

**Prophecy Cosmology and the New Age Movement
The Extent and Nature of Contemporary Belief in Astrology**

Part 3

Chapter 11

Belief in Astrology: A Public Survey

Chapter Description

In chapter 10 it was argued that attempts to quantify belief are highly problematic. Given the concerns over attitudes to belief discussed in chapters 8 and 9, I designed a questionnaire with the following aims.

1. To test the reliability of previous surveys by examining the extent to which different types of questions may elicit different types of answer,
2. To examine the extent to which individuals may give apparently contradictory replies within the same questionnaire and
3. To test whether the results in previous surveys may be replicated.

In order to fulfil these criteria the questionnaire was designed partly on the basis of the surveys conducted by Paulik and Buse (1984), Miller (1992), Bauer and Durant (1997), Blackmore and Seebold (2000-1) and Gallup (1976a, 1976b, 1978, 1979, 1980, 1996, 1997).

After the initial questionnaire was designed and distributed, it became clear that certain additions were required. The questionnaire was therefore adapted following feedback from respondents. The questionnaire along with the details of these amendments are given in Appendix 1. The full results are given in Appendix 2. The headline results are discussed in this chapter and should be seen as indicative rather than definitive. They may be used as the basis for further studies within the field.

Tables

All tables are given at the end of the chapter.

Ethical Considerations: Anonymity of Respondents

Respondents were invited to fill in their name and contact details for possible follow-up only. They were told that they might leave out these details if they did not wish to be contacted. The anonymity of all respondents will be respected and they will be identified in the text only by a letter code and number.

Methodological Issues: Discussion

The quantification of belief is widely understood to be highly problematic, and there are substantial problems with both the collection and interpretation of statistical data concerning religious affiliation, practice and attitude. The problems were defined by Caird and Law (1982: 161), who made seven criticisms of previous research into religious affiliation. Amongst the issues they identified¹ were a failure to define religion, a lack of differentiation between the different levels at which religion may be viewed, a failure to investigate multiple affiliations, a reliance on items of belief which are not representative of the whole domain and inadequate scaling methods. Such criticism were not new. As long ago as 1913 Edmund Husserl criticised deductive, quantitative investigations for reaching grand conclusions based on little evidence, or as he put it, resting either on 'an infinitude of axioms' or 'a very few axioms' (Husserl 1972: 6). More recently Glock (1962: 100; see also Yinger 1970: 32) attributed the contradictory results of studies of religion in the USA to the conceptualisation of religion in universal terms and a failure to recognise its other dimensions. As Yinger pointed out,

We cannot quantify without precise measurement. But what are we going to measure? So long as there are disagreements over the definition of religion we shall design different measuring instruments and apply them to different bodies of data. Almost certainly, as a result, we will arrive at different views of the religious situation (Yinger 1969: 88).

Regarding the measurement of religious affiliation, Glock (1962: 98-99) and Glock and Stark (1965: 20-1) proposed the existence of five universal dimensions in all world

religions: ideological (belief), intellectual (knowledge), ritualistic (behaviour traditionally defined as religious), experiential (inner emotional experiences which may be defined as spiritual) and consequential (the effects of the first four dimensions on the secular world). Although Glock and Stark's efforts represented a recognition that existing measures of religious affiliation were inadequate, and their scale provided a means for differentiating different levels of religiosity or commitment to religion, they were overtly concerned with examples drawn from Christianity (Glock 1962: 100). Yet Clayton and Gladden (1974: 135-143) observed that many people involved in 'non-conventional religions', including those characterised as New Age, in which they included theosophy and spiritualism, 'tend to have multiple group memberships'. Research which has assumed that individuals have one religious affiliation may therefore be unreliable. They suggest that the key element of religiosity is primarily defined by commitment to an ideology, and that Glock and Stark's other dimensions are merely expressions of the strength of that commitment. The crucial task in the study of religiosity is then to pinpoint the belief system, or ideology, with which the believer identifies. The individual's religiosity can then be determined by 'the degree of acceptance or non-acceptance of the traditional - and/or nontraditional - beliefs indigenous to the ideology' (Glock and Stark 1966: 142). The strongest evidence of religiosity, they argue, should be provided by the translation of ideological commitment into religious practice and conclude that more subtle measures of religiosity need to be created, especially acknowledging the religiosity of people who may not identify with the religion that is dominant in their society.

