

The Astropoetic School of Soul-Discovery

News From The Astropoetic School May 2023

Greetings from [The Astropoetic School of Soul Discovery](#) in the Missouri Ozarks, where phoebes nest on top of wind chimes, and squirrels drink out of my hot tub while I sip my morning coffee ten feet away on the deck.

My Go-Fund Me Campaign

In addition to this tri-annual newsletter, I am publishing a monthly newsletter called **The Book Report**, available to anyone who makes a donation of any amount to the [Go Fund Me Campaign](#) I have set up to support the publication of my new book – *Astrology in the Era of Uncertainty: Moving Beyond Interpretation into an Archetypal Exploration of Psyche and Cosmos*. In each issue of **The Book Report**, I will share my progress in making the transition from manuscript to book, along with suggestions for how you can help, and an installment of the book itself.

To date I have raised \$1,817, minus Go Fund Me fees, through 20 donations. My goal is to raise \$4,200 altogether, which will pay for editing, cover design, printing, and possibly a bit of promotion. If you wish to play a more active part in bringing this creative project into manifestation, please consider making a donation and/or telling your astrological friends about it.

Anyone who donates \$50 or more will receive an autographed copy of the book when it comes off the presses.

For a donation of \$200 or more, you will receive my entire library of astrology books – five counting this one – plus mention on my acknowledgment page and my website.

Lastly, Angel Donors who contribute \$1,000 or more will receive all of the above, plus a free [Chakra Pattern Overview](#), which provides a detailed exploration of your birthchart as a template for spiritual growth.

To contribute, go here: <https://gofund.me/6fbc1f0f>.

Since the last issue of **News From the Astropoetic School**, I have hired a copy editor, and started seeking endorsements, the first of which comes from Safron Rossi, a member of the core faculty in the Jungian and Archetypal Studies program at Pacifica Graduate Institute, author of [The Kore Goddess](#) and co-editor of [Jung on Astrology](#)):

Landwehr's Astrology in the Era of Uncertainty provides a thought-provoking historical narrative to the various spirits that have moved through the art of astrology through the centuries. Defining astrology as "an attempt to understand and more consciously occupy our place in a larger, living cosmos" his book aids us in the task of revivifying our sense of life embedded in conscious relationship to the *anima mundi*.

To those of you who have been kind enough to participate in this campaign, I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Please feel free to spread the word to anyone you think might be interested – via email and/or social media. PDF preview copies are available for any practicing astrologers and/or published authors, willing to give the book an endorsement.

Pluto's Not-for-the-Faint-of-Heart School of Do-or-Die

In the last issue of **News from the Astropoetic School**, I started a new series of articles called *The Shifting of Our Collective Archetypal Field*, about Pluto's evolutionary crash course, as it moves relatively rapidly through the signs since its discovery in Cancer in 1930. While astrologers work themselves into an understandable frenzy, wanting to speculate about Pluto's entry into Aquarius this year, this series will first look backwards at how Pluto has shifted our collective archetypal field so far. Eventually, we will work our way to the present moment. But having just formed its first retrograde station in its new sign on May 1, we might consider the possibility that Pluto is asking us to first revisit what we have learned or failed to learn so far, as the best possible preparation for what comes next.

This retrograde invitation is, of course, true on some level, for all the planets. With Pluto, however, lessons not learned may well prove fatal – not just for those individuals whose birthchart is triggered by its passage, but for all of us, as a species seeking to survive and flourish. It is perhaps no coincidence that Pluto's passage through a sign generally encompasses a retrograde period every couple of degrees of progress through the sign, about once a year or so – giving us ample opportunity to review what we are learning and try to get it right. This is important because Pluto lessons learned and embodied as a global culture will lead to our collective evolution, while Pluto lessons unlearned will severely diminish our collective quality of life. As the old cliché about Pluto goes, "That which doesn't kill us, will make us stronger," the corollary of which is, "That which we don't embody as hard-won wisdom, will eventually kill us."

