

# The Astropoetic School of Soul-Discovery

## News From The Astropoetic School January 2023

Greetings from [The Astropoetic School of Soul Discovery](#) in the Missouri Ozarks, where winter still holds the power, even in the midst of a warming climate, to remind us that nothing lasts forever.

### Calling All Readers to Opt In

I have been writing this newsletter now for over ten years as a way for me to keep in touch with those of you who are, or were at one time, interested in my work. I have shared news about upcoming events, previews of my books, articles from my 50-year archive, and fresh articles about topics of timely interest. Occasionally, I have gotten feedback from some of you, who have appreciated one offering or another. From most of you, I have not heard a word.

I do not automatically assume that this means you are not interested in what I share. But I also have no desire to clutter your inbox with unwanted material. For that reason, at the beginning of this new year, I am asking each of you who are interested in continuing to receive the newsletter to let me know. Feedback, of course, is always welcome. But you need not wax eloquent, if you truly have nothing to say. A simple, "Please keep me on your mailing list" will suffice.

If I do not hear from you, I will assume that you are no longer interested, and this will be the last newsletter that you receive.

If you are interested in continuing to receive the newsletter, you might also consider passing it on to anyone else you think might also appreciate it. Thanks.

### Announcing a New Go-Fund Me Campaign

In addition to this newsletter, and my ongoing work with astrological clients, I have self-published four books since 2004. These books have garnered excellent reviews and some have won awards, but sales have not provided me with many bragging rights, and in the throes of my obsession, they have in fact become a bit of a financial black hole. Be that as it may, I have decided that the journey was worth taking, even if the destination was not the romantic notion of what it means to be a published author.

I have also come to the conclusion – long ago, actually – that I am a writing fool, who will write as he breathes until the day that he breathes no more, regardless of who reads me or cares what I have to say. In that vein, I have spent the last few years of the pandemic writing yet another book, this one the best I have written yet,

in my humble and non-biased opinion. The book is called *Astrology in the Era of Uncertainty: Moving Beyond Interpretation into an Archetypal Exploration of Psyche and Cosmos*. I wrote it as much to make sense of this careening world for myself as I might have for any intended audience, although as all authors do, I believe it says something worth saying, and worth hearing.

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We live in a difficult time. The world is changing in ways that are often complex, confusing, and disruptive to our lives, and that can't easily be anticipated. Accurate, reliable information about what is happening is in short supply, and a small army of sophists skilled at deception muddy the waters in which we all hope to discern what is true. Within such a world, it can be immensely practical to, as the Delphi oracles admonishes, "know thyself," and to live in allegiance to that truth.

Astrology has long been a viable pathway to useful self-knowledge, as well as to a deeper understanding of one's place within the world, and beyond that, within the larger cosmic order. Astrology, however, has been dismissed by science, demonized by religion, trivialized by the media, and is often limited by astrologer's themselves, seeking to address the immediate concerns of their clients, instead of teaching them how to tap into their own source of inner-knowing.

Ultimately, it is astrology's capacity to evoke this inner-knowing that will make the difference in navigating an increasingly uncertain world – at least for those who truly understand the language. It is to those of you for whom astrology is a second language, but who may in fact be clueless about astrology's deeper potential, that I have written this book.

Beyond its known utility as a source of guidance in matters impacting everyday life, *Astrology in the Era of Uncertainty* is about astrology's capacity for facilitating a meaningful conversation between psyche and cosmos. Out of this conversation can come not just a clearer sense of identity and purpose, and a greater capacity to effectively navigate one's life, but also a communion with numinous, sacred mysteries that transcend whatever appears to be going on, from a merely human perspective.

Such conversations have generally been discouraged in our Western culture, largely because of the predominant influences of science, which values rational, objective consensus over imaginal, self-reflective meandering, and religion, which emphasizes faith and belief over personal experience. It is also not the way astrology is normally practiced.

As an archetypal language, directly referencing not just the planetary cosmos and the interior landscape of an individual psyche, but also the living gods and goddesses of mythology, a knowledge of astrology can foster an intimately personal conversation between psyche and cosmos in a way that science and religion cannot. Astrology, however, has co-evolved with science and religion, and consequently shares many of the same perceptual biases, especially as it has had to conform to the cultural zeitgeist of the day in order to have a seat at the table at which cosmological and metaphysical issues have been discussed. This book takes stock of what we have gained and lost in each era, through this conformity, and re-imagines an astrology that reclaims its own epistemological roots as an attempt to commune

directly with the cosmos and the divine intelligence that was once known to permeate it.

