

Uranus-Pluto: The Rebellion Against Institutions

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October is a more-than-normally interesting month this year, astrologically speaking. Two eclipses occur this month — a total lunar eclipse on October 8th, followed by a partial solar eclipse on October 21st. These events that symbolize a fateful intensity occur during the retrogradation phase of a Mercury retro loop, and all three of those events presage the upcoming sixth exact pass of Uranus square Pluto in December.

In fairness, none of those events is particularly rare, and I don't ascribe any extraordinary or amazing significance to their concurrent alignment. I'm not suggesting that their coincidence is not meaningful — no, I'm inclined to consider it quite meaningful — but the symbolic meanings aren't based on how often each occurs, but rather on the content implied by their approximate synchronicity.

A fact of our times is that the people who run civilization — by whom I mean those individuals in high institutional positions of power and authority who plan or strategize decisions that affect us all (either potentially or actually, and either immediately or in the longer term) have a vested interest in keeping the current game going by the perpetuation of the status quo. Business as usual. These people are paid, and usually quite handsomely, to keep things as they have been, so as to prevent social chaos, obviously, but even more to squeeze maximum benefit out of circumstances, either as existing situations or newly arising possibilities. More often than not, "maximum benefit" translates as money. Money for whom? For themselves and their institutions first, and then maybe, just maybe, for others.

Beyond their individuality, these leaders comprise a club or a social class. They speak a common language, share many attitudes and beliefs, and agree with each other more than they disagree. For instance, in the higher echelons of institutionalized politics, Democrats and Republicans are more alike than different. Oh yes, progressive or liberal Democrats disagree vehemently with Tea Partiers and Republicans about many things, but, behind the obvious conflicts over philosophies, programs, and policies, their overriding concerns are, in fact,

similar, and much closer than appearances suggest, especially once they are elected to represent us.

I offer this bland insight in the same spirit as the suggestion that police and criminals are closer than we might presume, in that each necessarily learns to think like the other. These days, of course, that is intensified by the fact that the line separating them is not merely blurred, but sometimes erased entirely, since criminality has become commonplace in high places. Some social authorities feel that laws apply only to the other 99%. Loyalty among thieves may be rare, but extreme loyalty is commonplace within law enforcement. As members of a close-knit fraternity, police routinely close ranks to protect their own, even in cases where that protection may be unwarranted or actively harmful to public trust of the institution.

A central tenet of my assumptions about life in society — especially a mass society — is that institutions start out by serving their constituencies, but evolve more and more as time passes toward serving themselves. A corollary is that as institutions grow larger and more successful, this shift increases and accelerates from relative selflessness to subtle and then outright narcissism. In the final stages of this progressive illness, an institution succumbs to sociopathic behavior, helping no one, and harming everyone it touches. Left to their own devices, this devolution in institutions is natural, inevitable, and unavoidable. It cannot be prevented. It can however, be halted or reversed, but some force from outside — political, economic, social, or even (in extraordinary cases) spiritual — must act on the institution to provoke reform or renewal.

For instance, a land-grant college is expressly chartered to serve the needs of its public constituency by helping to provide a more educated populace, which yields benefits at every level of society. Over the life-span of that institution, however, it will morph and shift in its focus, gradually moving away from its original mission of serving the public (to which it still adheres in theory and lip service) and moving toward greater concern with its own well-being and survival.

At the beginning of an institution's life, that ratio (between serving the public and serving itself) might be 90/10. Gradually, however, the ratio shifts in the other direction, becoming 80/20 or 70/30. Eventually, the ratio might even be reversed, with only 10% of the institution's resources, time, and energies going to serve the public, while 90% is devoted in one way or another to feathering its own nest. No one in the institution admits this, and its public posture will consistently deny that such a dramatic change has occurred, but that is the reality of life in advanced societies.

This is true of any institution — education, commerce, medicine, law enforcement, military, law, government, entertainment, travel, etc. The curve is from service to others to survival for itself. We live in a period where many of our largest and most cherished institutions are already far down that road, so

that vested interests — always an important factor in social considerations — are now a dominant theme in the operation of any relatively stable mass society.

National politics is a perfect example. Our elected representatives in Congress now spend a disproportionate amount of their time in office not governing, but fund-raising for the next election. And with that come many other associated ills, such as influence peddling and allegiances that are for sale to the highest bidder (i.e., campaign contributor).

This is not to suggest those who work in institutions don't care about the greater good. Not at all. Millions of people who work in institutions continue to try their very best to serve the public. For those devoted and responsible workers, the change in the institutions for which they labor occurs invisibly around them, woven into the underlying structure of how the bureaucracy operates, which either subtly or obviously impedes their efforts to serve effectively. Often, those dutiful workers — at any level, from the Board Room to the Mail Room — attribute their difficulties to the inherent human problems of power hierarchies expressed through ego conflicts or personality clashes. And yes, such issues are ever-present in all social hierarchies. But the older an institution gets, the more those personal issues of maturity, style, or interpersonal conflict tend to mask the deeper cause of institutional dysfunction. The shift toward self-serving by the institution becomes the invisible elephant in the room. Rather than being recognized as a progressive illness, however, this is often seen as simply the inevitable cost of doing business.