For anyone who is concerned about the state of the world today – which is probably everyone I know, and everyone you know, and ought to be all of us – it is worth considering the possibility that we are, in some ways, failing to meet Pluto's challenges. It is also worth considering that this failure is slowly killing us. The global problems we face today – as Pluto enters Aquarius – are a reflection of our cumulative failure to take seriously our own power to destroy, as well as create, and the immense responsibility this power requires in order to wield wisely.

In the January 2023 issue of this newsletter, I explored the history of Pluto's passage through Cancer, including some of the formative world events that marked this passage – World War I, the rise of the extreme ideologies of fascism and communism, the Great Depression, and the Influenza Pandemic. In this installment of [The Shifting of Our Collective Archetypal Field](#), later in this issue, we will undergo a similar review of Pluto's passage through Leo, from 1937 – 1958.

Before that, in this new parallel series – [Pluto's Not-for-the-Faint-of-Heart School of Do-or-Die](#) – we will take a closer look at some of the lessons Pluto offered us during its sojourn in Cancer, lessons that we have by-and-large, still failed to assimilate or embody as a global culture, and which now contribute to some of the ongoing issues that humanity faces.

Cancer's Quest for Sanctuary

When Pluto moves through any sign, what seems to emerge is a shadow reflection of the archetypal essence of that sign. This shadow reflection, in turn, raises questions about fundamental issues we might associate with that sign. Addressing these issues in a more effective way, on a collective level, then becomes the pivot point of Pluto's challenge while in that sign. Not addressing these issues, or addressing them inadequately, inevitably leads to a compromised global reality, and adds another layer of complexity to our human predicament which lingers, and continues to fester, even as Pluto moves on.

I would argue that the fundamental issue around which the archetype of Cancer is constellated is the question of belonging: of being in a place that not only adequately meets basic physical needs for food, shelter and clothing, but also emotional needs for safety, stability, security, self-affirmation, love, respect, and community, a place where one can thrive because one is an integral part of something life-affirming that transcends one's individual existence, with which one resonates. This is a fundamental human need that can perhaps be understood as a quest for sanctuary.

As a human community, we all need to feel as though we are moving toward a world in which everyone, human and more-than-human, has its place; where everyone's basic needs are met; where we can count on each other to cooperate toward the common good that supports and sustains us all. To the extent that this quest for sanctuary seems idealistic, this is perhaps a measure of our failure to meet Pluto's opening challenge in Cancer, a failure that continues to reverberate today in a much more insidious and complex set of consequences than it did back then.

With Pluto in Cancer, we experienced war, economic collapse and pandemic, all on a global scale, within the span of less than a quarter century, while the political world order rearranged itself in ways that made it more polarized and extreme. Within such a tumultuous scenario, this sense of sanctuary, fundamental to Cancer and to our collective wellbeing during Pluto's passage through Cancer, was hard to come by. Pluto's challenge, commensurate with the intensity of world events, was to implement changes designed to mitigate the threat to sanctuary that comes through war, economic instability, runaway public health threats, and political extremism.

During the Pluto in Cancer years, efforts were made, along with mistakes and failures it is possible to learn from, if we have the collective will to do so. Where collective will is absent or insufficient; where we willfully refuse to learn from our

mistakes and failures; where we have the power to rise to the occasion and create a better, more equitable and life-sustaining world for everyone, but we do not – evil is born. This is the cost of admission to Pluto's mandatory Not-for-the-Faint-of-Heart School of Do-or-Die. This is the fundamental choice that leads either to our collective evolution as a species, or to our eventual extinction.

Pluto in Cancer demands that we create sanctuary in order to evolve. If we can't do that, or won't do that, then as a species we will not survive. We can speculate that by the time Pluto enters Cancer again, sometime in the late 22nd century, our time will be up. If reports emerging during Pluto's passage in Capricorn, only one-half cycle in – about climate change, species extinction, future pandemics, our declining capacities to produce enough food, shelter and/or other basic needs for a growing population, including increasing numbers of refugees displaced by wars, pandemics, famines, and political oppression – are to be taken seriously, we may not make it that far.

