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The Gauquelin Effect Explained? Comments on Arno Miiller's Hypothesis of Planetary Correlations

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Abstract—Arno Muller's "hypothesis of the planetary élite" (Müller, 1990) amended Gauquelin's "midwife hypothesis", which suffered from weaknesses. The approach is a welcome contribution to the persistent problem of how to explain planetary correlations with human births (the Gauquelin effect). However, it is inconsistent with empirical observations:

(1) Gauquelin effects are unrelated to character traits. Miiller's hypothesis explains a correlation that does not exist.
(2) Sometimes planetary effects decrease with eminence. This is inconsistent with Muller's idea that more eminent as compared to less eminent people should have cultural and biological advantages.
(3) Birth frequencies can be infrequent instead of abundant when the planet is rising or culminating. This is inconsistent with Muller's assumption that in prehistorical times the births of children were desired, not avoided, when the divine planet was so placed.
(4) The doctrine of planetary heredity—the basic precondition of Muller's hypothesis—is probably invalid.
(5) The Gauquelin effect is weakest for Venus. Muller's claim of an impact of planetary appearances on the evolution of the Gauquelin effect would predict the opposite.
(6) Muller's model covers only the evolution of conditioning between planetary sensitivity and character traits. It does not explain the evolution of planetary sensitivity prior to such conditioning.

Gauquelin's original midwife hypothesis as well as Muller's new version of it could be refuted straightforwardly if further tests showed that the Gauquelin effect occurred undiminished in eminent births induced by obstetric drugs.

Introduction

Michel Gauquelin's discovery of statistical correlations between planetary positions and human birth frequencies has been properly called an "erratic block rolled on the road of science" (Müller, 1990, p. 103). The first attempt to make sense out of the discovery was made by Gauquelin himself. But his "midwife-hypothesis", in which the planets are seen as environmental forces triggering parturition, created great puzzles. Recently Müller set out to solve them (Miiller, 1990).

My research on the Gauquelin effect generated appreciable evidence in favor of its existence (Ertel, 1987a; 1992). So the problem of its explanation has been

my concern also. I therefore welcome Müller's creative venture. However, recent empirical evidence suggests that his approach is untenable. In what follows, after sketching the problem, I shall give an account of this conclusion.

Gauquelin's Midwife Hypothesis

Gauquelin's midwife hypothesis may be summarized as follows: The hereditary components of individual differences in human beings are dependent upon parental genes that join at the moment of conception. Individual differences are generally described in terms of psychological or behavioral dispositions. But there may also be certain physiological predispositions such as neuronal and hormonal reactions (Eysenck, 1967). It is thus conceivable that the fetus would react, according to its psycho-physiological "character", to external physical stimuli. Gauquelin points out that certain stimuli such as geomagnetic fluctuations show connections with extraterrestrial events such as the solar wind. If the solar wind were involved, the planets might enter the causal network via their influence on the interplanetary field. For example, as Mars rises above the earth's horizon, some geophysical change might occur to which the fetus might be sensitive. If it was mature enough for delivery it might then react by producing hormones which begin the mother's labor (hence the metaphor of a midwife).

Problems in Gauquelin's Midwife Hypothesis

Three independent problems are inherent in Gauquelin's approach:

(1) Problem of biological advantage. The human body represents a system of adaptive physiological mechanisms. Our sweating mechanism has evolved to match the temperature of the atmosphere. But the triggering of birth by planets seems to lack any adaptive advantage. No evolutionary process is conceivable that might give rise to planetary factors becoming involved in a child's delivery.

(2) Problem of planetary temperaments. Gauquelin maintains that individuals who are sensitive to a certain planet at birth will exhibit, in their later lives, temperamental traits that are symbolically related to the planet's color, brightness, speed and form of motion. But it is hard to imagine how symbolical representations of a planet, based on mature perceptual processes, could be brought to bear at the fetal stage. For example, for the reddish color of Mars to become symbolically related to fiery and bellicose character, it must be perceived and transformed by cognitive processes of information which the fetus cannot yet possess.