The result of such debates is a widespread scepticism concerning previous attempts to demonstrate such phenomena as secularisation. Grace Davie (1994: 45), for example, a critic of secularisation theory, noted that 'Sociologists are always suspicious of statistics, often with good reason. They are even more suspicious of religious statistics, which are, undoubtedly, among the most difficult sources of social data to handle. For

example, church membership may be both an unreliable guide to belief and a poor measure even of attendance'. Indeed, Davie adds, the 'disjunction between practice and 'belief' characterises much of British religious life since 1945. Shiels and Berg provided support for Davie's claim, reporting that 'Church attendance appears to be a grossly inadequate indicator of religiosity. While many respondents scored medium to high on orthodox beliefs (63%), a full 60% of the respondents attended church only once or not at all during a four-week period. Moreover only 20% attended church four or more times in a month' (Shiels and Berg 1977: 27). As Hill (1979: 14) recognised, there is no certainty that inner commitment will take a social or institutional form. In relation to astrology, then Plug (1975: 174), found that readership of horoscope columns is not necessarily an indication of belief. In addition, belief in one thing does not necessarily suggest belief in another, so that, for example, 'to believe that witches do exist does not make one a 'believer in witches', that is, a disciple or a follower of witchcraft' (Williams, Taylor and Hintze 1987: 358).

As Michael Hornsby-Smith (1991: 3) argued in the introduction to his study of modern English Catholic belief patterns, each item of dogma, from teachings on contraception to papal infallibility, and each activity from church attendance to pilgrimage, may be a different indicator of belief or, to use a more socially functional word, 'commitment'. Thus, astrologers' differing attitudes and commitment may be distinguished by opinions on whether astrology can forecast the future or transform the soul, by attendance at classes or conferences. The latter scale though, may fail to identify those committed astrologers who dislike such gatherings, or those who attend them out of habit.

Belter and Brinkmann (1981: 431), meanwhile, even wondered whether the attempt to quantify belief, as opposed to non-belief, was so epistemologically flawed as to be pointless. They found that the results obtained when testing whether believers in God placed the locus of control in their lives externally or internally, were inconsistent. They

concluded that there was a general 'problem in conceptualizing and measuring belief in God', adding that 'it is apparent that such a belief is more complex than a simple belief-disbelief dimension' and that therefore to contrast belief with disbelief as if the two are mutually exclusive opposite positions would not 'relate adequately to the individual's locus of control orientation'; that is, reveal the true complexity of an individual's world view or meaning system. The result, then, is an understanding that quantitative results have little significance in isolation from phenomenological considerations, particularly the understanding that belief may be a highly flexible phenomenon. According to McCutcheon (1999a: 10),

For scholars who adopt the reflexive option, studying others explicitly involved a high degree of reflexivity, a turning back onto the researcher of his or her own questions and answers. Claims that the researcher is able to make objective or neutral claims about the world at large are therefore highly suspect to the reflexive scholar for he or she would maintain that the world at large is just what it is for you or I precisely because you and I are what, who, and where we are. For instance our choice of question shapes the answer we will receive; a researcher's presuppositions and biases regarding who counts in a society as it tells us about the society under question.

This bias, some would argue, is unavoidable. Thus, as Cantrill (1980: x) argued, the composition and interpretation of questionnaires is always subject to 'personal value judgements at every stage'. As noted by Edwards (1957: 12), the nature of the response to particular questions may depend on the wording of those questions. Stanley Payne (1980: 6, 16) also observed just how often the assumptions behind questions are unacknowledged and the wording ill-defined questions. The present survey is therefore intended to reflect on previous quantitative studies and examine the extent to which they may be considered reliable.

Questionnaires

A total of 252 questionnaires were distributed in 6 batches.

1. 48 questionnaires were distributed to BA students in the Study of Religions Department at Bath Spa University College in November 2002. These replies are summarised as snBathSpa 2. In the text these are given the code SR1.

2. The questionnaire was then adapted and distributed to a further 59 BA students in the Study of Religions Department at Bath Spa University College in November 2002. These replies are summarised as snBathSpa 4. In the text these are given the code SR2.

3. 51 questionnaires were distributed to BA students in the Food Technology Department at Bath Spa University College in November 2002. These replies are summarised as snBathSpa 1. In the text these are given the code FT.

4. The questionnaire was further adapted and around 40 copies were distributed at the Long Ashton Golf Club, near Bristol, in March 2003. 29 replies were received. These replies are summarised as snBathSpa5. In the text these are given the code GC.

5. The questionnaire was further adapted and around 200 copies were distributed at the MAJMA Middle Eastern dance festival in Glastonbury on 4th-6th April 2003. 46 replies were received. These replies are summarised as snBathSpa6. In the text these are given the code MJ.