In his 2017 BBC TV show, "Expedition New Earth" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQhvNEVRo7w>) the renown physicist Stephen Hawking suggested that humans should plan on colonizing another planet within 100 years to have any hope at all of survival as a species. Citing an inevitable extinction-level catastrophe, such as an asteroid hit, but also including climate change, nuclear war, the proliferation of genetically modified viruses, and the unknown threats posed by AI (an obvious Pluto in Aquarius issue), he suggested that this was necessary because Earth's capacity to sustain human life was increasingly in question.

A reasonably intelligent person might question whether moving to another planet would be anything more than a temporary fix at best. Aside from the possibility of an asteroid hit, humans are responsible for these other conditions on Earth that now threaten our survival. If "wherever you go, there you are," it likely wouldn't take long for us to duplicate the same dysfunction that is now threatening to do us in, on Planet B. Meanwhile, it is not hard to see this predicament as a direct consequence of our collective failure to create sanctuary right here on the one precious planet that has been our home for about 6 million years.

It has really only been since the Industrial Revolution, which began about one-half Pluto cycle ago, that humans have reached the capacity to destroy sanctuary on a scale large enough to affect the habitability of Planet Earth. With Pluto's discovery and passage through Cancer, as documented in the last issue of this newsletter, the handwriting was already on the wall. If we couldn't stop resolving our differences through war; if we couldn't find a way to harness our abundant resources toward ensuring the health, equitable prosperity, and wellbeing of our growing population; if we couldn't refrain from indulging extreme ideologies that demonize and seek to eliminate entire populations, classes, or races of people, then we were inevitably going to fail at the task of creating sanctuary.

There are, of course, other dimensions of this failure that also affect the more-than-human world that have evolved since Pluto was in Cancer, as well as additional human follies that more directly affect humans. But this is where it starts. Where will it end? Few of us alive today will live long enough to see Stephen Hawking's vision come to pass, if it does, and this is probably a blessing, since it probably won't turn out well. Given the evidence so far, our chances of creating a habitable sanctuary on another planet aren't any better than they have been here.

Really, our only viable option, as I see it, is to find a way to do the following:

Dismantle the machinery of war; address the violence of a culture built on conflict and the unquestioned widespread availability of weapons; and find a better way to resolve our differences.

Develop social institutions that ensure everyone has enough to eat, a place to live, and sufficient income to meet basic necessities, while shifting our priorities from insanely over-bloated defense spending to making our communities more livable.

Reduce our tolerance for all human behaviors and institutionalized political forces that denigrate or demonize others – racism, sexism, gender discrimination, vilification of LGBTQ+ individuals, ageism, ableism, religious persecution, etc. – and educate ourselves and our children to be tolerant of and appreciate diversity.

Become serious in our commitment to address climate change, loss of biodiversity, the toxification of our soil, air, and water, and other environmental issues that compromise the capacity of the earth to sustain the health and wellbeing of humans and other species; and doing this in a way that respects issues of environmental justice.

Develop a global health care system oriented around the old Hippocratic principle of “doing no harm;” that is oriented around the actual needs of people, rather than profit; and that facilitates international cooperation in equitably addressing pandemics and other global health issues.

Make an effort to address the global issue of immigration, which is a primary manifestation of our failure to create sanctuary, as increasing numbers of people flee from intolerable conditions caused by war, violence, political oppression and persecution, climate catastrophes, famine, and disease.

Whether or not we, as a planetary culture find the political will to resolve these complex global sanctuary issues in sufficient time to make a difference remains to be seen. The sad reality is that while for some, these steps are just common sense, for others, they are seen as an impediment to business as usual, or horrors of horrors, evidence of creeping socialism or excess government. So, while the situation deteriorates, we duke it out politically, and do the too-little-too-late cha-cha in tandem with Pluto’s retrograde dance, hoping at best, for one step back to be balanced by two steps forward.

