

# Uranus-Pluto: Violence and Social Justice

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The recent spate of incidents where apparently unwarranted and excessive use of deadly force on the part of police resulted in deaths of individuals is not, in itself, unusual. Rough handling of suspects has never been exceptional in America (or, even more, around the world), and the current examples that have broken the surface and made news are commonplace in modern America. Besides the incidents themselves — around which much disagreement and divergent opinion swirls — lies a deeper and more troubling issue, namely, the cozy relationship between the institutions of law enforcement and legal justice (i.e., the courts). Over the past week, two grand juries charged with the responsibility of determining whether trials should be held with the respective police officers as defendants have dismissed the cases, handing down no indictments against the officers and, in so doing, effectively justifying their actions and leaving the families of those who died with no recourse. This outcome turns out to be routine in our history, almost without exception. The legal justice system invariably protects law enforcement from even the question of culpability.

What is different about the current examples is their timing in symbolism and the public reaction to them.

Normally, such incidences involving legal dismissal of charges about excessive use of force by police produce only minor ripples in the public consciousness. They may on occasion spark some controversy, at least for a short time, but, generally speaking, either they produce very few ripple effects of public concern or they remain entirely beneath the surface of public awareness. The recent cases, however, are provoking an upwelling of public protest. The outrage is not yet reflected in the reporting priorities of the mainstream media, of course — except to characterize the protestors as hooligans — since all major institutions tend to close ranks in defense of the status quo assumptions of the dominant culture. So, the increasing number of organized protests and the swelling ranks of indignant citizens may not be apparent if one's news source is CNN or Fox News. That omission among major news outlets notwithstanding, however, the

evidence is beginning to mount that a trigger may have been reached that could bring to critical mass a social movement of significant, serious, and even prolonged rebellion against the way law enforcement is conducted in America. I won't call that possibility a mass rebellion, for such protests are always carried forward by a relatively small minority of individuals. The center of the population bell curve always remains unaware, unconcerned, or essentially asleep until after the revolution is over and a new status quo begins to settle in.

While we don't know at this point whether the protests will fizzle out (as happened with the Occupy movement) or deepen over time and gain enough traction and support to provoke meaningful reforms, what we do know already is that these incidents and the mounting protests surrounding them represent another in the ongoing series of cracks in the foundation of business-as-usual symbolized by the astrological transit of Uranus in Aries square to Pluto in Capricorn. That event — which is the defining astrological configuration of the decade of the 2010s — has been mathematically active since June 2012, and has now made five of its seven exact passes, with the sixth coming on December 14th of this year, and the final seventh perpendicular alignment four months away, in March 2015.

The nearly three years of that seminal transit represent the time when we are challenged to begin expressing in real and concrete terms the emotional and philosophical seeds that were planted (some for the first time but most of ancient origin that were re-planted) and took root in the collective subconscious during the 1960s. What were then ideas, theories, experiments, and — most importantly — impassioned wishes must now flesh themselves out into fuller manifestation in the actual operation of civilization, becoming normal rather than exceptional. Any of those wishes that cannot make the transition will wither and die, at least for the next century, after which they can be resuscitated and again attempted. Whichever of the seeds makes the transition successfully (by gaining sufficient popular support to sway those in power) will have a chance to bear fruit over the coming decades — more and more visibly through the 2020s and 2030s, but most specifically in the 2040s and beyond.

What do I mean by "bearing fruit?" What exactly is the product to be harvested in the next quarter of this cycle? Since I don't have a crystal ball and cannot see how life on the earth will look in the second half of this century, I'll the answer in poetic terms: The hoped-for changes would be a civilization that is more balanced, healthy, and sane, where we humans regard ourselves as part of the Family of Life on this planet, moving away (at least to some extent) from the narcissistic model of dog-eat-dog competition and the scramble to amass scarce resources no matter who suffers ("I got mine, and I don't give a damn about you"), by moving toward rebuilt societies that integrate greater possibilities for

sharing, cooperation, and empathy in the interpersonal interactions and the institutions we co-create to guide our social affairs.