6. The questionnaire was further adapted and around 100 copies were distributed by Michelle Pender, who had been present at the MAJMA festival, to her Arabic dance classes in Manchester. 19 replies were received. These replies are summarised as snBathSpa7. In the text these are given the code AD.

My samples were small, following the model set by Bennett (1987: 11), who argued, 'folklore study is unlike social sciences such as sociology in that it prefers small-scale studies to large scale surveys. What it loses in universal significance by this approach, it gains in understanding'. I do not wish to generalise about society as a whole, but rather attempt to illuminate questions surrounding the quantification of belief. The consequence of small samples, though, is that small variations in the number of responses can result in substantial variations in percentage results.

Response Rates

I obtained a response rate of 100% amongst the student groups who completed the questionnaires as a class exercise. even though they were informed that it was voluntary. In the other distribution groups responses were much lower as I was dependent on willing supporters, family members and friends to persuade respondents to complete the questionnaires.

Headline figures on Belief in Astrology

The figures given by Gallup polls for belief in astrology, based on direct questions, are generally placed between 20% and 29%. However, both Paulik and Buse (1984) and Bauer and Durant (1997) arrived at much higher figures as a result of inference based on indirect questions. It therefore seems apparent that individuals may deny belief, yet give favourable answers which may, in themselves, be used to suggest belief, to other questions. My own questionnaire combined direct with indirect questions and obtained higher figures. The results varied between 23.6% for Food Technology students and 69.6% for respondents at the MAJMA festival. These figures, together with my own results, are summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

Reasons for Variation in Headline Belief Figures

The lowest figures for belief were obtained from Food Technology students and members of the Long Ashton Golf Club. Given that over 60% of the former were aged under thirty and 100% of the latter were aged over fifty, it may be concluded that age in itself is not a determining factor, that is, that young people are no more likely to state belief in astrology than older people. However, Rose (1996: 389) noted that the average demographic profile of participants in his research who had ever had an astrological reading was between thirty-five and fifty-five. Thus the MAJMA group is within the target age range and has the greatest figure for the purchase of personal horoscopes. Following Dean (1998/9: 26-28, 47- 51) then, who argued that belief in astrology may follow a visit to an astrologer, the MAJMA group's high level of belief may be sustained by positive experiences of such visits.

It is noticeable, though, that the Study of Religions students scored almost twice as much for belief in astrology as the Food Technology students, and MAJMA festival dancers three times as much, the latter statistic confirmed by the figure obtained from the smaller sample of Arabic dancers. The figures therefore indicate a clear contrast between undergraduates taking a vocational course and Golf Club members aged over fifty on the one hand, and women who take up Arabic dance on the other. The former may be considered more conventional, the latter less conventional. This contrast may, then, be confirmation of Wuthnow's marginality hypothesis (discussed in chapter 10), using his 'type 2' definition of the term as adventurousness and a tendency to think independently (Wuthnow 1976: 173). In this sense, attendees at the MAJMA festival may be defined as marginal, whereas the Food Technology students and the members of the Golf Club are not.

Religious Affiliation

However, there may also be a connection between these varying figures for belief and religious affiliation. If it is assumed that those professing both Christianity (and attending a regular church service) and atheism are likely to be hostile to astrology, while those defining themselves as pagan or 'spiritual but non-aligned', are more likely to be sympathetic then the headline result for religious affiliation may indeed support this hypothesis (Table 3). Thus the MAJMA sample produced the lowest figure for Christian affiliation, a low figure for atheism and the highest for paganism and 'spiritual but non-aligned'. Its headline figure for belief was the highest. The Food Technology group produced the highest figure for atheism, a low figure for 'spiritual but non-aligned' and, like the Golf Club group, had no pagans at all. Accordingly it had the lowest figure for belief in astrology. The Study of Religions group, meanwhile, produced almost exactly the same figure as the Food Technology sample for Christian affiliation, but a much lower figure for atheism and higher ones for paganism and 'spiritual', and accordingly produced a higher level for belief. The second lowest figure for belief in astrology was produced by the Golf Club group, which also was 96.5% Christian with no positive responses for pagan or 'spiritual' and the highest level of church attendance.

