

Narcissism and Politics

by Bill Herbst

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Donald Trump is now the “presumptive nominee” of the Republican Party in the coming election. That term — *the presumptive nominee* — is used by party officials to indicate the de facto winner of the primaries. Although Trump’s formal nomination will not be confirmed until the party convention in July, the race on the Republican side is effectively over, with only one candidate left standing as King of the Hill.

All hail the victor, Donald Trump! All Republicans must now unite and pledge fealty to the new heir to their throne! Well, maybe not all...

When I began this commentary series about the 2016 presidential with an essay about Donald J. Trump’s chart, I attempted, as best I could, to maintain at least some semblance of neutrality, more detachment than objectivity, *per se*.

I began pulling back from that intention with updates to the Trump commentary — first on March 3rd, then again on March 11th — by injecting more of my own personal politics.

Now I want to take that further in a separate commentary, not through more revelations about my own politics (which are hardly a secret), nor with deeper exploration into the astrology of the candidates, but rather by stating my perceptions and opinions concerning the basic psychology of Donald Trump’s character.

These perceptions and opinions were formed by the totality of my experience over the past months, which includes both direct perception and astrological insights, among other factors. They are not, however, strictly astrological in the interpretive sense. While they correspond to certain potentials in Donald Trump’s chart, they’re

not inevitable consequences of that natal chart, or any other chart, for that matter. We take the heritage of what we begin with — in genetics, family, astrology, and our time and place in history — and parlay it into something more. Yes, we play the hand we're dealt (whoever the dealer may have been), but the outcome is usually not pre-ordained. How we play the hand matters — well or badly, with skill and savvy or unconscious predictability. In my particular beliefs, who we become is a function of many different factors, among them fate and destiny perhaps, but also luck and grace. I'm not sure exactly how much individual consciousness and maturity may contribute, but I believe they make a difference.

The opinions and perceptions I'll offer here are not particularly complex or unique. They're already held by a considerable segment of the American and global populations, so I'll keep this update simple and to the point.

Donald Trump is a narcissist. That epithet comes as no surprise to Trump's critics, who invoke it with regularity when describing him. Trump's behavior, however, does nothing to challenge or discourage the idea. He can be an aggressive-defensive narcissist when in attack mode or a friendly, engaging narcissist when not feeling put upon, but, either way, his narcissism is obvious.

Because I'm not a licensed psychologist or professional clinician, I'll stop short of labeling Trump with the clinical designation of *Narcissistic Personality Disorder*. It may be useful, however, to list a few of the definitions surrounding that designation:

Narcissistic Personality Disorder (NPD): *a disorder in which a person has an inflated sense of self-importance. Found more commonly in men, NPD's symptoms include an excessive need for admiration, disregard for others' feelings, an inability to handle any criticism, and a sense of entitlement.*

In my non-clinical use of the concept of narcissism, I'd add to that list of symptoms a few others, such as pathological lying and the inability to accept, admit, and/or apologize for wrongdoing. The typical strategy of the narcissist in the latter situations is to blame others. Consider Trump's response to an interviewer's question about his

implied insults in a Tweet about Ted Cruz' wife: "*Well, he started it.*" Ah yes, the convenient rationalization of a nine-year-old.

Do all those qualities of narcissism accurately describe Donald Trump to a T? I think they do.

The Donald is arguably one of the more successful snake-oil salesmen in the world. While no one would suggest that Trump has a tightly-controlled personality or a carefully-considered approach to self-expression in behavior — quite the contrary, he is a notorious loose cannon who will say nearly anything that crosses his mind in a given moment — Donald Trump is nonetheless a very cunning individual and extremely effective in fending off or redirecting criticism while keeping himself center-stage and in the spotlight.

Why people believe anything Trump says is a question with a complex answer, but the simple response has to do with the collective state of the American psyche at this point in history. I don't know if Trump's supporters among the voting public would disagree with the presumptions I wrote above or merely dismiss them as irrelevant. Having won the primary campaign to become the presumptive nominee of the shattered Republican Party, Trump has amply demonstrated his skills as an outrageous performer, able to galvanize and thrill his audiences with repeated, nearly endless statements designed for provocation or shock value. I agree that, for those who eagerly or grudgingly plan to vote for Trump in November's general election, what I've written in the paragraphs above probably doesn't matter.

At least one commentator recently opined that Trump doesn't actually want to be president, but only to run for the office, so that he can capitalize afterwards on the massively increased public exposure and notoriety he will have gleaned throughout the campaign. To me, that argument seems particularly prescient and insightful. I doubt that Donald has any interest in taking on the awesome and serious responsibilities of the highest political office in the land. Instead, I think he's aiming to make his ego-brand a household word. He wants the world to worship at the altar of Trump.

Whether or not Trump truly wants to be president, however, the timing of his run for that office has been perfect thus far. While having made numerous feints about running for public office in the past, Trump's decision to do so in 2016 reveals a savvy appreciation on his part regarding the simmering conditions now emerging in the electorate.

Trump is capitalizing on a virtual tsunami of inchoate rage that has been welling up for some decades and is now cresting in our collective psyche, especially among Americans who feel that they have lost privileges to which they believe themselves entitled.