Yes, I understand that this way of defining the intention is idealistic and perhaps too simple, and that the reality on the ground will be much more complex, textured, and full of contradictions. After all, paradox is the way of life, despite the illusory beliefs of those who can see things only in black-and-white terms. My way of stating the meaning of the Uranus-Pluto cycle in this commentary is to define their symbolism as a forced shift in overall balance rather than a wholesale all-or-nothing swap. In a world of cut-throat competition where egotism, self-interest, lust for power and control by the few over the many, and the violence that routinely results from such attitudes and beliefs is considered normal and even acceptable, such idealism as a gentle reminder bears restatement time and again.

So, let me offer the meaning of the cycle once more: We're looking to find or create ways to make our collective life (and our individual lives as well) less violent and more loving. That can mean something as basic and fundamental as The Golden Rule: *Do unto others as you would have them do unto you*. Perhaps at some point in the future of human evolution that sentiment will become second-nature to us as an added component of our DNA. At this point, however, it remains an ideal for which we may strive but, especially in the collective, must struggle to express, since most of what we have created lobbies strongly for the opposite. Tribalism still rules, with its in-group/out-group divisions: the Capulets versus the Montagues and the Hatfields versus the McCoys. In addition, those who are not obviously like ourselves, with different physical appearances, different religions, and different cultural rituals, are often seen not merely as strangers, but as potential enemies. The status quo of our current social interactions echoes what referees tell boxers before every match: *Protect yourself at all times*.

This is essentially what all institutions in America and elsewhere. They learn to protect themselves first. Then, when and if their own security is assured, they may extend consideration to others beyond the mere letter of their charters into the true spirit of their *raison d'être*. But what if institutions reversed that order? What if they achieved their own security by brilliantly performing the services for which they were created? That would be amazing progress toward true civility in civilization. The challenge of putting service first and their own security second is important (and difficult) for all institutions, but of particular relevance to law enforcement, where police are at risk of physical harm and even death in their daily interactions with the public. In the context of our current culture, however, many institutions, including law enforcement, have it backwards. In order to protect themselves, certain police officers regard others — most specifically individuals from minority races who are neither economically nor social privileged

— as suspects to be treated with extreme mistrust and, despite minimal cause and sometimes even no provocation at all, subjected to the use of deadly force.

The problem here is that the police, as formal representatives of legitimate society — must necessarily resist the urge to demonize others, whether or not that urge might be considered “understandable” in the heat of the moment. Making that effort successfully is critical to justify their authority by inspiring and maintaining public trust in the entire institution of law enforcement. Yes, I realize that in the hyper-militarized, post-911 America of the 2010s (where civilians exercising their constitutional right to express grievances through public protest are easily and all-too-often seen by authorities as “terrorists”) this runs counter to everything the police experience — their training, their culture, and their shared experiences within the brotherhood of law enforcement officers.

Nonetheless, taking on that seemingly contradictory and even potentially dangerous effort to rein in their own tendencies toward shooting first and asking questions later is absolutely paramount for the police. This is the true heroism of those who work in law enforcement — the courage to restrain their use of force to protect the public, even when placing themselves in harm’s way. That heroism thousands of times every day, often quietly, in the lives of police officers and too often goes unrecognized.

My personal notion of “spirituality” does not involve the glamour of magical powers or a Technicolor aura of the transcendent. It is not supernaturally separate from the ordinary, but a natural part of life. For me, spirituality is an essential dimension of mundane, pragmatic reality that adds to activities and experiences, elevating them into something subtly finer than they would otherwise be. The experiences are still whatever they are, with all their practical meanings and regular ramifications, but they are imbued with something more. Viewed from that perspective, every career or profession carries if not the obvious responsibility of a spiritual component, at least the possibility of one.