A famous quotation from the writings of Thomas Jefferson illustrates the sentiments of many a clear-eyed observer of society: ***"I hold it that a little rebellion now and then is a good thing, and as necessary in the political world as storms in the physical."***

Jefferson wasn't suggesting the wholesale overthrow of governments or violent descent into social chaos. He was pointing out that, without *some* rebellion every so often, politics will inevitably become sclerotic and cease to perform its intended function of serving the wants and needs of the entire society. The same is true of every major institution in culture. Rebels and malcontents are as necessary as traditionalists and more conventional, upstanding citizens in preserving the health and sanity of a society. We need both business people and artists, engineers and poets, plumbers and musicians. We need both kinds of people: those who celebrate what is good and worth keeping in our society by participating in the ordinary business of the hive, and others who point out to us where we have collectively gone wrong. The wind is not always at our backs, and the ship of culture needs to tack to keep it moving forward when the winds are against us. Sporadic and focused rebellions provide this tacking.

The symbolic meaning of Uranus in Aries first-quarter square to Pluto in Capricorn — the ongoing and preeminent astrological event of this decade — is

to make that necessity a reality. The alignment indicates a breakdown in our largest institutions (Capricorn) that starts from within the institutions themselves as an egregious overplaying of their power in ways that are clearly self-serving rather than for the greater good (Pluto), which is then furthered by an unexpected rebellion (Uranus) against institutional malfeasance, a seemingly spontaneous insurrection that occurs from the ground level up, fomented by individuals (Aries) who stand up in protest against the oppressive influence of such institutions. Actually, these insurrections aren't spontaneous; they've been brewing invisibly under the surface, slowly heating up as discontent with the status quo grows. Such rebellions manifest as potent and disruptive forces in the collective, however, only *after* critical mass is reached at the boiling point, so that they *appear* to arise full-blown and without precedent, as if out of nowhere.

Consider — as just one example among many — the most recent scandal in the National Football League (NFL) over the increasingly sensitive social issue of domestic violence and abuse. [Note: I wrote about professional sports in Commentary #12, back in April of this year, when a scandal over racism rocked the NBA. While I don't intend to devote this essay to sports, it does seem to be a lightning rod for the Uranian-Plutonian shocks that are now underway and increasing in America and around the world.]

Football has become a dominant force in American culture. The NFL in particular is now a huge business enterprise, larger than most of our biggest corporations, raking in revenues amounting to tens of billions of dollars per year and the focus of a sizable percentage of our social media on television, radio, and the internet. Starting out in the early 20th century as a rag-tag assemblage of club teams, by century's end, professional football had eclipsed baseball as the "national pastime," as well as emerging as an 800-lb-gorilla-type economic juggernaut.

As it grew, the NFL evolved from almost "outlaw" social status into one of the most conservative bastions of American culture, enshrining patriotism (love of the military) and testosterone-laced male domination. Its business savvy in marketing itself to a willing public, its eager adoption of cutting-edge, sophisticated technologies, and its increasing share of media air time were accompanied by an ever-deepening stodginess, authoritarian conservatism, and a knee-jerk adherence to the reactionary status quo in social attitudes.

Since Uranus and Pluto began their dance in 2012, however, cracks have appeared in the NFL's superstructure. The game's inherent violence and grievous injuries to players, most specifically through head concussions and brain damage, have grown from merely anecdotal concerns to provoking a serious culture-wide movement with considerable social traction, so much so that the NFL's Rules Committee has been forced to begin modifying the game itself to scale back the violence.

The scandal that erupted recently over the NFL's handling of a physical assault by one of its players — Ray Rice — during an argument with his girlfriend (an episode that was videotaped by an elevator camera) has rocked the privileged corridors of professional football. While the NFL itself is in no danger of folding its tent, and I would be foolish to imply that people will stop watching football, a rebellion is now fully underway. From this point on, notice has been served that the institution itself must change. The NFL, of course, is scrambling to do damage control to maintain its image and continue to expand its success, but the pressure for reform is not likely to go away. Time will tell what, if anything, comes of this social movement in terms of substantive change within the institution of the NFL.

Keep in mind that this is but one example among a multitude of depredations now coming to light concerning major institutions and their impacts on society. It pales, for instance, when compared to the unscrupulous behavior going on routinely, every day, day-in and day-out, in the financial sector (Wall Street and the Federal Reserve) — which runs the gamut from technically legal through arguably unethical to overtly criminal — by those who want to stave off reform of the monetary system, keep the illusion of a recovering economy intact, and remain Masters of the Universe. Since the financial crisis of 2008, large banks have done little to nothing to reform themselves and their greed-driven schemes. Numerous scandals have come to light — with no significant repercussions yet to the perpetrators — involving banks deceiving the public and even stealing from their own customers. Presidential cabinet members and federal regulators tend to come from the industry itself, which effectively allows the wolves to guard the hen house. But such is life in a society where mega-institutions collude to get their own way and keep nefarious activities out of public view.