Readership of Horoscope Columns

Paulik and Buse (1984) and Bauer and Durant (1997) both inferred belief in astrology from readership of horoscope columns while Gallup poll figures on readership of columns are used in the secondary literature to infer belief. The Gallup questions are vague and the figures variable. For example, in Great Britain in 1975 15% claimed to read a horoscope column 'regularly' and 38% 'from time to time', a total of 52% (Gallup 1976a: 2.1417). In the same year in the USA 23% claimed to read columns 'regularly'. Both 'regularly' and 'time to time', though, are periods of time which invite widely differing interpretations; they might be presumed to be anywhere between once a day and once a month, or even longer. Miller (1992) found that between 16 and 22 of

respondents read columns (or 'personal reports') on an unspecified timescale, while for Blackmore and Seebold (2001) the figure of 'regular' readers was 70%.

Paulik and Buse did not publish their raw data but Bauer and Durant attempted to refine the question into four frequencies: often, fairly often, not often and not at all. Table 4 compares these figures with those from my survey. The results are surprisingly similar, given that Bauer and Durant's general definitions of time periods may not coincide with my specific ones. The totals also correspond with Blackmore and Seebold's figures. It should be noted, though, that the numbers reading horoscope columns every day are tiny and that the Food Technology students, low on belief, scored the highest percentage for daily readership.

General Conclusions

Questions 7 to 25 are summarised in Table 5. It is immediately apparent that the Gallup poll figures are, in general, low, and that of my six groups the Golf Club results are the most cautious and the MAJMA group the most sympathetic to astrology. The difference between questions which apparently require an objective judgment about the real state of the world and those which ask for a subjective response are evident in the difference between questions 18 and 20 on the one hand, and 7 and 8 on the other in the MAJMA group: 50% think the stars influence life on earth and 28.3% think astrology can make accurate forecasts, yet 69.6% would like a personal chart and 73.9% value the astrologer's advice. The discrepancy between these figures is apparent in all my six samples. Blackmore and Seebold's survey did not show this pattern; however, the reason being that their question on whether the astrologer's advice is valued asked for a simple yes/no answer, whereas mine allowed for 'always', 'often' and 'sometimes'. Whereas behaviour, such as the purchase of books or computerised horoscope reports, may be subject to yes/no answers, attitudes and opinions are not.

The wording of questions and the options offered as answers are crucial to the final figures. A dramatic example was provided by the amendment of question 14, on the accuracy of sun-sign character descriptions, in the last sample, distributed to Arabic dancers. Previously this question only allowed for a yes/no answer. In response to feedback following the MAJMA festival though, a third option, 'partly', was added, and whereas 47.4% said their sun-sign was accurate, a figure in line with other groups, when the positive answers for 'partly' were added, the resulting figure rose to 79%, the highest in any of my samples.

It must be asked which question should be taken as indicating belief in astrology. For the MAJMA group is it the 73.9% who value the astrologer's advice, the 63% who regard their sun-sign as an accurate description of their character or the 28.3% who consider that astrology can make accurate forecasts about the future? However, it may be possible to discern different levels of involvement in astrology between, for example, those for whom astrology consists solely of sun-sign delineations and columns on the one hand, and the greater involvement indicated by a personal visit to an astrologer on the other. Other indications of greater involvement might be the reading of a teach-yourself book, the taking of a course, knowledge of moon or rising signs, the use of astrology as a spiritual discipline or a willingness to alter behaviour. Figures for all these questions rarely rise above 20%, except amongst the MAJMA sample, together with the 35.4% of the first Study of Religions sample (SR1) who had purchased a teach-yourself book. Amongst the MAJMA sample 19.6% had purchased a computerised horoscope, 26% knew their moon sign and 23.9% their rising sign, and 17.4% had taken an astrology course. The positive answers in the MAJMA group may have been boosted by the fact that respondents were self-selecting, unlike those in the three student groups. Yet the Golf Club group was also self-selecting and produced the least positive answers. It is clear that it is difficult to generalise across the population as a whole and that the nature of the sample is crucial. In addition, generalisation on the

basis of large samples may conceal sharp variations between different groups , such as between the Golf Club and MAJMA groups.

Regarding astrology's identity as a new age discipline, the personality profiles represented by the sun-signs are Alan Leo's most significant contribution to astrology. Sun-sign astrology as a general cultural phenomenon is, as was argued in chapter 7, part of the New Age *senu lato*. The evidence indicates that between 82% and 100% of adults know which sun-sign they were born under, and anywhere between 37% and 79% think that their sun-sign describes their character, depending on the group and how the question is asked. Leaving out the conservative Golf Club group, between 45% and 67% of my samples discover the sun-sign of people they're having relationships with, and between 31% and 64% have brought a book about their sun-sign for the year ahead. If York (2003: 25-6) argues that astrology was the 'lingua franca' of the 1960s counter-culture and New Age movement, then my samples indicate that it has also become an essential part of the language of popular culture and mass psychology.

