



# After Gauquelin What Next?

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*It is now over 50 years since Michel Gauquelin (with his wife Françoise) published his first challenge to orthodox science (Gauquelin, 1955, 1960) and ten years since Ertel & Irving (1996) published what has been referred to as 'the best and most detached account' of the complex fracas of charge and rebuttal, confirmation and denial, which followed.*

**T**his should have given adequate time for the scientific world, and its critics, to come to terms with the new situation and to offer suggestions as to how to proceed, but while there have been dogmatic head in the sand assertions, woolly metaphysical musings and large quantities of vague speculation, there seems little substantive advance. That is not intended to belittle the immensity or significance of the problem. Put at its simplest, Gauquelin claimed to have found strong and significant correlation between extreme ability of an individual in a particular field of human activity, and the position of specific planets at the moment of his birth. In effect, he was suggesting that there may be a scientific basis for the long-derided 'superstition' of Astrology.

He himself was quite aware of the rabid opposition that would be aroused by this claim, and from the outset pleaded with sceptic organisations to repeat his experiments for themselves, with his active assistance. He suggested that such research should concentrate on one of the simplest cases, in which each country would have its own supply of potential subjects. He had shown that significantly more top-class athletes are born within about two hours after the 'Rising' of the planet Mars (above an ideal horizon at the place of birth) or two hours after 'Culmination' (planet at its highest altitude) than would be expected. This led to the study of the so-called 'Mars Effect for Sportsmen', (although in fact he studied Actors, Doctors, Executives, Journalists, Military, Musicians, Painters, Politicians, Scientists, Sportsmen and Writers). In each case he found significant correlation (either positive or negative) between the probability of extreme ability in that field, and an astronomical situation at the time of birth involving the positions of one, two or three of the 'planets' (Moon, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn)..

Naturally, there were strong objections from materialist and humanist sceptics to taking his claims seriously and in the USA the Humanist Society formed CSICOP (Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal), while France already had the CFEPP (Comité Français pour l'Etude des Phénomènes Paranormaux) and Belgium the 'Comité Para'. Over the next twenty years or more, after much hesitation and argument, each of those three organisations carried out its own replication of Gauquelin's experiments with their own data, and each duplicated his results with remarkable consistency. Then each procrastinated, lied, fudged, and indulged in character assassination and evident bad faith in an effort to avoid

admitting that fact. The public admission was only grudgingly made when one or more of their own members 'blew the whistle' and revealed the deceit, or when their own analysis was checked by an outside authority. CSICOP in the USA in particular firmly established a shameful reputation for highly unscientific and dishonest dealing, so that when in 1983 (six years after the event) it was finally forced to publish an admission that it had falsified results, and that the Mars effect was genuine, Kenneth Irving commented: 'However, in my opinion it misrepresents the real issues by continually questioning the integrity of Gauquelin's data, even though most of the specific grounds for doing so at that point had already been looked into and found wanting. - - - More to the point, while availing themselves of every opportunity to plant doubts in the uninformed reader's mind about Gauquelin's sampling procedures, they mentioned not one of the very specific questions raised by several people - - - about the way in which their own data was gathered.' (Ertel & Irving 1996. p.K1-23)



The same book contains a most detailed analysis of the whole business by Suitbert Ertel, who himself replicated much of Gauquelin's work and carried out more using his own data. The meticulous detail, both mathematical and chronological, of the book leaves little doubt as to the reliability of his conclusions. The 'Mars Effect' is scientifically proven to be 'real'.

The three sceptic organisations, each formed specifically to oppose claims for the paranormal by open and honest scientific discussion and unbiased experiment, acted thoroughly dishonestly, using every dissimulating and delaying tactic (including innuendo and character assassination) to prevent their having to admit that Gauquelin was right. But to any person with a serious concern for the scientific profession, the most horrifying aspect of the episode is that the majority of their members supported them in that aim or considered the whole affair a huge joke. The 'whistle-blowers' in their ranks were individuals who seemed to have earned a measure of opprobrium for their honesty. Only after the duplicity of its leaders was fully revealed did a number of senior members of CSICOPS resign in disgust. One is justified in suspecting that many professional scientists consider scientific orthodoxy and the sanctity of scientific dogmas to be more important than the truth.

### The Experiment

Gauquelin's procedure begins by identifying sufficient persons of 'eminence' (according to an agreed criterion) in the 'Target' profession (Athletics or Sport in the cases under discussion) and information sought about the place, date and time of his birth. Then for each 'target' person a roughly equivalent 'control' is selected, born in the same area at about the same time, but not in the profession under investigation. From the resulting information the planetary situation at the time of birth is calculated for both target and control. There follows a massive exercise in statistical manipulation to discover if there is a particular planetary situation which shows a statistically significant difference (positive or negative) between the number of Targets and Controls born in that period. When it is considered that the day is divided into twelve periods, five 'planets' are considered and he used sample sizes varying between about 300 and 4000, (i.e., 600 to 8,000 people) this is obviously a very time-consuming and expensive process. One cannot but admire the patience and dedication of Michel Gauquelin and his wife (who was, by the way, a professional statistician).

In each of the professions studied the effect is quite appreciable, and shown to be quantitatively reproducible between analyses carried out in four or five different countries by different organisations, using their own data, but similar protocol. Ertel showed that the higher the achievements of an athlete, the greater the probability that he was born at the time of the 'favoured' conditions.