(3) Problem of physical forces. There is no empirical evidence suggesting that planets can exert an influence, directly or indirectly, on the biosphere. Nevertheless such forces are conceivable. But forces whose effects are restricted to regions on the globe for which the planet is momentarily rising are not conceivable unless they are analogous to those generated by

the rising sun, such as the flowering of plants. Entirely inconceivable, however, are forces whose effects are restricted to regions for which the planet is momentarily crossing the culmination point. Indeed, the mechanism would have to channel the effects on both rising and culminating regions at the same time while ignoring all other regions. We don't know of any organism reacting only at sunrise and at noon, no known forces of heavenly bodies meet such temporal requirements.

Miiller's Hypothesis of the Planetary Elite

Miiller's hypothesis of the planetary élite attempts to solve the first two of the above problems inherent in Gauquelin's midwife model, but not the third problem (more on that below). It differs from Gauquelin's approach in that it covers not only the mechanism of planetary effects in action, but also the conditions giving rise to the mechanism in the first place. First, Miiller's mechanism in action deserves some comments:

Gauquelin's original mechanism has not much changed. Muller postulates, as did Gauquelin, some unknown planetary forces triggering the birth of fetuses which are sensitive to such forces. His only amendment here consists of a change regarding timing: According to Gauquelin, planetary effects determine the onset of maternal labor, which raises the problem of how they can become synchronized with the actual birth some variable number of hours later. Müller solves the problem by postulating that the planetary effects determine the synchrony with birth, in the same way that visiting a restaurant synchronizes eating with the arrival of a meal. Deliveries being released by an internal program, therefore, would not need additional planetary stimulation when the final hour of delivery has come.

Here a first devil has been cast out with Beelzebub. Gauquelin had to maintain, without plausible explanation, that not only did planetary forces induce labor, they were also effective at the very moment of delivery. Miiller tries to evade this dilemma. He correctly posits that if the planets trigger maternal labor in rise (R) or culmination (C) positions, as Gauquelin assumed, the effect would actually not consist of boosting frequencies of births at R and C since the child's delivery occurs hours later, and labor's duration varies greatly among conditions of birth. Müller's twist, however, presupposes, at the induction of maternal labor, planetary adaption to its prospective duration with delivering of the child to occur synchronously with planetary position. For that extreme speculation, I regard Miiller's mechanism no less deficient than Gauquelin's.

Muller[7]s main concern, however, is to explain how planetary midwife assistance came to arise. First, it is assumed that the Gauquelin effect is the result of some prehistorical process of conditioning which, in line with neo-Darwinian processes of evolution, became part of the human genetic endowment. Second, the conditioning process occurred in a cultural-religious context and brought about biological advantages for an élite, whose genes had thus a greater chance to be transmitted. Third, the Gauquelin effect has now lost its biological signifi-

cance because the necessary cultural conditions long since have disappeared (perhaps 2000 years ago).

The evolution of the Gauquelin effect, as suggested by Miiller, may be summarized in a simplified narrative: A prehistoric tribe of primitive hunters is awestruck by the stars and declares Mars to be the tribal god. The god has traits like courage and heroism that are symbolic transformations of the planet's appearance. The god Mars is worshipped, above all, when in the rising and culminating position since the people feel intimately connected to their god at these moments. A child born at such a moment obtains divine attributes. The tribe therefore expects from the Mars-born child a courageous and combative mind, and will provide favorable educational conditions so the prophecy becomes self-fulfilling. Mars-born children will obtain privileges in their later lives, and will be given leading roles. They will have more wives and offspring than ordinary people. In the tribe, mothers and their families will try to have their children born when Mars is rising or culminating. They will watch Mars at night and, when a child is about to be born, will unconsciously try to control physiological processes by becoming sensitive to Mars-related forces and pertinent subtle cues that may initiate labor at the right moment. The genes of successful mothers, i.e. those more sensitive to Mars-related cues and consequently with more Mars-born children, will have a greater chance of spreading in the tribe. Therefore, over the centuries, a genetic contingency will be built up between Mars cues and traits, the latter being associated with an elite. According to cybernetic genetics the possibility of such adaptive mutation (as distinct from chance mutation) and a corresponding greater speed of genetic change, is a reasonable one.