Although Pluto’s as yet unmet Cancer challenge can really only be addressed collectively, we can each take individual steps to at least align ourselves with the evolutionary possibility of sanctuary. While such a way of life, which is really what it is, waits to be created by each one of us, limited only by our compassionate imagination, here are a few example steps to get you started:

Plant a garden, and give away the surplus produce to your neighbors. While you are at it, put up birdhouses, and plant flowers that support bees and other pollinators of natural abundance.

Volunteer at the local homeless shelter, or work with organizations like Habitat for Humanity to make affordable housing possible.

Volunteer, and/or send money to any number of other good organizations doing good work to address environmental issues, humanitarian or human rights concerns, and/or racial, gender discrimination or social justice issues.

Strike up a conversation with someone with whom you disagree, or who in some way lives outside of your comfort zone, with the intent to simply listen, understand the other's point of view, and find some common ground where agreement becomes possible.

Work to elect and support progressive politicians who share your values, and will work toward the common good, rather than their own or some vested interest that profits at the expense of the common good.

In the Not-For-the-Faint-of-Heart Pluto School of Do-or-Die, every step you take toward the alignment of your life with the seemingly idealistic goal of sanctuary, will strengthen you, even as it helps the rest of us, in however small a way. Other challenges have been posed by Pluto's passage through subsequent signs, and we will get to those later in this series. But to the extent that we are able to create sanctuary in the places where we live, the subsequent tasks will be easier.

The Shifting of Our Collective Archetypal Field

In the last issue of this newsletter, we considered Pluto's passage through Cancer from the years 1914 – 1937, along with defining moments in the history of that era that shaped the cultural tenor of that generation and established the challenge of sanctuary discussed in the previous article. In this installment of this series, we will take a similar look at Pluto's passage through Leo, from 1937 – 1956, including the transitional phase from October 1937 – June 1939, during which Pluto went back and forth between Cancer and Leo.

Pluto in Leo: World War II

Called the War to End All Wars, World War I should have been an international wake-up call, but it wasn't. Indeed, at the beginning of the transition phase, US President Roosevelt gave his famous Quarantine speech, calling for calling for an international "quarantine" against the "epidemic of world lawlessness" by aggressive nations such as Hitler's Nazi Germany, Mussolini's Fascist Italy, and Hirohito's Imperial Japan, even while these nations were gearing up for what would eventually become World War II, a far deadlier escapade than World War I. This policy, which became associated with American isolationism, became untenable after the surprise attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941.

Meanwhile, in 1938, Hitler's expansionist aspirations began with the annexing the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia, and then bullying Czech president Emil Hacha to sign away his country's independence. Most of the world took a wait-and-see attitude, but when Hitler subsequently invaded Poland in September, 1939 – a few months after Pluto firmly established its presence in Leo – World War II officially began when Britain and France declared war on Germany.

In August, 1939, Germany signed a non-aggression pact with Russia, which included a secret agreement to divide Europe into German and Soviet "spheres of influence" after the war. The pact would dissolve less than 2 years later, when Germany took the war to Russia. In the meantime, while Germany invaded its European neighbors Belgium, the Netherlands, France, Denmark, Norway, Luxembourg, and Romania, and bombed Britain, Russia annexed part of Romania, invaded eastern Poland, Finland, and the Baltic States of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, annexing parts of all these countries into the Soviet Union.

In 1940, Italy declared war on France and Great Britain, shortly after which, France surrendered to Germany. Like Germany and Russia, Italy had its own expansionist aspirations under the dictatorship of Benito Mussolini, who consolidated his political stronghold in Italy, as Hitler did in Germany, during Pluto in Cancer. Prior to declaring war on France, Mussolini occupied Corfu, a Greek island in 1923, annexed Albania in 1939, and supported military dictator Francisco Franco during the Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939. Mussolini was a shrewd opportunist, who initially declared neutrality in World War II, then jumped in when he smelled the possibility of sharing the spoils of war with Hitler, after his successes in the early part of the war. He miscalculated, and wound up hung upside down in a service station in Milan, after being captured and killed in Switzerland, where he fled with his mistress when his fortunes started to go south.

