

astrological-cultural-spiritual-political
views & commentary...

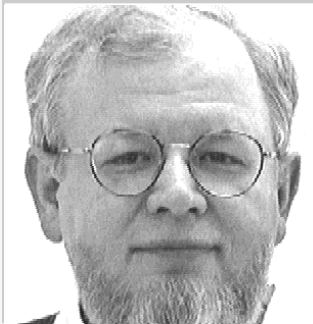
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THE HERBST NEWSLETTER



Thoughts, dates, & 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...

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Dear friends,

Let me preface this month's newsletter by saying again something that needs to be repeated often. In these commentaries, I offer my opinions and analyses—astrological or otherwise—with the caveat that I can't provide a money-back guarantee of their truth and accuracy. I know too well how nuts we all are (myself included), and I would not wish to suffer either the heady power or the awesome responsibility of running the world. If nominated for Dictator, I will not run, and if elected, I will not serve.

My purpose in these newsletters is mainly to find like-minded individuals who see the world at least somewhat as I do. That's the typical mammalian impulse toward belonging. Cows enjoy chewing their cud in a pasture surrounded by other similar cows. Guernseys want other Guernseys around, and Herefords want Herefords. So, in similar bovine fashion, I speak out to look for other cows like myself. Moooo!

—Bill Herbst

THE DISENTHRALLING

On December 1st, 1862, during the darkest days of the American Civil War, not quite two weeks before the Army of the Potomac's humiliating defeat at Fredericksburg, President Abraham Lincoln asserted the sentiments below in his State of the Union Address to the combined Houses of Congress:

The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

Lincoln made those statements in regard to his earlier announcement in September, 1862, of The Emancipation Proclamation. His words referred not only to the crises of rebellion, war, and the divided union, but specifically to the institution of slavery in America and what had emerged finally—after four decades of struggle, debate, and ineffective compromise—as the urgent necessity for its formal and legal demise.

Most of the 31 million Americans alive then were racists in their unquestioned assumption of the superiority of European culture and caucasian stock. A significant percentage believed the dark-skinned people laboring under subjugation to be literally subhuman. I doubt that those proportions have changed over the ensuing 150 years nearly as much as some might think.

“We must disenthral ourselves, and then we shall save our country.”

I agree with half that statement. Yes, we must disenthral ourselves, for that is the ongoing meaning of the Jupiter-Saturn-Neptune T-square under which we labor during 2005-2007. Just like today, Saturn and Neptune were opposite in the heavens from 1861-1864 during the Civil War, when Lincoln gave this particular address. Then, as now, America was suffering through an exhausting, disheartening process of seeing its ideals dissolved by the corrosive reality of war. We have one more year to go of this necessary disillusionment. That's all for the good, because facing reality is the precursor to the shock of awakening that comes after, in 2008-2011.

Where I differ from Lincoln is in my belief that we cannot then “save our country,” for the simple reason that the nation itself is a significant contributor to the global crises that challenge our species. This is not merely an American issue, of course—ALL mass cultures and powerful nation-states are part of the problem. Either we learn to live differently or suffer dire consequences. The map of the world is sure to change dramatically over the next century. What is less certain is how the inner map of human nature will change.

Slavery

In this first decade of the 21st century, we find ourselves at another crossroads of history concerning enslavement. To be sure, one facet of this crisis is our continuing struggle with longstanding racism and xenophobia, this time concerning other dark-skinned people—Muslims mostly, but also Mexicans. I'm not sure who Americans are collectively more afraid of in that regard, terrorists from the Middle East or illegal immigrants from south of our borders, both of whom have supplanted the African boogeyman in our mythic nightmares.

These days slavery is no longer about literal ownership of human beings who are forced live in shacks on plantations and pick cotton, but is instead about *de facto* ownership through industrial globalization—the endless corporate quest to find sources of cheap labor to exploit. Many on the right who believe that capitalism in its current form is just fine, thank you, see this as progress, the betterment of the commercial marketplace through more efficient business practices. Many on the left who believe that capitalism has devolved into a monster see it as more slave labor and the callous abandonment of America's middle and lower classes. Both arguments carry weight within the context of their specific concerns.

In the larger view, however, the slavery from which we need to be disenthralled is not about others, but ourselves. Whatever our jobs, at least half of us in America now qualify as third-worlders. We may not look like it yet, but the bulk of Americans are no longer among the privileged. This is a different kind of enslavement, one that does not require iron chains, except, of course, for government's secret imprisonment and now “legalized” torture of anyone they regard as terrorist suspects, including American citizens.

