

Brexit: Another Sign of the Times

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The decision in Britain on Thursday, June 23rd, 2016, where United Kingdom voters chose by the slim margin of 52% to 48% to leave the European Union, is, in numerous ways, a significant sign of the times.

Disunity is the order of the day in civilization. Harmonious cooperation — never a particular hallmark of the mass societies created by a species that is both in-group competitive and out-group fearful — is currently at a low ebb. As a collective, human beings are more afraid now than at any time in recent decades about the possible loss of what they have (whether what they think they have is real or imagined).

Economic, religious, racial, and philosophical/ideological conflicts have escalated since the 21st century began, to the point where collective humanity, particularly in its national and regional alignments, is now Lincoln's "house divided against itself." This erosion of trust in cooperation has occurred for many reasons that I need not detail here. A reasonable assessment of the astrology that describes this epoch implies that this condition will worsen before it improves. Like a broken leg that has knitted improperly, making walking difficult, and thus needs to be intentionally re-broken and set again to heal correctly, we face the inevitable breakdown of a civilization that has, through the bulk of its 11,000 year history, been held together not by union, but by force and coercion (whether overt and crude or covert and subtle).

I don't mean to imply that harmony and cooperation are invariably good, nor that conflict and differences are necessarily bad. To everything there is a season, with ebbs and flows in the overall balance between getting along together and fighting for dominance

or control. Just as night and day are paired opposites in earthly existence, so harmony and conflict are forever paired in the dance of the Tao. Both have a correct place and natural function, and each helps to define and clarify the other.

At any given moment in the world, both good and bad harmony exists, and good and bad conflict exists also. Just because a sizable percentage of any group may agree on something does not insure that what they agree on is true or positive. The same applies to disagreement. There are creative and fertile disagreements and stultifying and tragic disagreements.

Assessing which expressions of harmony and conflict are good versus which are bad is neither simple nor obvious, and it's sure as hell not straightforward. Just as beauty is in the eye of the beholder, so the judgment of harmony/conflict as positive or negative is a subjective evaluation. Not only can the expression of harmony and conflict change from good to bad all on their own, but our value systems for assessing which is happening can and do change over time. In addition, these opposites are often simultaneous and intertwined: harmony in any area is usually accompanied by conflict in related areas, whether or not that is easily apparent. That makes the determination of helping versus hurting — of setting up positive outcomes versus sowing the seeds of negative repercussions — all the more difficult. That uncertainty, however, is part of what makes human life so kaleidoscopically diverse and curious.

What we have now is groups of people — frequently groups that come together with a select or even relatively small number of members — that are coalescing because many individuals feel alienated or excluded from the collective agreement. Not only do they feel excluded and harmed by their lack of acceptance from the larger society, but they believe fervently that the collective agreement is wrong or bad. What distinguishes this particular decade — the decade of the Uranus-Pluto alignment — is that such people, who formerly felt isolated and/or powerless to confront the status quo and thus remained silent, are now rising up in active defiance to confront the status quo.

In the 2010s, such downtrodden individuals (whether they are actually disenfranchised or simply imagine themselves to be) are being galvanized by events to discover that others feel themselves to be in the same boat. That recognition of shared experience is a potent outlet for frustration and an incubator for passionate social activism. Such groups are arising almost spontaneously, often seemingly overnight. That suddenness is only in appearance, however. Actually, the discontent has simmered for a long time, cooking slowly under the surface, and is triggered by events that act as a tipping point, so that people who have previously suffered in silence suddenly shout, *"Enough!"* The unexpected and seemingly spontaneous alignment of "belonging" to an out-group allows people to go beyond the isolated and relatively powerless experience of feeling that *"I've had enough, but what can I do?"* to the socially powerful experience of saying: ***"We've had enough, and we demand change NOW!"***

In America and around the world, this phenomenon has been occurring with increasing frequency. Whether we're talking about the Tea Party or Occupy movements in politics, gender causes targeting rape in the military and on college campuses, the Black Lives Matter uprising against institutionalized racial violence by law enforcement, social concerns about serious injuries in sports, or, in this year's presidential election, the profound significance of voter passion that has arisen around Bernie Sanders' and Donald Trump's candidacies. Even the onset of Isis/Isil out of the ashes of the mideast (ironically, the ancient "cradle of civilization") reflects this meme — the alliance between individuals who feel ignored, disenfranchised, mistreated, and resentful into an active group that challenges the majority view and existing order, and often does so with a vengeance.

All these and many other significant developments reflect the Uranus-Pluto symbolism of this decade. The transformation of diverse social movements into bold social activism is not occurring from the top down, but rather from the bottom up. People in positions of social authority in corporate boardrooms, institutional offices, or in the halls of government may be sympathetic and even support a given reform, but they are not the originating spark. These are grass-roots movements.

When Donald Trump speaks about his intention to build a wall along our southern border to keep out illegal immigrants, he's not the creator of that idea. He's simply tapping into a deep feeling of resentment that has been growing among a segment of the population, bubbling away under the surface, but now breaking through into full view. Basically, Trump is surfing on a tidal wave of disturbed but intense sentiment.

The same is true of Bernie Sanders' impassioned wish to get big money out of politics. He is hardly the first person to feel that large corporations and moneyed interests exert too much power and distort the values of our society. No, that perception has been around for a long time, but it registered most deeply with disconnected individuals who felt powerless to change the situation. Now that is the proverbial idea whose time has come, and Bernie Sanders happened to be the person who was present and willing when the deep feeling cracked through into the zeitgeist and coalesced into a nascent movement. Sanders didn't set out to be the leader of a revolution, but he volunteered for the job, and millions of people said "Yes!" to his offer.