Like these other dictators, who were springing up like deadly mushrooms around the world during Pluto in Leo, Japan's Hirohito consolidated his power during Pluto in Cancer, and began a campaign of militarization and imperial expansion during Pluto in Leo. As Germany and Italy were drooling over the possibility of carving up Europe, and Russia was building the Soviet Union, Hirohito was waging war across Asia. In particular, he waged the Second Sino-Japanese War, which began with a false accusation against Chinese dissidents as a pretext to invade Manchuria in 1931, and escalated to a full-blown war in 1937 that overlapped with World War II and eventually killed 20 million people.

Hirohito also feared an invasion by Russia, and was maneuvering strategically to avert this fate when Germany invaded Russia. As did most of the rest of the world, Japan was reluctant to take sides in World War II at first, but by 1940, became a partner in the Tripartite Pact with Germany and Italy. Hirohito saw this as a way to further his own ends, and to pursue his aggressive foreign policy agenda in China and Southeast Asia, while Germany and Italy kept the Allies busy in Europe. At the same time, the United States was becoming increasingly vociferous in its condemnation of Japanese expansion in Asia, and after a period of contentious haggling among his minister, Hirohito agreed to go to war against the US. In retrospect, this proved an unwise decision, although unlike his fellow dictators, Hirohito survived the war, after General MacArthur argued that a cooperative Japan under Hirohito could serve US interests. Not only was he not tried or executed for war crimes, but he remained Japan's reigning monarch until 1989, the only monarch in the world after 1979 who retained the title of Emperor.

With all four of these dictators – Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin and Hirohito – we have a cadre of dark superstars. These men were, of course, not the first or the last to lust after, consolidate and abuse their power, but during Pluto in Leo, the sheer global scale of the combined deadly consequences of their grandiose aspirations for dominance over their neighbors and their rivals was unparalleled. World War II

killed an estimated 80 million people; the Second Sino-Japanese War 20 million; the Soviet campaign to annex the Baltic States killed up to another 130,000 – over 100 million dead through wars conducted by megalomaniacs, all within the span of less than two decades.

The Holocaust and the International Recognition of Genocide as a Crime Against Humanity

The second milestone event of Pluto in Leo was the extermination of 6 million Jews, by Nazi Germany and its collaborators. This represented two-thirds of all Jews in Europe at the time, and one-third of all Jews worldwide (<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/remaining-jewish-population-of-europe-in-1945>). In addition, another 7 million people deemed “inferior” by the Nazi regime – including Soviet prisoners of war, Soviet citizens targeted for mass starvation, rural civilians brutally murdered to send a message to anyone hoping to assist the Jews or the Allies, the mentally and physically disabled, and the Romani people – were brutalized, maimed, tortured, and systematically eliminated.

The term genocide was coined in 1944 by Raphael Lemkin, a Polish lawyer, to describe this phenomenon, and legally defined in 1948, after the war, at the Genocide Convention that he initiated. This was, of course, not the first time that genocide had taken place. Lemkin himself noted that the colonial era was inherently genocidal, having perpetrated systematic acts of violence against indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, Australia, Africa and Asia; as was the global slave trade that had existed for centuries before World War II. But the fact that this atrocity was given a name and formalized as a crime against humanity after one of the worst genocides in history, before or since, makes this a matter of increasing collective awareness in the Pluto in Leo era. Before that, perpetrators of genocide could far more easily justify their elimination or enslavement of entire groups of people deemed “inferior.”

Indeed, during the Genocide Convention itself, Stalin argued that certain groups should be excluded from the international definition of genocide, likely because he feared greater scrutiny of his own genocidal activities in Soviet Russia. In my last newsletter, I documented Stalin’s war crimes as he came to power when Pluto was in Cancer, as he systematically set out to eliminate his political rivals, imposing impossible hardships of rural peasants, and other misguided and inhumane policies that eventually killed 7-11 million people. During World War II, Stalin continued these genocidal policies against the Baltic peoples of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, to the point where the Nazis were initially hailed as liberators when they invaded these parts of the Soviet Union. It might be argued by some that this is just the nature of war, but like Hitler, Stalin was ruthless and brutal toward anyone who got in his way, including entire groups of people he deemed expendable.