As horrified as I am that—after 800 years of fundamental human rights enshrined in the Magna Carta—the elites who rule have finally succeeded in gutting the Constitution by tossing into the garbage can the legal protections of *habeus corpus*, I am less concerned with that particular totalitarian outrage than I am with our more subtle and pervasive loss of freedom through the seductions of mass mind control. Those velvet chains are seemingly invisible, but stronger than iron, since the enslaved don't realize their bondage.

Conspiracy

As a partial aside, I do not subscribe to crude conspiracy theories concerning mind control and social manipulation. For instance, I do not believe that the government intentionally concocted the attacks of

9-11. I prefer the notion of a more subtle conspiracy involving billions of small decisions by millions of human beings at every level of society acting in what they perceive as their own self-interest to manipulate others and reshape the external environment. That's a mouthful, but it boils down to this: The conspiracy is collectively unconscious and made up of the sum total of our individual decisions and actions. That makes the resulting mind control all the more powerful, however, not less so. Were the conspiracy simply orchestrated from the top down by a cabal of plutocratic elites, the rest of us would already be rioting in the streets. We're not, because we are all part of the collective enchantment.

This is not to suggest that no cabals exist. Of course they do, from neoconservatives in the Bush administration through executives in corporate boardrooms to local city councils in bed with commercial developers. Such groups do their manipulative work partly in public, as open business, and partly in secret, behind closed doors. They are effective when they network with other like-minded groups, amplifying their power and resolve, but only if the rest of us agree to go along for the ride. This is where public relations comes in—to convince the rest of us that what they want is in OUR best interests, whether or not that is objectively true. Forging consensus in a mass culture through techniques of mind-control—i.e., advertising and marketing—is critical to the struggle for power. Competing worldviews win or lose based largely on whose propaganda we collectively believe.

Among the many reasons that our current condition is so vexing is that the ongoing cultural, political, and spiritual hypnosis is not 100% effective on most people. Despite the apparent success of mass mind-control, nearly everyone recognizes that something is seriously amiss. Like morphine, mass hypnosis does not actually neutralize the pain of our collective illness, but merely banishes it to a slight remove, so that we are still somewhat aware of the discomfort, though not writhing in agony. We are only partially sedated.

As a result, any given person has his or her take on what ails us. For some, it is modernity itself and the decay of what they see as upstanding morality that festers at the root of our pain. Such people seek to take us back to a Normal Rockwell fantasy of conformist social and religious fundamentalism (whether Christian or Islamic). Others identify the problem as conservative backlash, and they lobby for a renewed progressivism. That's the red-state/blue-state division, which is one of numerous popular yardsticks eagerly adopted by the mainstream media's echo chamber.

The November Elections

Consider the upcoming midterm national elections on November 7th. Some of my friends feel encouraged by the seeming meltdown of the Republican Party through the revelations of endless scandals and increasingly visible malfeasance. They are hopeful that the Democrats will regain control of the House and/or the Senate. To these dear friends I say good luck and good night. From my admittedly on-the-fringe perspective, the center of the bell curve in American politics is now a one-party state. Both the Democrats and Republicans believe in Empire, support wars of domination, and serve the same corporate masters, wealthy elites, big-money special interests, and myopic short-term goals. Both parties embrace a vision of America that amounts to a poisonous concoction of collectively-held fantasies.

Most Democrats in Congress do not support either the Murtha bill for immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq or the McGovern proposal for defunding of the war. In fact, the Democratic Party has cut off funding for almost all anti-war candidates. Democrats running for office who oppose the aggressive, violent policies of Empire have been abandoned and disowned by party leaders who hold the purse-strings. Only "stay-the-course" candidates receive financial assistance from the party in their campaigns. That's telling.

Basically, I do not believe that the outcome of this election will make any substantive difference in the coming collapse of society and the radical reorientation that will follow. Yes, the election results could alter the appearance of the melodrama and the shape-shifting illusions that swirl around us, but the reality of what's on the way will be unaffected. We are not yet ready to consider real change at any fundamental level. Business-as-usual is still the predominant theme in America and the world.

Religion and Vengeance

Here and now, near the end of what we sarcastically call “civilization,” we are witnessing the penultimate failure of religion and economics, which have walked hand-in-hand like starry-eyed lovers for the past 10,000 years, and especially through the most recent two millennia of the Piscean Age. The Great Sages—among them, Jesus, Mohammed, and Buddha—would weep to see what has been wrought in their names, their teachings either perverted or ignored by religious institutions and the ersatz spirituality of their followers.

Most human beings rarely live up to the tenets of the great religions and profound spiritual teachings. For example, how many Christians express compassion and forgiveness *only* when it is easy and convenient to do so? I’d guess a lot of them. After a significant violation—such as occurred on 9-11, for instance—masses of people shed the veneer of Christian kindness and revert to more primal impulses for “getting even” by wreaking bloody payback, not merely to those we believe caused the harm, but to anyone who vaguely resembles the perpetrators.