Methodological Implications of Figures of Stated Levels of Belief

The three groups most sympathetic to astrology (SR2, MJ, AD) each showed a strong tendency to admit to moderate belief in astrology. In two groups (MJ and AD) close to 60% chose this option. In all five groups levels of 'moderate belief' were far greater than levels of 'strong belief', while the gap between the two options was much greater than that between 'moderate disbelief' and 'strong disbelief'. This suggests that, in general, respondents were happier to admit to strong disbelief than strong belief and that, when they did admit to belief, moderate belief was the chosen option.

This observation would seem to support Jahoda (1969: 25-6) and Bennett (1987: 27) in their contention that there is a general reluctance to admit to belief in anything which has been labelled as superstitious. However, there is a further implication with

significance for the general view that belief in astrology presents peculiar problems. For example, as has been discussed in chapter 10, Dean and Mather (1977: 79, 83) commented that 70% of the adult population read horoscopes while only 20% 'believe that there is something in it'. This raises the problem of why 50% of the adult population does something it regards as meaningless. Yet, with higher figures for belief the discrepancy between the headline figures for belief (moderate and strong) and readership of horoscope columns (daily, weekly and monthly) shrinks to a range of 47% for the FT group to just 1% for the AD group. It might perhaps be possible to speculate, then, as did Paulik and Buse (1984) and Bauer and Durant (1997) that frequency of readership of columns translates directly into intensity of belief. Yet, among the groups in my study, there is no indication of which level of belief might correlate with level of belief when the respondents' own statements about their belief are taken into account.

Further, the relationship between positive answers to questions on astrology correlates only weakly with stated levels of belief, supporting Plug's (1975) proposition that readership of horoscope columns may be a poor indicator of belief. Thus, one respondent (MJ/33) gave indications of strong belief: has visited an astrologer for a private consultation, would alter behaviour depending on astrological advice and uses astrology as a spiritual tool, but never reads horoscope columns and declared a level of 'moderate belief'. Another 'moderate believer' (MJ/38), though, had also been to an astrologer for a consultation, reads horoscope columns once a month and sometimes values the advice give, but was uniformly negative in all other answers. A third 'moderate believer' (MJ/37) read horoscope columns once a month, sometimes values the advice and would like to have a personal horoscope but was otherwise uniformly negative. Between the range of these three respondents, it is apparent that the answers to specific questions have only a loose relationship with stated levels of belief. Further, the answers given by one of the few 'strong believers' (MJ/5) are actually slightly less

positive than those given by the moderate believer MJ/38, while another 'moderate disbeliever' (MJ/16) sometimes values the advice given in horoscope columns and finds out the sun-signs of people with whom s/he is having relationships. Thus, the theory that the wide discrepancy between figures for belief in astrology and the readership of horoscope columns may be explained by the claim that many readers don't take astrology seriously is contradicted by the generally high figure for actions such as finding out partners' sun-signs.

A similar lack of clarity was found amongst the other groups. For example, in the Golf Club group GC/23 is a 'strong believer' and has visited an astrologer but would not wish to have a personal chart. GC/13, a 'moderate believer', would alter behaviour on astrological advice, but reads horoscope columns only once a month. Two (GC/25, GC/26) chose 'Not at all' on the line scale of belief in astrology but, of the five levels of belief, the former chose 'moderate disbelief' while the latter chose 'no opinion'. That is, asked to choose between levels of belief on different scales, individuals choose substantially different options. The same patterns are found in the student samples. For example 'moderate believer' FT/27 was a Roman Catholic, answered yes to all the religious questions, read horoscope columns every day and gave very positive answers to most of the other questions,