Similarly, the NFL is nothing compared to the evolving tumult in higher education, where student loans now comprise the largest percentage of consumer debt, and where online colleges (i.e., for-profit “diploma mills”) are springing up like mushrooms to take advantage of the government-approved racket. Or the sobering challenges now compounding in the health care system and insurance industry, which are wedded behemoths that affect us all. No, I cite the NFL only because professional sports is such an easy target, a prime example of a “good old boys club” that’s beginning to come apart at the seams.

Like leaves in autumn that burst into magnificent color just before they die and fall from the trees, so our largest institutions are more powerful than ever, throwing around their prodigious weight and influence like primordial giants in seven-league boots, which is actually the prelude to their downfall.

Given that Uranus and Pluto are still in alignment, and that the major social revolutions and upheavals implied in the symbolism don't even approach critical mass until at least a year **AFTER** those two outer planets complete their

perpendicular alignment in March, 2015, the news these days — from ISIS to ebola — is significant.

I have written before about the “delay” factor in collective astrology. The symbolic meanings of major alignments *sometimes* show up in real life *during* the alignment, such as happened in the French Revolution, whose bloody and chaotic Reign of Terror during 1793-1794 coincided perfectly with the timing of a concurrent Uranus-Pluto opposition. More frequently, however, the fullest expression of a given alignment in the collective occurs in the years *following* the mathematical end of the pattern.

For example, the current Uranus-Pluto cycle began with both outer planets conjoined opposite Saturn in 1965-1966, but while one could see the archetypal symbolism of radical challenges to authority and the status quo taking shape in the middle of that decade — through civil rights, music, fast food joints, and psychoactive drugs, to cite just a few of the many unexpected developments — the fullest expression of provocative change and upheaval wasn’t seen until 1968-1969 with the Moon landing, Woodstock, and political turmoil surrounding protests over the Vietnam war, plus the assassinations of Martin Luther King and Robert Kennedy. Yes, we saw the seeds of such changes early in that decade with the Cuban missile crisis, JFK assassination, counterculture movements, etc., but the essence of what most of us think of as “the Sixties” didn’t culminate until the end of the decade. In 1966, despite many changes, the fabric of 1950s American culture still seemed largely intact. Few people foresaw the shocking developments that were right around the corner. By 1969, however, a mere three years later, America was a very different society, beset by deep divisions that were welcomed by some and derided by others, with the images of 1950s conformity relegated to memory.

A similar pattern is likely to be true of the 2010s. While the real-life correspondences to this decade’s Uranus-Pluto symbolism have certainly been visible before and during the alignment, at least for anyone with eyes to see, through financial meltdown, disruptive climate change, political gridlock and extremism, economic difficulties, and ongoing wars, those early developments are all seeds — harbinger of larger things to come. The domino-effect hasn’t begun yet; disruptive or radical events still seem separate and unrelated. The most sweeping and provocative upheavals won’t occur until the later years of the decade, after some event or combination of events triggers the shift into critical mass.

So, here in 2014 the corridors of power may *appear* secure, but trouble is brewing as command and control wanes. Institutions find it more difficult to convincingly maintain authority, propriety, and stability over a public that has remained docile so far, but is increasingly disconnected from institutions and mistrustful of its leaders. Discontent with the status quo and those who maintain it is building, brick by brick. The natives haven’t revolted, but they are restless.

The astrological alignments of October 2014 imply that this sporadic and still-young movement toward significant breakdown of and public rebellion against institutions that serve themselves more than the public will very likely accelerate in unexpected and unpredictable ways.

Meanwhile, as turbulence grows in the collective realm, billions of us continue to go through the extraordinary personal challenges implied by the Texas Two-Step of Uranus and Pluto transits in our individual natal charts and private lives. The first wave of these personal transformations began to hit around 2007, and they will continue to show up in the natal charts of individuals, signaling radical changes and profound endings and new beginnings, all the way through the second half of the 2010s and into the early 2020s.

This reveals a dynamic not often discussed in astrology, nor in regular life, for that matter. Change is not simply a function of outer circumstances, but of inner states as well. Major outer-planet alignments in astrology do not merely symbolize factors occurring around us in the outer world. They also imply forces simultaneously coming to a head inside each of us. The pressures, stresses, and anxieties we deal with are frequently both external and internal, and often simultaneous. The changes that life forces on us don't come only from outside, but from inside as well.

This is not always apparent or easy to comprehend — Where does one stop and the other begin? Which is more important? If we handle one type successfully, does that give us an advantage in getting through the other type intact? Are the challenges independent and separate in operation, or are they interconnected? I doubt that such questions have pat answers, but instead can be addressed only on a case-by-case basis in each of our individual lives. What is obvious, however, is that the pressures to grow and change, both from within and without, are built into the very fabric of life as we experience it. The decade of the 2010s is a special time when radical shifts are both necessary and inevitable for most of us, whether the transformations are longed for or uncomfortable.

Let me close this commentary by quoting the famous Bette Davis line from the 1950 movie, **All About Eve**: "*Fasten your seat belts. It's going to be a bumpy night.*" Change the last word in that line from "*night*" to "*decade*," and the sentiment applies very well to this time in history.

We ain't seen nuthin' yet, folks.