The Mars Effect is therefore the 'believer's' dream and the sceptics nightmare; since it is an undoubtedly paranormal (i.e. scientifically inexplicable) effect, based on completely neutral data accessible in the public domain before the experiment was thought of, the three sources being:

Professional or Sporting Directories or Encyclopaedias;

Local Government records of the Place, Date and Time of birth of the Targets and Controls;

Astronomical Tables enabling the positions of all the planets to be calculated for any arbitrary time and place.

Kenneth Irving comments:

*The Mars effect as an anomaly presents a problem because it appears to violate either laws or fundamental assumptions in several different disciplines, including physical sciences such as physics and astronomy, and social sciences such as psychology - - -*

*I submit, however, that the record of the debate over this finding in both its scientific and sociological aspects makes a negative conclusion on the Mars effect untenable.'*

*(ibid. p.K1-33.).*

This summarises the immensity of the problem to the scientific mind, and forcibly drives home the reasons why it was so violently opposed. It is totally impossible to defend the integrity and reliability of the scientific method and its assumptions, in the face of such a completely inexplicable phenomenon. Having failed (and disgraced itself) in its frantic attempts to disprove it, one would have thought that the scientific world would be seething with attempts to recover its authority by explaining it, and to consider its implications, but this is not so. There seems to have been little or no follow-up work in the last ten years, and the reasons for this are the most intriguing part of the story.

### But What Now?

Gauquelin identified three limitations to the principle:

The Mars effect only applies to the very highest level of achievement. In Athletics, for instance, it is limited to those winning medals at international level.

The Mars effect is strongest for regimes requiring individual skill and effort (such as Track or Field events and Boxing), but is weak or totally absent for team sports at all levels.

The effect only applies if the person was born at his 'natural' time, i.e., if the birth was not induced or by Caesarean section.

He emphasised that the definition of the criterion and the selection of the targets were critical factors, requiring careful thought. The tighter the definition of eligibility for targets and/or the higher the criterion set, the fewer can attain it, so the smaller the sample available.

The experimenter may have to choose between a strong result with a wide deviation or a weaker result, more accurately defined. The requirement for natural childbirth must drastically reduce the expectations of accuracy for data gathered in a modern European or American-style society and Gauquelin suggested that no target should be born after 1950 (advice that CSICOPS ignored). Then reliable experiments can only be carried out in a country that has a well-controlled and publicly accessible system of registration of births, including registration of the Time of birth (which excludes the UK). The target profession or activity must itself be well organised and documented, with recognised and publicly accessible systems of indicating proficiency or high achievement (such as different levels of University Degree, Professional Institution or National Team membership, or medals at international events).

All such factors being considered, it is quite possible that work already carried out has almost exhausted the total amount of reliable data available and no more will be forthcoming! In which case no more similar experiments can be carried out, except possibly to extend the discovery to other professions, or meta-analysis combination of existing results, or recycling of the same data to higher degrees of accuracy. Such work would be pointless, as none will get us any nearer to a theory, much less an explanation.

It is important to recognise that the Mars effect does not legitimise Astrology in general, and certainly not its publicly recognised form, in which the planets control or predict episodes in one's future. If it could be shown that a recognised pre-Gauquelin system of astrological prediction would produce results in agreement with Gauquelin, that would certainly be impressive, and may lead to serious research under controlled conditions, but that seems unlikely.

For this is the other side of the problem. Neither the hardened sceptic nor the starry-eyed astrologer can offer anything approaching a feasible theory as to how Mars rising at the time a baby emerges from the womb can possibly help it to be a world-class marathon runner twenty years later. One can postulate Morphic Resonances, Planetary Influences or Reichenbach's odic force *ad nauseam*, but there is nothing in our vaunted twenty-first century knowledge that gives us the slightest hint as to how the Mars Effect works.

Does this mean that the situation should be ignored, just 'swept under the carpet'? *Quite Definitely NO!!*

The so-called 'white crow' syndrome is well known. If I propose that all crows are black I can never prove that true, since I cannot examine all crows. But if anyone should produce a single white bird, agreed by experts to be a crow, my theory is destroyed. More than three hundred years ago the scientists of the day proposed (largely on the

basis of wishful thinking and as a gesture of defiance to religious authorities) that the whole of existence is purely physical, and this became a mantra, then a rigid dogma. In its defence a dozen suspected white crows have been quietly tarred. Now we have a case in which, after more than twenty years of public, bitter and dishonest wrangling, established authorities claiming to represent the extreme sceptical scientists of the Western world have been forced to admit, through gritted teeth, that here is a phenomenon that cannot be explained within the limits of present-day science, and almost certainly cannot be explained in materialist, reductionist, determinist terms. The fact that it cannot be explained on astrological, metaphysical or spiritual grounds either is irrelevant. The certified white crow has come home to roost. If they are as dedicated as they claim to be to science as the pursuit of truth, the sceptics (and particularly the behavioural psychologists and aficionados of Strong AI) will need to review their beliefs, and be prepared to accept the need for change – and the public admission of that need.

I have a vision of Heaven, or Valhalla, or Mount Olympus, or Mount Meru or wherever the powers that be who shape our world gather for their social occasions. I confidently suggest that at this moment they are clinging to chair-backs and each other, hiccuping and mopping streaming eyes at the sight of the greatest cosmic joke ever, in which we poor humans, after several hundred years of ferocious and bitter argument, have been presented with a sure-fire, bomb-proof paranormal phenomenon on a plate – and nobody knows what use it is or what to do about it!

## References

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