That’s one of many reasons why war is still inevitable and peace a mere fantasy, because most of us are unconsciously vulnerable to the dark side of human nature, a fact that effectively separates us from almost all other animal species. Even among the higher primates, revenge is rare if not unknown. Not for us, though. We are all over revenge like flies on feces. Despite the admonitions of religion (“*Vengeance is mine, ’ sayeth the Lord*”), revenge remains a powerful motive force in human affairs, not just in geopolitics, but at every level of culture down to families, friends, and intimate partners. Legions of divorce lawyers are proof of the interchangeability of love and hate.

Economic Disharmony

Meanwhile, with the Dow and corporate profits now at their highest levels ever, the toxic engine of the global economy chugs on, transferring monetary wealth upward while corrupting everything it touches, literally destroying the balance of life on this planet. Commerce, which ought be vital and life-sustaining, has morphed into Moloch, the destroyer of worlds.

All the myriad social problems that face us—politics, health care, distribution of wealth, moral conflicts, immigration, terrorism, war, etc.—can be funneled down into a single crisis: living in disharmony with Nature, as if She were nothing more than an obstacle to be overcome (as in the “conquest” of Nature) or a resource to be exploited for profit and convenience (much like a trust fund from a rich aunt given over to an adolescent who has no appreciation of its value and no concern for its exhaustibility once squandered).

A fundamental law of life on earth is that what is taken out must be put back. The ecological matrix of overall balance must be maintained for organic life to continue to flourish. That system has worked for two billion years, regulating and restoring itself through numerous crises. Earth is once again in crisis: Human beings have become the single greatest threat to the matrix of life. We are ruining the Garden with discordant agriculture and rapacious industry. The oceans, atmosphere, and topsoil—three of the critically interconnected regulating systems for maintaining life—are dying because of us.

For two million years, our ancestors lived as hunter-gatherers without harming the environment that nurtures life. Only in the last 11,000 years have we become destructive to the ecosystem, with the most recent centuries wreaking havoc of truly astounding proportions. Our ancestors, whose oversized brains were mischievous and clever, said to themselves, “You know, we could ferment a lot more alcohol to get high if we stopped merely foraging for grain and instead cultivated it. We can clear all this land and grow grain ourselves!” And so, agriculture was born, and with it, civilization, which led to carving up the land and resources in ownership and control, which led to territorial conflicts, which led to war, which, well, led us eventually to where we are now.

Are we to blame for what civilization has wrought? Yes and no. Much of what we are—our cleverness, our industry, our greed, our territoriality, even our fear of other human beings—are programmed into the DNA of our genetic code. We’ve just been following the script that Nature allowed. Unfortunately, our stunning success has been our undoing. Despite occasional efforts to the contrary, the record of human

civilization is damning with regard to living in harmony. We seem unable to get along with Mother Nature, not to mention getting along with each other.

Not that Nature cares, of course. If we cannot restrain ourselves, She will do it for us. When imbalance and disharmony reach sufficient extremes, as they are now, corrections automatically kick in. Having given us our day in the sun, Nature will dethrone us from our temporary status as a dominant species much like a dog shakes off an infestation of fleas. Humanity may survive in some form, but our deranged impact on the world around us will be minimized. Nature will take whatever's left, go back to square one, and spend another billion years seeing what She can rebuild. And sentient beings from the far corners of the universe will read their morning newspapers and note that another carbon-based amusement park has gone belly up. One less combination vacation-paradise-and-horror-movie for spirits seeking embodied experience. Oh well, it was fun while it lasted.

Evolution is now a race to see if we flawed human beings can find room in our hearts and minds and lives for the better angels of our nature. This will not occur naturally, since it would take eons, and there's simply not enough time. Humans developed raw power so quickly that the delicate balance with love and reverence were eclipsed. Now we have maybe a century—perhaps less—to save ourselves from ourselves. That revolution is likely to occur in crisis and by force, and with astounding repercussions. Either we find ways to balance love and power, and to come back into harmony with Nature, or we will be relegated to the scrap heap of evolutionary history.

For what it's worth, I think we may still have a chance. We are at the end of an Age, in the disintegration of excess, conflict, and chaos. A new order will emerge from the ashes of a bankrupt civilization. Human nature may not change, but human behavior will be constrained one way or another to bring us back into accordance with natural law.

Right now, as we approach critical mass, our spiritual discipline continues to be *disenchantment*—the hard work of giving up foolish dreams, faded hopes, and forlorn fears.



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