Choosing a career in law enforcement — just like selecting any profession — involves consideration of many different personal factors, including temperament, background, goals, talents and skills, social circumstances, cultural attitudes, political beliefs, among many more. The spiritual component of the choice to become a cop, however, is effectively encapsulated in the phrase most of us know or have seen painted on the sides of police cars: *“To Protect and Serve.”*

When he or she puts on the uniform, every police officer stops being a regular person. For the durations of their daily work shifts, police officers are no longer “citizens.” They perform as protective “angels” for all citizens. Yes, they have weapons and social permission to use them, but the use of deadly force is not

their primary authority and should never be their first choice. Instead, the real power of their authority lies in the ability to reassure the citizenry that civilization is truly civil. They serve to prevent or at least minimize the fear of barbarism and violence that is an inevitable part of any mass society where most of us are strangers to each other, and to both maintain and restore peaceful interactions among citizens. They do this by protecting citizens from harm. It doesn't matter whether those citizens are suspects, victims, or bystanders. The spiritual task of police officers is to promote the safety of all citizens.

Circumstances inevitably occur where doing that — promoting, maintaining, or restoring civil safety — requires the judicious use of force, even deadly force. That comes with the badge, as does the silent heroism in the willingness of police officers to put themselves at risk and in harm's way every time they go to work. Further, human fallibility will on occasion play a role in disrupting the successful completion of their missions. These factors are not, however, the cause of the current upwelling of protests among outraged segments of the public.

The mantra-like phrase "To protect and serve" defines the core spirituality of working in law enforcement. In the ideal, every police officer takes on that extraordinary responsibility as a sacred duty always lives up to it and never forgets it. Ah, but human beings in the real world do not invariably live up to ideals. In the diversity of individuals characteristic of any group of human beings, some people will more effectively live up to their sworn or chosen ideals more than others. Certain extraordinary people will excel at fusing the mundane and the sacred in ways that may not always be obvious either to others or themselves, but will nonetheless register as palpable. Other individuals in the same group will fall short. For some people in this category, the "fall from grace" will occur because the terrible demands of real life wear them down, causing them to forget their spiritual responsibility or be unable to express the ideal. For some who fail, though, the ideals may never have been understood or embraced.

In the specific case of law enforcement, those last two categories — police who lose the ability for whatever reason to live up to their spiritual responsibility or who never embraced it in the first place — are tragedies waiting to happen. They corrupt not only the integrity of the police but undermine public trust in legitimate social authority.

When tragedies occur involving harm, especially death, to citizens at the hands of law enforcement, the public needs to know that the officers involved are not monsters who willfully misused their power. Sometimes this is obvious, as it would be in the case of apprehending perpetrators in a bank robbery, to cite a particularly straightforward example. Other times, no such clarity of justified

motive exists, as in the recently publicized deaths. The police may (and almost certainly will) conduct in-house investigations, but the only way for the public to be reassured in these instances about the integrity and legitimate authority of law enforcement is in a court room. When that recourse is denied, as it has been recently by two grand juries, everyone suffers — citizens, the institution of law enforcement, and civilization itself.

The courts must display the courage to pursue the truth of what happened with no cronyism or vested interests, particularly when that involves harm to a member of the public by a police officer. To whitewash such inquiries because of misguided kinship between law enforcement and the legal system is itself a criminal act that mocks justice. When that occurs, as it has too frequently, the legitimacy of both institutions is corrupted into moral bankruptcy. The police are transformed into violent vigilante gunslingers who may injure or kill anyone who looks suspicious to them, and then — even worse — are permitted by kangaroo courts to get away with the crime.

Apart from the personal tragedies to all those concerned, that is the larger issue that the mounting public protests are attempting to bring to light, and it's important as a serious facet of the Uranus-Pluto process aimed at reforming society for the better.

Uranus and Pluto are symbolically relevant to all facets of such social events in this decade, from the causes of such tragedies in the first place, through the rebellious uprisings that bring them to light and awaken our attention, to the reforms necessary to correct transgressions and prevent further affronts to our cherished principles of justice and equality under the law. However lofty or idealistic those principles may seem, they are essential to creating a society worth having.