Entitlement is a fascinating phenomenon among humans, especially because of its linkage to the importance of habit in our programming. Choice may matter (at least, I think it does), but habits comprise a much larger component in our lives. Whatever benefits we accrue, in whatever ways they come to us — through our own hard-won achievements, through family heritage, through social largesse, or just by being in the right place at the right time — tend to become hard-wired into our expectations about life.

Add to this the concept of territoriality — the characteristic behavior of all animals (including human beings) to keep others away from an area they use or control, i.e., fiercely guarding what we own — and we have a virtual guarantee of conflict when life changes and what we assume is ours is lost or taken from us.

Over the more than half-century since the end of World War II, American society has changed dramatically. Starting in the 1960s and sporadically accelerating through the ensuing decades right up to where we are today, American politics has become a battleground over entitlement and territoriality. Those who felt entitled have fought to keep what they own (or believe they own), while those who felt disenfranchised have fought to gain a foothold in entitlement. This extended, ongoing battle has often taken the shape of class warfare in various ways — economics, race, social beliefs, religion, etc.

Certain classes have won major victories. The wealthy have improved their entitlement massively and claimed great swaths of additional

territory. Immigrants of non-European racial heritage (particularly Asian) have also made significant inroads into acceptance and prosperity, claiming their place in the sun. While the century-long struggle for women's equality continues, the feminist movement has clearly changed the social landscape in America.

By contrast, the economic and largely white middle and lower-middle classes in America, which gained significant entitlement in the period following World War II, have suffered grievous losses over the past four decades. Manufacturing in America is now a mere shadow of its former industrial might, and the export of manufacturing facilities (to regions previously called the Third World, with Mexico, China, India, and Malaysia being foremost in this category of cheap-labor havens for manufacturers) has eliminated the bulk of once-lucrative factory jobs in America that allowed middle- and lower-income workers to support their families. In addition, those classes in America that embrace conservative attitudes in social, religious, and lifestyle considerations have all felt their territories to be under assault. Finally, a sizable percentage of white males now consider themselves to have been demoted to second-class citizenship.

These losses, whether in income, status, well-being, cultural homogeneity, or even meaning itself — are felt by many who suffer them as unjust, unfair, and just plain wrong. This segment of the population has no trouble finding scapegoats for their losses, particularly in government or society at large.

The problem for the losers — whether those who were previously entitled and have suffered erosion of their territory, or those who were never entitled and desire a bigger slice of the pie — is that society and even Life itself does not seem to care. In the nitty-gritty of civilization, entitlement tends to be a pragmatic issue of power rather than a moral crusade. Considered in the mass, the "haves" are not very attentive to the needs and desires of the "have-nots." The appeal for social justice, whether to go backward to recover a more comfortable past or to move forward into a brave new world, is usually greeted with indifference. Over time, this inertia leads to frustration, anger, and finally rage among those beset by a sea of troubles.

Rage tends to oversimplify, causing those who feel it to lash out at any target that can be identified as the enemy. As I stated early in this commentary, what we have now in this country is a welling-up of cumulative frustration in the form of inchoate rage. I'm not suggesting that this rage is unjustified, merely that it shuts out more thoughtful considerations and nuanced strategies for achieving redress of grievances or beneficial changes in society. Those in the grip of rage become singularly focused on their own wounds, which is a kind of survival-based narcissism.

In short, the disturbed personal narcissism of Donald Trump is in total harmony with our own disturbed national narcissism. Trump affirms it, confirms it, and enshrines it. That may be a good strategy to win votes in the primaries, but it's not a smart or viable approach to governing.

Narcissism, whether on the part of our leaders or ourselves, exists in the dark underbelly of the Uranus-Pluto alignment whose symbolism dominates this entire decade. The macro-level of narcissism among institutions is a bellwether of what ails us in the 2010s and a huge obstacle to the changes necessary to allow the human species to mature in the ways we live on this planet. At the micro-level, narcissism among individuals is playing out not only as defiant refusal to move ahead, but also as sporadically increasing spasms of violence. In the latter half of the 2010s we are witnessing at both levels the tragic results of our inability to empathize with others, particularly those who don't seem like us.

Narcissism is not a modern phenomenon. It's as old as humanity and has accompanied us throughout our history. In some ways, narcissism could be considered the root problem at the heart of human psychology, a toxic ailment for which we have never found easy or effective treatment. What's different now about our struggles with our own and others' narcissism is how much more is riding on the outcome. Our collective future may rest on how we deal with this dangerous flaw in human nature.

The case can be made that current conditions in civilization are likely to worsen before they improve, in part because we are past the point of meaningful reforms to the existing order, but also because we

aren't yet ready collectively to create a better, more harmonious future. While myriad individuals continue to work diligently and with great heart toward personal maturity and social progress, in the overall zeitgeist we still cling to a past that is being revealed as untenable, and we need to see this clearly before we can move ahead cooperatively. From that perspective, breakdown is not only inevitable, but necessary, since we will move forward only when we have no other choice.

In that sense, Donald Trump is the ideal candidate to reflect where we are now. He mirrors back to us our own narcissism.

While I believe the odds of Trump's winning the election and actually becoming president to be slim, stranger things have occurred. For all his glee in shocking people, I think Donald Trump would be shocked to find himself President, as would America.