The Era of Uncertainty in the book's title is a reference to our current postmodern age, in which both science and religion have lost some of their presumed monopoly on truth. In the Era of Uncertainty, there is a renewed hunger for more direct access to personal gnosis, not dependent on external authorities. Each of us craves a reliable internal compass with which to navigate a world that, in the throes of very large, seemingly insolvable environmental, political, economic, social, racial and cultural problems, is increasingly uncertain. While astrology may not be able to directly address these global issues, it can help us to cope in meaningful ways by reminding us, through an ongoing, ever-evolving connection with the same primal forces shaping the world, that we have a place and a purpose in the larger scheme of things. This book is an attempt to show how astrology can be used to bring this sense of connection alive.

*Astrology for the Era of Uncertainty* is written in two parts. Part One is a parallel history of the development of astrology and science, religion and culture, showing how astrology has adapted itself to the prevailing paradigms of each era, and changed, as it has slowly evolved into its present form. Part Two is a movement backward through this same history, in order to reclaim astrology's more imaginal, mystical, mythological and cosmological roots as a participatory form of communion with the archetypal cosmos. In Part Three, I explore my relationship to the asteroid Vesta in an extended case study, demonstrating a method for going more deeply into a birthchart than is possible with standard interpretive analysis.

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As part of my own personal uncertainty, this past year, I have experienced a jolting financial crisis, which has left me unable to afford the luxury of self-publication, as I have with my first four books. I expect this to change as my investment portfolio slowly recovers, but in the meantime, the sense of urgency I have about getting this book out into the world compels me to try something new. In short, I have decided to start a Go Fund Me campaign to raise the necessary funds to edit and produce the book, which I finished last year.

I anticipate that it will cost about \$4,000 to bring this book into manifest form, with perhaps a bit left over for promotion. With hat in hand, I am asking my readers – those of you who have opted in – to help me raise these funds. If you are inspired to do that, you can access my Go Fund Me campaign [here](#). If you'd like to read more of the book before making up your mind, I can send a PDF sample to anyone who requests 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>.

For those of you who are kind enough to participate in this campaign, I thank you in advance from the bottom of my heart. It takes a community to raise a book, and if you've read this far, you could be part of that community.

If you are, you can also help by spreading 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.

## Entering the Archetypal Field

Writing my latest book, and working with dozens of people disoriented by the pandemic has changed the way that I work. I've always been a client-centered astrologer, meaning that I make the concerns and questions of my clients my focus, rather than their birthchart. Not since the earliest days of my 50-year career as a practicing astrologer, have I felt any need to dazzle my clients with my astrological prowess. But now, I've come to view the birthchart itself in a fundamentally different way.

*I met Joe about 15 months ago when I was exploring whether and how to reshape my psychotherapy practice following the forced stuckness of Covid. Since then, I've found working with him to be so worthwhile. He's extremely challenging and also highly supportive. He's funny and kind, also sharp and pointed. He's learned and wise which so are not the same thing. We never quite know how a session is going to go, and that's exciting. He's real and doesn't hide, which is encouraging me to do the same both with him and in my practice, as I pursue my new direction (an integration of psychotherapy and shamanism, not that you asked). – S. W., a client from Epsom, Surrey, UK*

*Last February, I reached out to Joe for astrological guidance on navigating a confusing, transitional phase in my life. But there was no way I could have anticipated the profoundly insightful, spiritually-rich adventure I was signing up for. Less than a year later, I'm forging a new path in my career; my sense of identity feels expanded and more dynamic; and my everyday life is imbued with a newfound sense of meaning, excitement, and an indescribable reverence for the mystery of life and my place within it. Working with Joe isn't for the faint of heart. He's wiser than Yoda and Gandalf combined, and what you'll learn about yourself on this journey can (and will!) call you to adventure. I suspect it's nearly impossible to embark on this exploration together with Joe, and not create unbelievable magic in your life. – J. B., a client from Red Bank, New Jersey*

## Moving From the Map into the Territory

Astrologers are fond of saying that the birthchart is a map, quickly adding, "but the map is not the territory." As true as this is, what does it really mean? If we go more deeply into the metaphor, it becomes fairly obvious. You wouldn't claim to know anything about Spain, having studied a map of Spain, without actually going there. By the same token, you can't really say you know anything about your interior landscape, having studied your birthchart, or handed it to an astrologer to read for you, unless you actually enter the territory mapped by the chart.

