
THE HERBST NEWSLETTER

astrological-cultural-spiritual-political views & opinions

--- Thoughts, dates, and reminders about our lives as members of the craziest species on this lovely planet. Like a message in a bottle washing up on the sandy shores of consciousness ---

Issue #125 – August 2010

Dear friends,

I began to compose this month's commentary about a different subject, how the ruling elites are not like you or me, but the subject of fast or slow collapse kept intruding into my thoughts. Eventually it pushed the other essay off the podium entirely, so I gave in and wrote this one.

--Bill Herbst

Commentary: **THE BIG QUESTION**

At this particular odd moment in the history of the human species during the summer of 2010, perched as we are atop the increasingly unsteady edifice of modern civilization that now leans like the Tower of Pisa, with its nearly seven billion citizens, its voracious commercial engines, and its diverse complex societies steadily merging toward a single global marketplace, where our domination seems nearly total over the rest of life on earth and indeed over even the earth herself, only one real question remains.

That question is: *Will the collapse of civilization be fast or slow?*

This variable, both fascinating and terrible, currently has no answer, but it arises for me everyday now, sometimes floating, sometimes darting in and out of my force field like my own personal Tinker Bell, though the effect is somewhat less charming than in the Disney version.

Since the advent of the internet in the early 1990s, a thriving subculture has developed, mainly in cyberspace, but also in major book publishing and the seminar/symposia circuit as well, surrounding the issue of impending civilization collapse. This is not, however, a unified subculture, but instead a crazy quilt comprised of different groups: the Peak Oil people (including Michael Ruppert, Matthew Simmons, Richard Heinberg, Matt Simmons, etc.), environmentalists and natural scientists (James Lovelock, Bill McKibben, William Kotke, et al), theologians (Thomas Berry, etc.), apocalyptic visionaries (Christian

fundamentalists awaiting the End Times and Rapture), cultural critics (James Kunstler, Jared Diamond, Dmitry Orlov, etc.), metaphysical devotees (like John Michael Greer and students of Nostradamus, the Mayan Calendar, Edgar Cayce, etc.), anti-corporate activists (David Korten, Naomi Klein, Vandana Shiva, et al), financial reformers and contrarians (Catherine Austin Fitts), back-to-the-land self-sufficiency advocates (Sharon Astyk), and yes, even astrologers (such as myself).

I apologize for the dreadful pigeon-holing of that brief categorization. No doubt the people listed above and thousands of other notables in the civilization crisis subculture would rightly chafe at such one-dimensional labels. But you get the point. We come from many different concerns, viewpoints, and disciplines, and the sole factor that unites us is that we all feel an urgent crisis emerging in global civilization, a period of discontinuity wherein humanity's future is essentially up for grabs.

Whatever route one takes to arrive at the meeting ground of civilization collapse, once there information flows freely from all sides. Admittedly, the subculture is so far a distinct minority, composed of many who are contrarian by temperament or otherwise predisposed to mistrust authority or criticize society. The majority of the population is still preoccupied with the standard, mundane concerns of day-to-day life. This is gradually changing, however. With each new collective crisis, from the financial meltdown of two years ago to the recent ecological disaster in the Gulf of Mexico, the ranks of so-called (and misnamed) "doomers" expand. A concern of considerable importance is what will happen when awareness of impending civilization collapse shifts from the fringes of acceptability to the center of society and morphs into a mass movement, which is coming, as sure as God made little green apples. But that's another essay.

Once "awakened" to the impending crisis, there is no going back. And for those of us already there, the question of what to do to prepare looms large. The answers depend on individual circumstance, obviously, but more importantly, on timing. Fast collapse implies immediate and urgent needs for emergency preparation, whereas slow collapse allows greater leeway in making the necessary adaptations. Even in a volcanic eruption, the lava of a slow magma flow can be walked away from; a 200-mph pyroclastic cloud of boiling toxic smoke and ash, however, overtakes and engulfs everything in its path.