The god Mars and its impact on tribal birth processes is only one instance. Among the visible planets, all were apt to play divine roles in prehistoric cultures, Jupiter and Saturn being paramount. The visible planets thus became associated with character traits reflecting their varying visual appearances. When the neolithic revolution and the settling down of societies brought about role and status divisions (e.g. rulers, soldiers, and administrators), there were already divine planets with the corresponding attributes (e.g. respectively Jupiter-social dominance, Mars-energy, belligerence, Saturn- preservation, caution). Thus the evolutionary process was continued on parallel pathways simultaneously.

Muller's hypothesis provides ingenious solutions to previous puzzles: Puzzle no. 1 (what is the advantage of planets being involved in human birth processes?) is solved as well as puzzle no. 2 (why are planetary temperaments symbolically related to planetary appearances?). Today, the Gauquelin effect has become meaningless indeed, but thousands of years ago it made sense culturally and biologically. Planetary forces are related to an elite not directly, but indirectly, through early conditioning, in which planetary appearances played their role in a process which eventually became genetically fixed.

Muller's hypothesis also solves a third puzzle in Gauquelin's body of results: Planetary effects have been observed only with eminent professionals, not with ordinary people, not even with exceptional characters like psychopaths, alcoholics, schizophrenics, and murderers. But according to Müller, planetary condi-

tioning and its evolution favored the formation of character traits together with cultural proficiency. Consequently, the observed lack of a Gauquelin effect with ordinary people (i.e not exceptional) and with psychopaths (i.e. exceptional but culturally barren or harmful) becomes intelligible. What matters is not just the character traits but also the degree to which their owner exceed others in valuable cultural contributions.

Defects in Miiller's Hypothesis

Nevertheless, in my view, Muller's hypothesis is untenable. The problem is not too much speculation—in the puzzling Gauquelin arena speculation should be greatly tolerated—but the ample empirical evidence at hand which does not support Muller's approach. In fact it contradicts it, as follows:

(1) Gauquelin effects are unrelated to character traits.

Muller's model explains how the Gauquelin effect and character traits connected with the triggering planet via perceptual appearance might become correlated ("how subjective projection [of temperamental traits] can be made compatible with objective effect [of the planets], I shall try to demonstrate with the following explanatory model", p.92). Yet critical tests of the correlation were negative (Ertel,1987b ,1990; Muller, 1992; Muller had not yet obtained negative results when he proposed the present model). Gauquelin's former positive trait results were shown to be due to some subtle trait extraction bias operating at finding character traits in respective biographies (Ertel, 1990). Thus the main problem Muller sets out to solve does not actually exist. Since temperament is irrelevant, the only remaining arguments for the model are Muller's assumptions regarding cultural eminence. These may still be valid even though Miiller might not want to detach eminence from temperament.

(2) The eminence correlation is not always positive.

According to Miiller, the Gauquelin effect increases with eminence. But this is not always true. Sometimes it may show no variation with eminence, or it may show a decrease as with Saturn at the births of scientists (Ertel, 1989a). This contradicts Muller's evolutionary mechanism, where biological advantage for the eminent (i.e. the fittest) is a prerequisite for genetical selection.

(3) The Gauquelin effect is not always positive.

Muller's model also presupposes that the Gauquelin effect is always positive. Mothers in prehistorical times and their families desired to have their children born when the divine planet was rising or culminating, so they would not want to avoid giving birth at such moments. Yet avoidance does occur, for example with writers (Saturn) and painters (Mars). Muller concedes that in his model artists are not represented. But he neglects to note that, due to negative Gauquelin effects in these professional groups, they do not fit in.