If the map is not the territory, and it is knowledge of the territory that is truly useful, then knowing how to read the map is of secondary importance. The map can orient you to your inner journey, but until you actually take that journey, you can't really say much that matters about the map.

If I had to describe how my practice has changed over the past few years, I would say that my focus and my interest now is in exploring the territory, and the client's journey through it. The map, that is to say the birthchart, has become, for me, only the point of entry into a conversation that ultimately leaves the chart behind.

Like all astrologers, I start with a rough intuitive guesstimate about what various patterns or placements in a chart might mean, which is mostly useful as an aid to asking the right questions. But I hold my speculations lightly as the client responds, and ultimately tells me what the symbolism means to them. I am often surprised by what emerges. A Jupiter-Pluto conjunction in one chart might entail a dialogue between a pinstriped manager who likes to be in control and a wild woman who prefers the deep end of the pool. A Moon-Neptune square might encompass both a multi-generation history of emotional abuse, and an entire female lineage, going back to earth-based indigenous traditions. The exploration of Vesta that I undertook in my book led me to a series of unlikely associations – with a Native American flute, kundalini shakti, the cinder-biters of Norwegian Viking culture, and the Queen of Wands – references that another astrologer with a different set of experiences and a different sense of resonance to the same archetype would not likely make.

Unlike the simple interpretation of a birthchart, a conversational exploration of a birthchart can go anywhere. It can, to be sure, be guided by the astro-logic of the symbolism, but it also transcends our limited conscious awareness of what the symbolism means. If it does not, then the birthchart can not reveal anything you don't already know. And if it doesn't reveal something you don't already know, why bother to do it?

## Letting the Story Be Your Guide

Behind the symbolism in the birthchart is a story. This may or may not be the story that you, as an astrologer, tell yourself about what you think the chart might mean. But if you are good at listening, and you have enough of a working vocabulary to recognize the symbols when they present themselves in unexpected guises, the client will tell you what the birthchart means, not in the abstract, but in their actual experience – through a story packed with emotions, and living images, as well as astro-logical vitality.

Once you have the story, then you are in the territory itself, where truth be told, there are no maps. If you get lost, you can always refer back to the chart. But I have found that these conversations have a life of their own. One thing leads to another, and before you know it, you are exploring the interior landscape mapped by the chart in a way that you simply can't, armed with the chart alone.

You are, to return to our metaphor, making an actual pilgrimage with the client from Barcelona to Spain, not just plotting your journey on a map. Crossing the spectacular rock formations and reliefs, ravines and river gorges of the Serranía de Cuenca is an actual experience, rather than just something to read about in a tourist guide. That close encounter with the mouflon, startled as you came upon it grazing, is not something you will find on any map.

Or leaving metaphors behind, as you explore the living reality behind a Jupiter-Pluto conjunction, let's say, you learn about the history of shaming that keeps the client playing by the rules, while also learning about the ferocity of spirit that perpetually dares her to break the rules and push past the safe edges of her comfort zone. You learn how these two very different energies work together at times to create hybrid resources, and how they, at times, work at odds with each other to produce fibroids, disproportionate anger about small annoyances, and outrage about very large issues beyond the control of any one person.

While it is possible to trace the story back to the birthchart, by the time you get waist-deep into it, it seems unnecessary and, in some cases, counterproductive, in the same way that referring to a map while you are wading across a stream with rapids might not be such a good idea. The map has shown you the trailhead, but walking the trail is far more interesting than the map itself. Isn't this really why you wanted to learn map-reading in the first place?