Methodological Implications of Answers on Religious Affiliation

Three questions were asked with a view to establishing whether evangelical Christianity correlates inversely with belief in, or attitudes to, astrology. These were: 'Jesus Christ is the divine Son of God', 'The Bible is the word of God' and 'God really does answer prayer'. The level of Christian affiliation was very small. However, there are certain indicative trends. Evangelical Christians may indeed be deeply hostile to astrology, but the same tendency is evident amongst atheists (for example, FT/15, FT/16). Both groups may have been influenced by anti-astrology literature, although the picture is by

no means clear. In the Golf Club group it is apparent that a high level of Christian affiliation correlates with a low level of acceptance of astrology. However, when individual responses are considered, this conclusion is questioned. For example, of the five who had visited astrologers, one (GC/1) answered yes to all three religious questions, two (GC/5, GC/7) answered yes to two, one (GC/25) to one and one (GC/23) didn't answer. There is in these examples, no sense in which attitudes to astrology necessarily correlate with religious affiliation. Another who read horoscopes every day answered yes to all three religious questions, adding to the statement that Jesus was the divine son of God, 'that is our teaching as Christians'. The apparent relationship between religious belief and attitude to astrology therefore disappears when individual responses are considered and an alternative explanation for the coincidence of high religious affiliation and low interest in astrology is therefore, as suggested above, conservatism.

In addition, amongst those who may claim Christian affiliation but who are not 'born-again' or evangelical, there does not seem to be any marked hostility to astrology. Instead it seems not to be an issue. In addition, amongst this group the answers to the three questions can be a mixture of yes and no. For example, MJ/38, a non-denominational Christian agreed that the Bible is the word of God but disagreed that Jesus is God's divine son or that God answers prayer.

Also significant is the extent to which non-Christians may give positive answers to the above questions. For example, amongst the MAJMA group two respondents, MJ/24 and MJ/33, both answered yes to all three religious questions while the former's religious affiliation was 'spiritual but non aligned' and the latter's was 'Buddhist'. Another who was 'spiritual but non aligned' (MJ/36) denied that Jesus is the divine son of God or that the Bible is the word of God, but agreed that God answers prayer and so do 'Jesus and Mary because they seem to have more time to spare'.

It is therefore suggested, as Glock and Stark (1966: 93) observed, that the traditional questions to test for religious affiliation may be inappropriate in an increasingly pluralistic context. In order to investigate the problem of apparently inconsistent answers on religious affiliation and attitude to astrology I conducted a number of interviews with students from the Study of Religions group. The respondent SR2/2 gave religious affiliation as Protestant, ticked 'yes' to Jesus as the divine son of God and God answers prayer, but 'no' to the 'Bible is the word of God'. S/he then gave very strong positive answers for astrology, but picked a level of belief in the middle of the line scale, claiming neither belief nor disbelief. In a follow-up interview the respondent gave further details, giving a picture of deep religiosity, though low attachment to the church, an interest in New Age or paranormal phenomena, and a sense that these are valuable, even though they are condemned by fundamentalist Christians:

I was raised in a Church of England home and I went to Church regularly as a child... I am in the Church choir and you know...as I got older I got more interested in religion and especially through studying religion...I am not devout Christian...but.. I agree with the statements that Jesus is the Son of God. I ticked the Protestant box for which denomination I am but I don't think the Bible is solely the word of God. I think it is the product of the time it was written in... I have practised meditation. Not just on my own. I have some books on yoga and I like to practise yoga. I am not, I am not really, you know, solely into it but I do find it interesting. I have done also...meditation. I have done candlegating - that's kind of meditating if you are looking at a candle. I am also very interested in psychics and life after death, mediums, that kind of thing. What happens when we die, that kind of stuff and also, it is very conflicting. Christians would say that mediums is a no-go area. It does say in the Bible that you shouldn't visit mediums but I am quite interested in that and I think I have read things on that by people who are Christians but also are mediums and how that works. So yes, I am in to it, all that kind of stuff.

I do read [horoscope columns] and...they are almost like a bit of a help to how to just go about life and stuff and that is kind of, kind of spiritual, it is almost like guidance from what I read...I don't take it literally but I do take it to heart a bit, what I read...it says oh 'You are going to have.. um.. Your relationship with this person is going to become more involved this week.' So, if I have been spending a lot of time with this particular person, then I think 'Oh well it must mean, must mean this person and um' and then I think that that would affect how I behave with that person that week and do, they do stick in my head. I don't just read them and forget about them.

I think about [Christian opposition to astrology] a lot because obviously it is, it is a big conflict, especially with one of my housemates who if we are speaking about it she will say that I shouldn't read them and that that it is hard to reconcile the

two...But at the same time I can't deny that I am interested in it so that even though I do say that I am Christian, I wouldn't go so far as to say that I wouldn't read them.

Lastly, the respondent stated her belief in astrology as 'middle' (in the middle of the line scale), that is neither belief nor disbelief because even though

I do say that I believe in it, I am still very sceptical of everything and I could never, I could never completely believe in it. There is always a part of me, I don't know for certain that it is true and that is the same with Christianity. That's the thing of always holding back.

