

Uranus-Neptune: The Technology Revolution *Part Three*

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*Version 1.4 (posted originally on 29 July 2017)
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In Part One of this new commentary series, I discussed the structure of the ten cycles of civilizational astrology and the symbolism of the Uranus-Neptune cycle, as well as the timing of the various phase changes within the current Uranus-Neptune cycle that began in 1993. While the cycle covers a range of symbolic meanings and real-life correspondences, I've chosen to focus on the connection of the cycle to the Technology Revolution that has become a central facet of our times and is expected to be even more important over the 21st century.

In Part Two, I wrote about widely-held belief that technological progress will rescue civilization from the looming problems we face. I also discussed the first set of reasons I feel that technology cannot and will not save us, namely, that technology is not energy, and that the development and application of technology is vulnerable to many of the possible (and likely) disruptions that await us, some of which are already damaging our world.

Now, in Part Three, I want to address the other reason for my doubts about technology as a panacea to the impending crises we face as a civilization and a species.

Technology can (and already has) dramatically changed the way we live as human beings in modern civilization. If someone who lived in any century up to the 20th could see how people live today, he or she would quite likely be dumbstruck. Commerce, transportation, and communications have all been utterly transformed by staggering developments in technology, and the changes have been accelerating at a pace that is nothing short of breathtaking.

As a species, this is what we're good at — inventing and building, essentially extracting resources from the earthly environment and recombining them in ingenious ways to manipulate our external world. We've always been good at this, we do a lot of it (literally, as much as we can), and the scale of such operations has now reached gargantuan proportions.

On the other side, however, are the difficulties of what we're not so good at. We're not nearly as talented nor skilled at dealing with intangible or interior realities, so, in the collective sense, we tend to avoid investing our energy in those arenas. The dilemma is that these intangible or interior factors are the primary causes of the possible (and, in many ways, probable) catastrophes we now face, some of which could result in our decimation or even extinction.

Basically, the predicament I'm referring to is what is commonly called "human nature" — the complex set of motivations, qualities, traits, archetypes, or whatever other term we wish to use to label them, that are hard-wired and built into our genetic code as animals. For most animals, these instincts are direct, straightforward, and relatively neutral. For human beings, however, this inner programming is bewilderingly complex, often circuitous, and subject to a whole host of modifying factors that can alter the expression of our drives. Neutrality is sometimes supplanted by tragic perversity, harmful to ourselves and to others. Human nature can be inspiring, but it can also be terrible.

Since human nature is an elusive rather than precise term — more philosophical than scientific — many varying definitions have been offered. One common definition is "*the general or core psychological characteristics, feelings, and behavioral traits of humankind, regarded as shared by all humans.*" That's pretty much in the standard ballpark — not specific, of course, in detailing exactly what those characteristics, feelings, and traits are, but adequate in putting a fence around the entire arena.

An equally common opinion is that "*you can't change human nature.*" And we haven't — certainly very little, if any, throughout our species' entire history. Our earliest ancestors who could be considered *homo sapiens* possessed essentially the same human nature that we have today. They were motivated by the same biological and psychological drives that animate our decisions and actions. Those drives were subject to the same paradoxes with which we struggle now.

In essence, while humans have been brilliant at manipulating and reshaping the outer environment, namely, the biosphere on which we live, we have precious little understanding about how to evolve (perhaps "civilize" would be a better term) our inward environment, namely, who we are within ourselves. Like a seemingly dormant volcano, civilization has only a thin veneer of civility on its surface. Just below, magma still boils and surges, and, every so often, erupts violently. We see evidence of that throughout history and in today's headlines.

Unlike a volcano, however, the magma of disturbed human nature can erupt *invisibly*. Human beings are frequently very skilled at maintaining the appearance of civility even when we are as mad as hatters. We may lie our asses off to protect our own egos or maintain our power. To make matters worse, we often

hide our true motivations even from ourselves. That's part of the disconcerting convolutions of the human condition.