(4) The heredity assumption is probably invalid.

Another prerequisite for Müller's midwife theory and its precursor is hereditary transmission of the acquired dispositions including planetary position at birth. Muller says "The summary of the three (Gauquelin) studies confirms the [heredity] hypothesis, but further studies are desirable" (p. 86). However, Gauquelin's third heredity study whose control was perfect (very large sample, unbiased data selection, and data analysis by computer instead of by hand) showed no effect, while a computer reanalysis of data obtained in the second study diminished the effect to almost nothing (Gauquelin, 1984). Furthermore an analysis of my own had negative results (Ertel, 1989b). Gauquelin was concerned that his heredity assumption might be wrong. But Muller seems not to realize that the heredity assumption, which in his model has "supreme importance" (p.102), is indeed most fragile.

(5) Venus effects are too weak.

Another empirical finding challenging Muller's model is that among planetary correlations those with Venus are the weakest. But they should be the strongest since Venus is the brightest of the visible planets which quality should enhance its conditioning. Thus, in mythology and painting Venus prevails among the planets, apparently due to its visual qualities. Muller did explain .the total absence of a Gauquelin effect for the Sun as well as for Mercury, but for Venus where the Gauquelin effect is almost absent such an explanation is not applicable.

(6) The evolution of a primary planetary sensitivity is merely presupposed.

Muller's evolutionary model explains the conditioning between planetary sensitivity and temperamental traits and its genetic transmission. However, it does not explain the rise of planetary sensitivity prior to such conditioning, i.e. the ability to respond to the "unconditioned planetary stimulus" (planetary force) that logically must precede its conditioning with any other stimulus. In effect Muller's model replaces one mystery with another. Did the evolution of planetary sensitivities prior to their conditioning with planetary appearances have any biological advantage? Miiller's model merely sidesteps the problem, it does not remove it. Suppose someone would claim the existence of some human sensitivity for radio waves and a capacity to discriminate between radio frequencies. The claim would be rejected as unfounded even though the physical forces are well known. Likewise Muller's claim of a priori human discrimination among physical forces whose existence are merely conjectured could hardly have any greater chance of acceptance.

Empirical Tests

The above problems with Miiller's approach leads me to predict that his model will not survive. Nevertheless it helps to sharpen the issues connected

with explaining Gauquelin's grand discovery. At any rate, I welcome Müller's suggestion to carry out further tests, for example of planetary heredity with eminent people, and of planetary effects, say the Mars correlation for athletes, in non-Western cultures. In as much as the cultural heritage is different, the Gauquelin effects found with Western people should not be replicable with non-Western eminent people.

Müller's idea of testing planetary effects with animals, however, does not appear very useful. It is hardly reasonable to expect planetary correlations with animals when they do not show up with ordinary people. The result would most probably be negative, in which case support for Muller's model would be minimal.

Alternatively, I suggest an easy test of simultaneously both the original midwife hypothesis as well as Müller's revised version of it. It requires two sufficiently large samples of birth data of, say, eminent athletes. The first sample should have been born before medical induction of labor became a general practice (before ca. 1940). The second sample, equal in eminence to the first, should have been born when the induction of labor by obstetric drugs was being practiced as a medical routine (after ca. 1960). According to Gauquelin, births of eminent athletes are physically triggered by Mars position only if the birth process is free from medical intervention. Thus both Gauquelin and Miiller would predict a Mars effect in the first sample and a significantly smaller effect in the second sample. If the results display the predicted difference then the midwife model will have gained support. But if the Mars effect in the second sample is undiminished then the midwife model and similar physical explanations will be disconfirmed. This result need not be disappointing, because it would probably encourage the use of entirely new modes of reasoning in our search for an explanation of planetary correlations. First tentative suggestions have already been made (Ertel, 1990). A study as proposed here might thus help to transform Gauquelin's "erratic block on the road of science" into a crossroad opening new directions.

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