Having studied in depth the various cycles of civilizational astrology for nearly a decade, I've deciphered enough of the symbolic coding to know that the pair of successive long-term alignments that make up the primary symbolic indicators of the archetype field from 2008-2020 present us with a two-step dance whose second phase is very different from its first. From 2008 through 2011, during the life of the Saturn-Uranus-Pluto T-square, whatever happens to push civilization closer to the edge will be resisted by the powers-that-be to the point of denial of anything changing at all in the way we live our lives and conduct our affairs. All the king's horses and all the king's men will work overtime to reassemble Humpty Dumpty. They have no chance of success, of course, but meanwhile will lie their asses off through falsely optimistic press releases and doctored data about how much progress is being made toward restoration of the status quo. This is not just my opinion, but a clear indication in the astrology of the Cardinal Cross.

Then, from 2012 on, when the Uranus-Pluto first-quarter square finally hits critical mass and takes over center stage, the second phase repudiates the first as we enter an extended period of real and dramatic change. The whistling-in-the-dark-as-we-stroll-through-the-graveyard attitude of 2007-2011, with its official resistance and institutional denial, will quickly crumble, giving way to something quite different, a wild scramble to catch up by finding or creating new structures and effective workarounds to replace the accelerating number of social institutions and ways of operating that have already failed, are failing, or will soon fail.

Notice that the Big Question is **not** *Will civilization collapse?* That question already has a known answer, namely, *Yes, civilization will collapse*. I knew that answer as soon as I learned that Uranus and Pluto would make seven exact passes of 90° perpendicularity during their first-quarter square between 2012 and 2015. Not that the extraordinary astrology of this transit in the Uranus-Pluto cycle alone is sufficient to convince me of the certainty of civilization collapse. Given the weight of everything else we know, however, from peak oil to ongoing species extinction, to environmental degradation, to human overpopulation, to predatory capitalism and the accompanying massive economic and political corruption, to the evidence of my own experience of 60 years on this planet — all that and more point toward impending civilizational collapse.

The final straw that broke the back of any lingering uncertainty for me, however, was the astrology of the 2010s, those seven exact passes between Uranus in Aries and Pluto in Capricorn. (I haven't spent my entire adult life as a working astrologer to overlook such compelling evidence.)

Along with millions of other people who share with me varying degrees of like-mindedness, I foresee the disintegration of modern industrial civilization as a done deal, a cooked goose, a *fait accompli* — only a matter of when and how, not if. Collectively, we humans have overplayed our hand, overshot our limits, ignored the warning signs, and set up our own fall.

Please note that I do NOT foresee either the end of civilization or the extinction of the human species. What I now consider inevitable is merely the breakdown of the civilization that we built over roughly the last 200 years, starting somewhere around 1820. That date is not as arbitrary as throwing a dart at a board (it was the year of a Uranus-Neptune conjunction while both planets squared Pluto), but neither is it precise. The roots of the industrial revolution extend back into the 18th century, and the entire 19th century was the gearing up period.

We might also use as a benchmark the year 1847. That was the beginning of the Uranus-Pluto cycle that preceded the current 1965 cycle, which is now reaching first quarter. At any rate, whenever we place the onset of modern civilization, the jig is up for the untrammelled excesses of the 19th and 20th centuries. That wild, drunken party is over.

What does *collapse* itself mean? To the best of our very limited ability to accurately foresee conditions in the future, civilizational collapse will likely bring

certain predictable conditions: Conveniences such as daily trips to the mega-grocery store for food will be replaced by less frequent visits to the weekend farmer's market or even to nearby farms. Food will be sufficiently expensive that people will grow as much of their own as they can. Gardening will be a huge part of our collective future.

Wal-Mart and Home Depot, along with all the other big-box retailers, will no longer exist. Malls will sit empty and abandoned, along with much of the outer rings of suburban housing. Many suburbs will be ghost towns, occupied mainly by intermittent squatters. Only the very rich or the very hardy will still live outside the boundaries of cities, towns, and villages.

Travel by automobile will be severely curtailed, limited only to special trips, and no longer something undertaken without thought or at the drop of a hat. Gas will be extremely expensive — when you can get it. Airlines will still exist — at least one or two — but travel by air will be prohibitively expensive, mainly for the very wealthy. By contrast, health care will be much cheaper than it is now, though still not free.