Every trait in the characteristics that comprise human nature can be expressed well or badly, for good or ill, in noble or ignoble ways. Each day, we see examples of humans aspiring to goodness, and we also see other instances of the fall from grace in humans who seem bent on doing harm, sometimes willfully. Often this distinction is obvious, but not always. The line that separates the positive value of expression of human nature from its negative value in expression is frequently unclear. I think it safe to say that the bulk of human beings conduct their lives from a base of good intentions, but even the best intentions are no guarantee of success in the follow-through and ramifications of what we do.

In the 1960 Hollywood western, *The Magnificent Seven* — an American remake of Akira Kurosawa's 1954 Japanese film, *The Seven Samurai* — a young Steve McQueen played one of the seven gunslingers hired by a Mexican village to rid the poor farmers of a gang of bandits. At one point late in the movie, McQueen's character Vin relates an anecdote to the bandit chief (played with dark glee by Eli Wallach). Asked by the bandit leader why the seven gunmen would take the demeaning job of defending an impoverished Mexican village, McQueen's character says:

*"Like a fella I once knew in El Paso. One day he just took all his clothes off and jumped in a mess of cactus. I asked him the same question: "Why?" He said, **"It seemed to be a good idea at the time."***

Again and again, this is the undoing of good intentions among human beings. What seems to be a good idea at the time turns out later to produce unintended consequences and negative repercussions. The apparent solution to one problem ends up creating other, much worse problems.

Who knew in the 19th century that the human population would multiply from a relatively manageable one billion members — where whatever harm we did was limited mainly to our squabbling amongst ourselves — to our current numbers of roughly seven billion? As that increase in population ramped up, the energy bonanza of fossil fuels that drove the Industrial Revolution eventually pumped so much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere that a greenhouse effect resulted, increasing average global temperatures. And yet, most especially here in America, we continue our policy of fossil fuel extraction and use, even to the point of denying the significance and dangers of climate change.

Many climate scientists believe that we're fast approaching the tipping point where global warming may become a self-reinforcing, runaway feedback loop that cannot be stopped. At least one notable climate expert (Guy McPherson) has announced that, based on his assessment of all available research, we're already

well past that fatal tipping point. Whether sooner or later, however, and inevitable or not, severe climate disruption threatens our very survival as a species.

This is an ecological example of apparently stunning success leading to potentially catastrophic failure. Our recent ascendancy as a prolific and dominant species has provoked numerous very serious unintended consequences, including toxic pollution of the ground, atmosphere, and oceans, and losses of huge amounts of viable habitat for other earthly plant and animal life forms. The environmental degradation has become so widespread that we've earned the dubious distinction of becoming perhaps the first living species to cause a mass extinction on our planet.

According to science, five earlier "great extinctions" occurred on the earth over the past half-billion years. The most recent of those — 66 million years ago — called the *Cretaceous Extinction*, was sudden, presumably the result of a huge asteroid slamming into what is now the Gulf of Mexico. It ended the reign of the dinosaurs and is estimated to have wiped out three-quarters of living species on earth.

The current and ongoing extinction, called the *Holocene* or *Anthropocene Extinction* (so termed because it is caused primarily by human activity), is now in its third century and is accelerating with each passing decade. Estimates vary widely, but a 2014 study published in the journal *Conservation Biology* claimed that the rate of losses in biodiversity (i.e., extinction of species) is 1,000 times more than would be expected naturally.

Whether or not that multiplier is accurate, evidence clearly indicates that what has been termed the *technosphere* — the sum total of human-created industrial and commercial activity — is driving the extinction. In short, technology is *not* helping to sustain or improve life on earth, but is, in fact, reducing the diversity and viability of life in ways that may prove disastrous.