### Approaching the Birthchart as an Archetypal Field

Actually, the birth map provides numerous points of entry into territory that is multi-dimensional, territory that I can have come to understand as an archetypal field. Each of the planets within a birthchart can be understood to be an archetype. On one level, each planet represents a universal psychodynamic that plays out in predictable ways, and that speaks to everyday experiences common to us all. But, on another level entirely, is a uniquely configured description of how the same primal forces that shaped this manifest universe, and came to be depicted as the gods and goddesses of world mythology, have also shaped each of us.

Exploring the archetypal field is not just an abstract intellectual exercise in parsing symbols. It is an invitation to commune with divine intelligence, as it makes itself known to you – through the particular configuration of archetypes in your field. Each of these archetypes has a different view of the field, and provides a different portal into this kind of communion.

It doesn't really matter where you start, but however you move from the map to the territory, you eventually encounter something numinous, something unexpected that puts everything into perspective, something larger than life that is awe-inspiring and terrifying at the same time. One does not bow before the gods and goddesses out of formal ritual respect; one drops to one's knees because it is the only response possible in the face of the sacred. Unless the conversation around your birthchart

takes you to your knees, the map is just a piece of paper, devoid of anything more than superficial interest. Or at least, this is how I have come to view it, in the twilight of my astrological career.

## Allowing Time and Space for the Conversation to Unfold

The other thing that has changed for me is that I have abandoned the idea that you can interpret someone's birthchart in one sitting, or even really, that interpreting it at all is an especially useful thing to do. The one-off model of a "reading" that has become standard practice among astrologers can do little more than start a conversation that is, within the course of a single hour, bound and limited by the chart itself. This is not to say that many clients cannot benefit from the kind of insights into their chart that can emerge in the hands of a skilled astrologer within an hour's time. If you want to actually explore the archetypal field mapped by the birthchart, however, you need more time than that, as it is a much bigger, and far more rewarding exercise.

Because this is where my interest currently lies, I encourage every client who shares this interest to sign up for what I call a **Chakra Pattern Exploration** – six sessions beyond the initial reading. Most who do, don't want to stop at six, as by then the conversation has become really interesting. The process begins with a **Chakra Pattern Overview**, which maps the lay of the land, but the real fun begins when together, the client and I enter the archetypal field itself.

If this sort of deep dive appeals to you, you can start the process [here](#). If you haven't worked with me before, you can begin by signing up for the Chakra Pattern Overview (Option 1). If you have worked with me, and want see how far into the archetypal field you can go, then take a deep breath and sign up for the Chakra Pattern Exploration (Option 2). As JB has suggested, *"it's nearly impossible to embark on this exploration . . . and not create unbelievable magic in your life."*

## The Shifting of Our Collective Archetypal Field

Archetypes in general are a collective phenomenon. They arise out of what Jung called the collective unconscious, and shape the larger, universal patterns that govern human behavior. The process of individuation is one of interacting with and gradually differentiating one's personal relationship to the archetypes, and ultimately moving beyond an unconscious, instinctual generic response. I believe we do this, not just as individuals, but also collectively as a culture, and that the archetypes themselves evolve as we engage them.

This evolution is often imperceptible, and not without backslides and periods of retrograde motion, to borrow an astrological metaphor. It is, however, an evolution that takes place, from an astrological perspective, in cyclical motion – which means that to some extent, it can be tracked, especially in relation to the outer planets, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, as well as – eventually – to the recently discovered Kuiper belt planets: Sedna, Orca, Eris, Hamea and Makemake.

Especially when two or more of these slowly moving bodies converge in an astrological conjunction – such as the Neptune-Pluto conjunction of 1891, the Uranus-Pluto conjunction of 1965-1967, or the Uranus-Neptune conjunction of 1993



– astrologers begin to look for a significant shift in the cultural zeitgeist. To a lesser extent, we can look for a shift when an outer planet changes sign.

### Giving the Archetypes Time to Reveal Themselves

It is thought by some astrologers – and I tend to agree – that the discovery of a planet marks the point in our collective evolution when the human species is ready to begin consciously assimilating the archetypal dimensions represented by that planet, which is just at the point of discovery, emerging into consciousness for the first time. While other astrologers rush to speculate about what these archetypal dimensions might be, ideally it seems prudent to allow each planet to complete one full synodic cycle (back to the degree at which it was discovered) before drawing hard and fast conclusions about the nature of its archetypal domain. Just as I suggested earlier in relation to our individual birthcharts, it is also important in understanding a planetary archetype on the collective level, to give the story time to unfold.