Home schooling, which is today only a fringe phenomenon, will take over a significant segment of primary and secondary education. Colleges and universities will shrink in number and size, and be revamped to serve more pragmatic community needs, such as job training in pragmatic skills.

For most people, disposable income will be a distant memory, and though consumer goods will still be available, they will be much more difficult to obtain, since costs of shipping via FedEx or UPS will have skyrocketed. The dollar may or may not still exist. If it does, it will be worth at least 90% less than today. State or even local currencies may have sprung up like wildflowers. Precious metals, especially as old gold and silver coins, will be accepted as money. Barter will flourish locally.

Internet usage may be restricted to certain hours of the day. Electricity may be similarly rationed.

Manual labor of all kinds will have expanded throughout society, and many cottage industries will have sprouted up to produce basic hard goods. Immigrants and illegal aliens will no longer dominate the manual labor or unskilled jobs, since those will be occupied by "regular" Americans who were once part of the service or financial sectors.

Though this is but an abbreviated snapshot of how post-collapse life might be configured, one more seemingly radical possibility deserves mention. The United States of America may go the way of the Soviet Union and dissolve into various smaller countries — California, Cascadia (Washington and Oregon), New England, etc. Smaller is better in the world to come.

My final note on the post-collapse future is that whether in space or time, distant visions are often illusory, like mirages in the desert, since reality — especially future reality — has a way of confounding expectations. Even after the stock market crash of 1929, could *anyone* have predicted the 1930s? Even after the

JFK assassination in 1963, could *anyone* have predicted the decade that followed? Shocking surprises are a hallmark of the Uranus-Pluto cycle whenever it activates.

This is akin to the old Monty Python running gag, where a skit is interrupted by the sudden, incongruous intrusion of a small cadre of characters comprised of the Pope, a Cardinal, and two Priests, all dressed in the ornate Catholic regalia of High Mass, whereupon Michael Palin, portraying the Pope, shouts out, "*No one expects the Spanish Inquisition!!!*" So, I realize that the view of the future offered here is really just the distorted image I see in my telescope. I'm probably way off.

Still, if my descriptions contain at least possible outcomes for *any* collapse, then what are the relevant time frames for *fast* versus *slow*? Well, a fast collapse would occur within the decade of the 2010s, from 2012-2020, and certainly by the time Pluto exits Capricorn in 2023. Fast collapse would mean that, by the end of the current decade, the ways most of us conduct our day-to-day lives would very likely be significantly changed from how we live now or ever lived before.

A slow collapse would unfold in more intermittent phases, with sudden discontinuities followed by a settling in to the new reality, like descending a long, stretched-out staircase. One step down, then five steps ahead, then another step down. Slow collapse is not that different from what we have now, and it would continue in fits and starts over 25 to 50 years. Where we end up might look similar to the results of fast collapse, but it would take three to four times as long to get there. Or perhaps we would have more time during the descent to learn what is necessary and put those needed structures in place, so that the shock effect would be minimized. Our new ways of living and conducting our social interactions, with their greater basis in reality than in fantasy, might be accepted as normal.

Fast collapse does carry more risk of some form of mass die-off, most likely caused by war, famine, or pandemic disease (which might be Mother Nature's way of dealing with the problem of human civilization should we prove unable to address it). Slow collapse could conceivably produce an equivalent reduction in global population — say by one-third or even half — but less visibly, more gradually, and without the tragic headlines. Even in fast collapse, however, distribution of change will be uneven, so that groups of people in one location may be relatively unaffected, while groups in other less fortunate locations will suffer greatly.

Right now, fast or slow collapse is a toss-up. But keep in mind the reference above to the 1930s and 1960s, and the shocking changes that came to pass in both those decades. Here in the summer of 2010, we are collectively not yet in the chrysalis of transformation; critical mass is not reached until 2012.

Even at that, however, we don't have too much longer to wait.

Next month's September newsletter is not a text commentary, but instead a single, at-a-glance graphic showing the Big Picture of Change during the 2010s.

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