As I've written before, Sanders and Trump are different sides of the same coin. Both challenge the status quo with the entire force of their personalities. Sanders comes from the progressive and idealistic wing (idealistic as in, "*We all do better when we all do better*"), lobbying for more inclusive togetherness. Trump has arrived from the conservative and pragmatic side (pragmatic as in, "*There's only so much pie to go around, and we deserve the full share we enjoyed in the past, but which was wrongly taken from us*"). So, Sanders and Trump represent inclusion and exclusion as strategies to challenge the way things are, i.e., the existing power hierarchy.

The two factions in the Brexit debate were divided along similar lines — those who favored inclusion versus those who wanted exclusion.

The inclusionist position says basically, "*Despite our serious problems, the fundamental direction of modernity is correct. Let's keep moving forward.*" The exclusionist position says, "*We have gone too far and lost our way. We should go back to recover the values we held dear.*"

At the heart of the exclusionist position is the deep feeling, based in anger and frustration over losses (whether real or feared), that stopping the forward momentum is absolutely paramount. Whatever has to be done to achieve that is OK, even if it risks disastrous consequences. Trust in the responsiveness of institutions has eroded so far for exclusionists that faith in any gradual reform is gone. As a result, disruption of the status quo is now the chosen strategy, even if it means harming everyone. This is eerily similar to the infamous mis-quote from a U.S. army officer during the Vietnam War: *"We had to destroy the village to save it."*

As a general rule, the astrology I see points to these last four years of the 2010s as a period when, more and more, the exclusionist point of view holds sway. Of those movements that gain traction and become powerful as forces pushing for social reform, an increasing percentage will resonate to the exclusionist attitude.

This is not to suggest that every social movement that arises to challenge the existing order will succeed in establishing a more just society. Far from it, some will fail outright or wither after only pyrrhic victories at best, with little real redress of grievances. Even the successes may prove illusory. As Pete Townshend wrote in The Who's song "Won't Get Fooled Again" — *"Meet the new boss; same as the old boss."* Social protest can re-shuffle the deck, but often the rules of the game don't change, and, even when they do, the odds typically remain in the house's favor. The games are rigged by those who manipulate the rules to their advantage.

The general expectation among those "in the know" before the UK vote was that the "Remain" faction would win out. I wasn't surprised in the least, however, by the British electorate voting to leave the EU. Staying was the inclusionist attitude. Leaving was exclusionist.

The global financial markets went batshit the morning after the British vote (Friday, June 24th) and fell precipitously. Why? Because they had already "built into" their pricing the expectation that Britain's voters would choose to stay in the European Union. When the results of the vote were confirmed on Thursday night, the shock sent the markets reeling. Without claiming to be a financial pundit or

soothsayer (I'm not), the question is not whether the markets will rebound — they will in the short run, because that's how markets work — but rather if this shock to the system will break the long-term trend and begin the unraveling of a global financial system built on sand.

The implications of Brexit are sobering for America's presidential election. I won't predict that Donald Trump's "America First" (exclusionist) attitude will necessarily triumph in the November presidential election against Hillary Clinton's theme of "Togetherness" (inclusionist). Maybe he'll win; maybe he'll get his butt stomped. What I'm saying, though, is that those who write off Trump because he's a complete narcissist, snake-oil salesman, and buffoon, and assert that he could *never* win the election are dead wrong.

I've already stated in previous commentaries that I'm no fan of The Donald. But Trump's meme of taking America back to an imaginary 1950s fantasy is perfectly timed, while Hillary's cheerleading for "Togetherness" swims upstream against a powerful undercurrent in the collective unconscious. If Hillary and her well-funded team of professional advisors conduct her campaign according to the traditional political rule book of what has worked in the past, she may be in deep trouble.

Stated in different terms, to the extent that Hillary continues to be associated among voters with the Plutonian archetype in the American psyche (i.e., *the more things seem to change, the more the power elites remain the same*) and fails to appeal to the revolutionary Uranian impulse ("*I'm mad as hell, and I'm not gonna take it anymore!*") — an attitude that is still rising and getting stronger with each passing season — she risks losing the entire shebang.

The horrors inflicted by fanatical religious fundamentalists, such as Isis, represent a violent protest against modernity itself, which — for better and worse — has changed the face of life on our planet over the past 200 years. Radical acts of public sabotage and murder

against the presumed sins of modernity will no doubt pockmark the landscape for quite awhile to come. The tragic carnage of the current seasons is, however, perversely in tune with a deep current flowing through these times — an intense abhorrence toward the way things are.

Collectively, social movements expressing active disagreement and discontent with the status quo are growing in both number and power. The momentum for change — at times regardless of the cost — is a rising tide, and many potent confrontations are in the offing over the coming years.

Whether these conflicts tear apart civilization and send the survivors back to the Dark Ages or set the stage for renewal through an evolution of our species out of its disturbed adolescence toward some wiser collective maturity remains to be seen. One way or another, though, the die is cast: Our immediate future is a time of discord more than union, separation more than togetherness, and sporadic shock more than consistent stability.

This does not imply that cooperation is dead, only that teamwork is likely to occur among smaller groups. Some of these groups will operate within a limited or primarily local scope, but others will no doubt exercise a disproportionate impact on society in general, altering the basic assumptions of how we live.

The pendulum will swing back, of course. From the mid-2020s through the 2030s, cooperation will once again hold sway as a social organizing principle, whether by choice or — more likely — out of necessity. For now, however, we are breaking apart more than coming together.