Although not directly involved in World War II, a fifth brutal dictator should be added to our list of those engaging in genocidal practices during the Pluto in Leo era. Mao Zedong, who considered himself a Marxist-Leninist, started his political ascent while working as a librarian at Peking University in 1927, when he led the Autumn Harvest Uprising, an insurrection in Hunan and Jiangxi provinces. By 1949, he had become leader of the PRC (People’s Republic of China), defeating the National Government of the Republic of China, which withdrew to Taiwan, and declaring a single-party state. In the years that followed, his policies were directly responsible for the deaths of

millions of Chinese, rural peasants, intellectuals, and counter-revolutionaries. His greatest legacy as an agent of genocide, however, came during Pluto in Virgo, with the Great Leap Forward, which led to the greatest famine in world history, killing an estimated 15-55 million people from 1958 – 1962, and the Cultural Revolution, launched in 1966, designed to purge the country of “counter-revolutionaries,” persecuting tens of millions more.

In retrospect then, it appears that Pluto in Leo ramped up the capacity of these extreme dictators to wipe out entire populations at a stroke. In Mao’s case, this capacity was known as a “cult of personality,” which relied on mass media propaganda to elevate him to the status of an infallible heroic leader. Likewise, Adolph Hitler was known for his mesmerizing cult-like status, called by historian Ian Kershaw, “the embodiment of modern political evil” (*Hitler: 1889-1936: Hubris*, Norton & Co., 1999). In Japan, Emperor Hirohito was considered to be divine, only officially renouncing his divinity in 1946 after being defeated by the Allies. (Kawai, Kazuo (1958). “The Divinity of the Japanese Emperor,” *Political Science*. 10 (2): 3–1). These men, all of whom were directly responsible for the deaths of millions of people, were all megalomaniac embodiments of Pluto in Leo, and its capacity for death and destruction.

The Atomic Bomb and the Birth of the Cold War

The capacity for killing on a massive scale was greatly increased by technologies being developed explicitly to create an advantage in war. While such technologies have no doubt always been a part of the military mindset, the First World War was probably the first major conflict in which the capacities of the Industrial Revolution were harnessed to produce the weapons of war that were being used in the field. World War I was not the deadliest conflict to that point in history, but aside from its global reach, it was made far more serious by the technology being used to fight the war – including military aircraft, repeating rifles and machine guns, field artillery, tanks, explosive devices, and chemical warfare. Between World War I and II, aircraft became increasingly sophisticated, more efficient and more deadly, as did tanks, warships, and every other class of weapon.

By far, however, the greatest and most terrible technological advance, and a defining milestone of the Pluto in Leo years, was the development of the atomic bomb, which was eventually dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, to end the War in the Pacific with Japan. The bomb was developed in secret at Los Alamos, New Mexico, through the Manhattan Project led by Robert Oppenheimer, who, after the first test in the New Mexico desert, famously quoted the Bhagavad Gita, saying, “Now I am become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds.” Indeed, the first atomic bomb to be used in war, dropped on Hiroshima on August 6, 1945, instantly devastated an area of 4.4 square miles and killed 70,000 people on the spot, with another 30,000 who died within the year. An additional 39,000 people were killed by the second bomb, dropped in Nagasaki three days later.

With this one weapon, the entire scope of war, as well as the political landscape of the world was forever changed. In the wake of World War II, aside from the US, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France, China, India, Pakistan, Israel and North Korea have all tested and developed nuclear weapons. Other countries, such as Iran, have tried to develop them against massive international pressure not to, mostly from the US.

All of this has evolved over the course of the 78 years since the first test of the Atomic bomb, and since then, thankfully, we – the collective human culture – have managed to avoid a nuclear war. The development of the first atomic bomb with Pluto in Leo, however, unleashed an arms race, between the Western Bloc, led by the US and NATO, and the Eastern Bloc, led by the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, and this became a major component of what was known as the Cold War.