In my identification of paradoxical human nature as the source of our problems, some readers may notice at least a passing connection to *The Four Noble Truths* of Buddhism, specifically the first two of that quartet of spiritual guidelines about human reality. To paraphrase, the *First Noble Truth* holds that all life is suffering, while the *Second Noble Truth* claims that the cause of this suffering is three-fold: greed and craving (which have no limits), ignorance (attachment to delusion), and hatred (destructive urges).

The *Third* and *Fourth Noble Truths* describe the cessation of suffering (through enlightenment) and a way to achieve it (the Eightfold Path).

Technology has no relation to the Third and Fourth Truths (solutions to suffering) and is firmly centered in the Second Truth (causes of suffering).

Technology is all about imagined possibilities and greater power. And that is entirely within the realm of ordinary (and fallible) human nature.

Every technological leap forward brings with it additional wishes for further leaps. Even the satisfaction of our desires is only temporary, since desire itself is insatiable. I'm not suggesting that we renounce desire (or technology, for that matter). Modern civilization has never been (and, I think, never will be) a giant monastery filled with billions of ascetic monks. Hell, I'm definitely a creature of my times, as wedded to modern technology as anyone else. I own and drive a car, watch a flat-screen TV, sit in front of an iMac all day long, and use an iPhone. So, I am hardly a paragon of virtue. That said, I still have a heart and a mind, and I write about what they show me.

What I'm lobbying for is not a renunciation of desire or even getting rid of our technology-laden lifestyles. My wish is for a modest restraint to counter our historical tendency to collectively act with hubris. I'd like us to consider the consequences of what we create and produce.

As soon as we developed the capability to build nuclear power plants, we went right ahead and built them by the hundreds. At that time, during the 1950s and 1960s, voices of sane caution suggested that perhaps this wasn't such a great idea. At the time, those voices were either ignored or marginalized. Instead, we were told, the whiz-bang technology of nuclear power would solve all our energy problems. Generation of electricity by boiling water with the heat produced by nuclear fission would be clean, safe, non-polluting, and cheap. Further, authorities guaranteed that we had the engineering know-how to insure that no life-threatening accidents would occur. Well, it turned out that those assurances were wrong. Dead wrong.

Our shocking arrogance has resulted so far in three well-known disasters — Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, and, worst of the trio, Fukushima, which is currently irradiating the Pacific Ocean with no end in sight.

Is this hubris and arrogance an unavoidable outcome of the all-too-common expression of the dark side of human nature? I hope not, but I worry that it may be.

Right now, hundreds of tech companies — from the current giants such as Google, Yahoo, and Microsoft, down to small Silicon Valley start-ups — are busting their tails to develop new and far-reaching technologies that will further revolutionize civilization. Do I imagine that these corporations will exercise any restraint at all, that they will seriously consider the ethical and moral concerns about where we may be headed and its implications for humanity? No, I don't.

All these companies are driven by the economic imperative of financial profit, made even more urgent by the global cyber-situation of our times, where

survival (or success) in technological development requires staying one step ahead of the competition, whether that competition is from other companies, other countries, the Deep State, or the cyber-Mafia, which is already huge and growing larger by the minute. Billions and perhaps even trillions of dollars are at stake. Whoever can offer new technologies first will grab a lion's share of those profits.

The other option is that our collective refusal to slow down and choose greater thoughtfulness and sane caution about who we want to become won't actually matter. The reason it may not matter is that we could be stopped in our tracks by any of the many possible catastrophes now facing humanity. Events we cannot (or are unwilling to) prevent, forestall, solve, manage, or control may pull out the rug from under us.

In the meantime, it's "*damn the torpedoes and full speed ahead*" in our headlong rush to develop the next generations of technology.

End Part Three

*In Part Four of this commentary series — **The Uranus-Neptune Cycle: The Technological Revolution** — I'll discuss the timing and meanings of active transits within the current Uranus-Neptune cycle now and in the 2020s, and list some of the technologies that may be implemented, both in the marketplace and less visibly.*