When, therefore, the personal feeling behind the answers are investigated, the apparent confusion of the questionnaire results is replaced by a situation of multiple affiliation and the individual reconciliation of competing world views. As Caird and Law (1982: 161-2) observed, 'a substantial proportion of persons involved in non-conventional religion tend to have multiple group memberships. Most researchers simply ask subjects their religion, thus missing this feature'. Nelson *et al.* (1976: 267) pointed out, additionally, that 'non-doctrinal or invisible religion does not form a unitary belief system'. Complexity is therefore to be expected. Moreover, as Roof *et al.* argued (1977: 407), the 'multidimensional' aspects of 'non-doctrinal' religion are shared with 'traditional, church religion'. It should be noted, then, that the confused picture arising from the questionnaire results is not necessarily an artifact resulting from the varying nature of the questions, but might instead indicate a genuinely complex situation which is of concern to the study of all religious belief which, as McCutcheon (1999: 10) argued, only a phenomenological approach can reveal.

Chapter Summary

It is clear that there is a difference between studies which seek to quantify belief on the basis of yes/no questions and those which offer variable answers. The former appear to be flawed by a general public tendency to deny belief in areas which may be considered superstitious. It may be that the type of anti-astrology literature surveyed in chapter 8

may have entered the public consciousness to the extent that it distorts the answers to questions on belief. This problem is most clearly evident in the Gallup polls, producing low figures on belief in astrology and readership of horoscope columns, and it may therefore be argued that research and debate which relies on such data is itself flawed (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 228-30; Gill 1999: 70-1; Gill, Hadaway and Marler 1998: 513; Roof 1993: 72; Hunt 2003: 173; Spencer 2003). Paulik and Buse (1984) and Bauer and Durant (1997), meanwhile, achieve headline figures for belief in astrology which are greater than those of the present study. The question then becomes one of the different ways of establishing belief; either by asking individuals about their behaviour and then assuming that this translates into belief, or asking direct questions about belief. In the latter case it is clear that variable questions result in higher results than do yes/no ones. It has therefore been argued that many of the existing figures on belief in astrology may be wildly inaccurate and that the methodology used to obtain them may be deeply flawed.

Table 1. Belief in Astrology: comparison of headline figures %

Great Britain 1975	14	(Gallup 1976a: 2.1417)
USA 1975	22	(Gallup 1978: 1.572)
USA 1978	29	(Gallup 1979: 184)
Great Britain 1978	20	(Gallup 1980: 329)
USA 1995	23	(Gallup 1996: 10)
USA 1996	25	(Gallup 1997: 205)
Germany 1980s	70 ²	(Paulik and Buse 1984)
Great Britain 1990s	73 ³	(Bauer and Durant 1997)
SnBathSpa1 (FT)	23.6 ⁴	
SnBathSpa4 (SR2)	42.4	
SnBathSpa5 (GC)	31	
SnBathSpa6 (MJ)	69.6	
SnBathSpa7 (AD)	63.2	

Table 2. Belief in Astrology: comparison of strong and moderate, belief and disbelief %

	FT	SR2	GC	MJ	AD
Strong Belief	2	5.1	3.4	10.9	5.3
Mod. Belief	21.6	37.3	27.6	58.7	57.9
No Opinion	25.5	18.6	17.2	4.3	5.3
Mod. Disbelief	27.5	27.1	31	13	15.8
Strong Disbelief	23.5	10.2	17.2	0	10.5

Table 3. Religious Affiliation and Belief in Astrology %

	Food Technology	Study of Religions	Golf Club	MAJMA	Arabic Dancers
Christian ⁵	41.1	40.7	96.5	34.8	36.9
Atheist	23.5	8.5	3.4	8.7	0
Pagan	0	8.5	0	15.2	10.5
Spiritual	15.7	25.4	0	37	5.3
Attend service	15.7	18.6	27.5	15.2	5.3

Table 4. Comparison of readership of horoscope columns with Gallup (1976a, 1978), Miller (1992) and Bauer and Durant (1997) %

	B&D ⁶	FT	SR1	SR2	GC	MJ	AD	Gallup	Miller
Every day	21	13.7	4.2	3.4	3.4	6.5	3.4	n/a	n/a
Once a week	23	29.4	37.5	33.9	24.1	26.1	24.1	n/a	n/a
Once a month	29	27.5	35.4	35.6	34.5	54.3	34.5	n/a	n/a
Never	<u>27</u>	<u>27.5</u>	<u>20.8</u>	<u>22</u>	<u>37.9</u>	<u>13</u>	<u>37.6</u>	<u>n/a</u>	<u>n/a</u>
Total readers	73	70.6	77.1	87.7	62	86.9	62	52 ⁷ /23 ⁸	16-22

Table 5. Headline figures for questions on astrology compared to Gallup (1976a, 1976b, 1978, 1996, 1997) and Blackmore and Seebold 2000-1) %

* Questions 16 and 17 were the same question, 8, in Blackmore and Seebold.