The Cold War was essentially an ideological and geopolitical struggle between the US and the Soviet Union for global influence, waged with psychological warfare, propaganda, espionage, embargoes, cultural rivalries, and a space race, in addition to nuclear arsenal development. Throughout the Cold War, the US supported anti-communist and right-wing governments around the world, while the Soviet Union supported left-wing parties and revolutions. Often the battleground for the Cold War was a more localized conflict, called a proxy war, somewhere in the Third World, where the US and the Soviet Union each supported a side. The Korean War between North and South Korea, conducted during Pluto in Leo, and the war in Vietnam, conducted during Pluto in Virgo, were two such proxy wars.

Central to the Cold War strategy was the development of nuclear weapons, although this proceeded relatively slowly during the remaining years of Pluto in Leo, and would not reach full steam until the Pluto in Virgo era, during which Kennedy sought to increase the US nuclear arsenal by 50%, and develop a new B-52 bomber to deliver them, while the Soviet Union under Khrushchev responded in kind.

During Pluto in Leo, however, the atomic genie was let out of the bottle, and would never be put back in. Despite decades of attempted negotiation between super powers to reduce nuclear arsenals, there are now approximately 10,000 nuclear warheads around the world. The US and Russia each still have more than 4,000 nuclear warheads each, of which more than 3,000 are actively deployed (Frida Berrigan, "The End of the World is Back," *In These Times*, January/February 2023, pp. 12-17."

Our economy, meanwhile, especially here in the US, but to some extent globally, is dominated by what eventually became known as the Military-Industrial complex, within which defense spending is the dominant driving force. US military spending reached \$877 billion in 2022, the largest amount of any country in the world, and more than the next 10 countries combined (– as listed by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute – https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_military_expenditures#See_also) with total global military spending estimated at \$2.1 trillion. About 7% of that or \$72.6 billion is spent on nuclear weapons programs (<https://www.statista.com/topics/4269/nuclear-weapons/>).

We take nuclear weapons for granted today, having collectively experienced a psychic numbing in the 1980s, called by one psychiatrist, "nuclear denial disorder," when we simply shut down in the face of 30 years of sabre rattling by nuclear superpowers. But the reality of nuclear annihilation is still ever-present, with Russia conducting new nuclear tests in 2022 and threatening the use of nuclear devices in Ukraine, and the US investing up to \$1.5 trillion to modernize its nuclear weapons and their delivery systems over the next 30 years. On January 24, the *Bulletin of Atomic Scientists* reported that the Doomsday Clock for 2023 was now set to ninety seconds before midnight, in response to this dire state of affairs. This is an

existential threat to our survival on this planet, at least on a par with climate change, and yet it is rarely discussed. This power of fallible humans to “become Death, the Destroyer of Worlds,” without the wisdom or sense of deep responsibility necessary to wield that power is also an unresolved legacy from the era of Pluto in Leo that we will carry with us into the era of Pluto in Aquarius.

The Rise of Conformist Consumer Culture

As a consequence of ramped up military spending by the government during World War II, the Pluto in Leo years after World War II and the early years of Pluto in Virgo saw an economic boom, which precipitated the birth of the Middle Class. “The average family income grew as much in the ten years after World War II as it had grown in the previous fifty years combined. Between 1940 and 1965, average income grew from about \$2,200 per family per year to just under \$8,000; when adjusted for inflation, that means average family incomes almost tripled” (<https://ap.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/fifties/essays/fifties>).

Unlike today, this rise in wealth affected everyone: the rich got richer, but the standard of living for most people also rose significantly, and over the course of the next 20 years, the percentage of those living below the poverty level was cut in half. Labor unions were an important part of this revolution, growing in power throughout the Pluto in Leo and Virgo years, negotiating higher wages for their members. Population grew, people moved to the suburbs, bought houses, automobiles and consumer goods. It was the Golden Age of Capitalism, many people became true believers, the American Dream was born, and the wellbeing of the nation began to be conflated, consciously and unconsciously with economic growth. This, of course, is a mindset that remains intact, one-half Pluto cycle later.

