ertel's astrological study of SIDS suggests a provocative example of this, if we consider some traditional planetary

symbolism, in conjunction with the known behavioural correlates of Serotonin and Dopamine. These two chemicals relate to the two opposing functions of pain-avoidance and reward-seeking, respectively (Cloninger, 1987, 1994), and it is known that they function as an opponent pair even at the molecular level (Daw et al., 2002).

The astrological symbolism offers a similar opposition between the planets Saturn and Jupiter, respectively. This is something, incidentally, which Ertel could investigate further, to see if the Gauquelin plus-zones, which are over-populated by Saturn in Ertel's sample of early deaths, are also underpopulated by Jupiter, in the manner found by Gauquelin in his studies of eminent professionals. It would be interesting to know if the Saturn effect identified by Ertel shows any variation with the birth order of the child, as my earlier work suggests that cadent Saturn may be found more often in first-borns (Douglas, 2001, 2006).

This brief comment on astrological symbolism as a system, suggests perhaps that the variety of AC phenomena could be characterized not just by geophysical, but also by neurochemical variables. It may be recalled that in mediaeval medical astrology the key theory was humoral, and perhaps such a view will eventually re-emerge, this time interpreted as a basic structure of neurochemical pathways (Douglas, 2006). Another ancient presumption, that the sun and the solar systems are similar to living organisms may also not be too far-fetched to consider (Grandpierre, 1997).²

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² Available for download at www.konkoly.hu/staff/Grandpierre/Sun_Sensitive.pdf

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³ Also available on the website of the Centre Universitaire de Recherche en Astrologie (C.U.R.A.) with extended discussion: <http://CURA.free.fr/xv/14doug1.html>

⁴ See the C.U.R.A. website for the complete article: <http://CURA.free.fr/xxx/30doug3.html>

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