Question	Gallup	B&S	FT	SR1	SR2	GC	MJ	AD
7.Values advice ⁹	-	39	51	62.5	50.9	31	73.9	68.4
8.Would like horoscope	38 ¹⁰	-	-	-	-	-	69.6	68.4
9.Computer reading	-	15	7.8	22.9	11.9	3.4	19.6	5.3
10.Personal chart	-	-	7.8	6.3	3.4	17.2	26.1	5.3
11.Knows sun-sign	57 ¹¹ 76 ¹²	100	98	89.6	88.1	100	82.6	84.2
12.Knows moon-sign	-	22	3.9	14.6	10.2	0	26.1	10.5
13.Knows rising sign	-	-	5.9	20.8	6.8	3.4	23.9	10.5
14.Sun-sign accurate	37 ¹³	85	45.1	60.4	37.3	44.8	63	47.4 79 ¹⁴
15.Consult astrologer	-	13	0	2.1	5.1	3.4	13	5.3
16. Teach-yourself book	-	24*	11.8	35.4	18.6	6.9	37	15.8
17. Astrology course	-	24*	2	0	5.1	0	17.4	0
18. Stars influence	23 ¹⁵ 25 ¹⁶	-	19.6	54.26	35.6	17.2	50	36.8
19. Not Superstition ¹⁷	-	72	37.3	66.7	52.5	31	56.5	57.4
20.Accurate forecasts	15 ¹⁸	-	25.5	37.5	27.1	6.9	28.3	21.1
21.Alter behaviour	-	15	2	4.2	13.6	10.3	17.4	5.3
22.Find out sun-signs	-	89	45.1	62.5	52.5	17.2	67.4	57.9
23.Book: love/year ahead	-	78	31.4	64.6	49.2	17.2	59.4	63.2
24.Spiritual person?	-	-	33.3	77.1	57.6	41.4	69.6	63.2
25.Spiritual tool?	-	-	5.9	16.7	11.9	6.9	30.4	15.8

Notes

1. Lack of explicit definition of religion. 2 No differentiation between the different levels at which religion may be viewed. 3. The dimensionality, that is the multiple affiliations, of religious belief was not investigated properly. 4. Items of belief are not representative of the whole domain. 5. The sampling of subjects is often limited to university undergraduates, a group not representative of the population as a whole. 6. The methods of scaling are inadequate. 7. Problems of validity of the measuring instrument are nearly always ignored (Caird and Law 1982: 161).
2. Total of 'strong believers' and 'believers'.
3. Total of all 'serious' and 'non-serious believers'.
4. This and the following Bath Spa figures are combinations of 'strong belief' and 'moderate belief'.
5. Combining Protestant, Roman Catholic and Non-denominational Christian.
6. Bauer and Durant's options were 'Often', 'Fairly often', and 'Not often'.
7. Great Britain 1975 (Gallup 1976a: 2.1417).
8. USA 1975 (Gallup 1978: 1.572).
9. Combines figures for 'Always', 'Often' and 'Sometimes'.
10. Great Britain 1975 (Gallup 1976a: 2.1417).
11. France 1962 (Gallup 1976b: 1.309).
12. USA 1975 (Gallup 1978: 1.572).
13. 'Do you think that the character traits attributed to individuals according to their signs contain a good deal of truth, a moderate degree of truth or none at all?': Good deal 6; Moderate degree 31 (Gallup 1976a: 2.1417).
14. For this version the option 'partly' was added. The result was 31.6, , boosting the figure to 71.
15. 'Which, if either, of the following do you believe in? In astrology, or that the positions of the stars and planets can affect people's lives?'. USA 1995 (Gallup 1996: 10).
16. 'Do you believe 'in astrology, or that the positions of the stars and planets can affect people's lives?'. USA 1996 (Gallup 1997: 205).
17. The figure given is those who do not think astrology is superstition.
18. 'Do you think it is possible to see the future in the stars?'. Sweden October 1978 (Gallup 1980: 329).