At the same time, this ideal state was sharply contrasted with the imagined state of affairs in Soviet Russia, where images of downtrodden people standing in lines for loaves of bread, toilet paper and ill-fitting shoes defined the alternative. Within this contrast, to make and spend money became a patriotic thing to do, and the very concept of democracy was conflated with capitalism. This seems obvious today, but it was a phenomenon that its roots in the post-war Pluto in Leo years – sometimes called the “Me Generation” – when having a house in the suburbs with a white picket fence, a new Buick Skylark in the driveway, and a new RCA color TV in your living room meant you were a true American and a solid citizen.

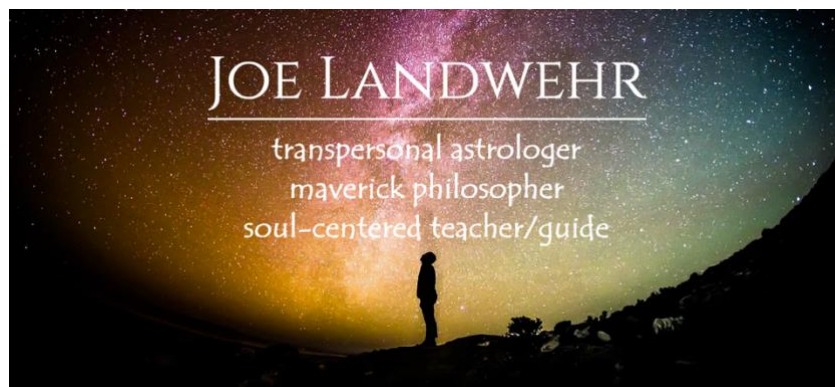
On the other side of the equation, at the height of the Cold War, there was also within the US, massive institutionalized paranoia about communism, referred to in the vernacular of the time as the Red Scare. Immediately following World War II, the face of this development was Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy, who vowed to weed out all those disloyal to the US. In a famous speech in 1950, he waved a piece of paper before his audience, claiming that it contained a list of members of the Communist Party who were serving in government. By the end of Pluto in Leo, anti-communism had become official government policy, not just in Washington, but in 44 of 48 states existing at the time, who passed laws designed to root out subversives and suppress communist activities. Throughout this era, the House Un-American Activities Committee investigated fellow congresspeople, bureaucrats, military personnel, journalists and Hollywood screenwriters, all suspected of being disloyal to the US, or communist spies, and all pressed to name names of others they knew.

While this drama took place in the halls of government, it also influenced the cultural mindset of the era, which was one of conformity, and increasing intolerance of non-conformity. If you were not aspiring to become a member of the growing, increasingly homogenous Middle Class, you were suspect (<https://ap.gilderlehrman.org/history-by-era/fifties/essays/fifties>).

The growing intolerance of non-conformity helped produce the staunching of dissent at many levels of society. Hollywood studio executives blacklisted writers and actors not just because of the Red Scare but also because of their own dislike of their politics. Newspaper and magazine publishers banished writers who were too stridently critical of the political and economic orthodoxy of their time. Television and radio executives refused to allow even mildly dissenting voices access to the air.

Of course, this mindset was about to be severely challenged when Pluto moved into Virgo, but with Pluto in Leo, as a culture, at least here in the US, we were becoming what Pink Floyd would later call "comfortably numb." Ironically, it is possible to see this state of affairs as an ersatz attempt at sanctuary. In reality, with the horrors of war seemingly behind us, the trauma of the Great Depression a fading memory, and a stable sunny-skies [Father-Knows-Best](#) future in front of us, we all went to sleep – even as the Lord of the Underworld had put a new unprecedented power of mass destruction in our hands, and more firmly planted a rabid US versus THEM mentality in our collective psyche – making real sanctuary a mirage.

Stay tuned for the next exciting episode as we look at how the lessons of Pluto in Leo continue to reverberate today and how Pluto's passage through Virgo began the great unraveling of Leo's fixed insistence on stability at any cost.



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