With that in mind, it is my sense that the newly discovered Kuiper Belt planets – which have only come on line since about 2006 – should be given a bit more time to tell their story before we try too hard to tell it for them. Uranus, discovered in 1781, has completed its 84-year cycle twice, nearly three times. Neptune, discovered in 1846, has completed its 165-year cycle once. Pluto, discovered in 1930, has a way to go yet before completing its first 248-year cycle since discovery. These are all stories unfolding, and it is my sense that we need at least one complete cycle before we can pretend to know what the story is telling us.

### Pluto's Evolutionary Crash Course

Having said that, I also think that Pluto possibly represents a bit of a special case. Because Pluto's path is inclined 17° from the ecliptic, its orbit is elliptical. This means that it spends an unequal amount of time – anywhere from 11 to 30 years or so – in a sign, moving through half of its orbit more quickly, and the other half more slowly.

As it happens, everyone alive today has been witness to the accelerated portion of this cycle. Since 1930, when Pluto was discovered in Cancer, it has already been through half of its zodiacal journey. It is poised to move out of Capricorn – the sign opposite Cancer – for the first time, in March of this year.

This suggests to me that as a human culture, we are on a bit of a crash course regarding Pluto. I believe that this rapid movement of Pluto – which, up to 2006, has been the outermost known planet in our solar system – is an astrological signature for the sense that many people have that human evolution is accelerating. I also believe that within the last hundred years or so, we have at times, been learning more than we bargained for in less time than we have needed to assimilate the lessons, and that as a consequence, we are now suffering from collective spiritual indigestion. Pluto's story is urgent, and it is not easy to take in. Perhaps, giving us all the benefit of the doubt, we are doing what we think is our best. But as anyone who has actually lived through a Pluto transit knows, this archetype often puts us in a situation where our best is not good enough. More than that is expected of us – and necessary – if we hope to make it through alive.



It would be nice if we could spend the slower half of Pluto's cycle – say through the middle of the 22<sup>nd</sup> century – gracefully assimilating these lessons, and rising naturally to a certain level of seasoned collective wisdom. Unfortunately, given that Pluto – an Underworld deity in Greco-Roman mythology – is associated with a learning curve that is often literally a matter of life and death, it seems we don't have that luxury. Instead, it would behoove us to break our own astrological rule of thumb, and begin taking stock of what we already know about Pluto and how to work intelligently within its archetypal domain – before it is too late.

It also seems to me that now, as Pluto is about to enter Aquarius, is as good a time as any to do that. At the very least, I am inspired to want to spend some time with Pluto in this newsletter and those to come, while we are in a transitional phase. Between March 23, 2023 and November 19, 2024, Pluto moves back and forth between Capricorn and Aquarius. At this later date, it finally settles into its new sign, where it remains until March 9, 2043. From March 2023 – November 2024, we are in a transitional phase; then for the next 19 years or so, we will witness a period in our collective evolution that can be symbolized, in part, by Pluto in Aquarius.

### Reviewing What We Know About Pluto So Far

Before we speculate a bit about where this might take us, it will be worth our time to look backward at what we know so far – or rather, what Pluto's story has told us so far. We can begin by noting the dates during which Pluto moved through previous signs, beginning with the sojourn in Cancer that preceded its discovery. What follows are the dates during which Pluto sat squarely in each sign, as well as the dates during which it was in transition from one sign to the next.

in Cancer	5/27/1914 – 10/7/1937
in transition from Cancer to Leo	10/8/1937 – 6/14/1939
in Leo	6/15/1939 – 10/20/1956
in transition from Leo to Virgo	10/21/1956 – 6/10/1958
in Virgo	6/11/1958 – 10/5/1971
in transition from Virgo to Libra	10/6/1971 – 7/30/1972
in Libra	7/31/1972 – 11/5/1983
in transition from Libra to Scorpio	11/6/1983 – 8/28/1984
in Scorpio	8/29/1984 – 1/17/1995
in transition from Scorpio to Sagittarius	1/18 – 11/10/1995
in Sagittarius	11/11/1995 – 1/26/2008
in transition from Sagittarius to Capricorn	1/27 – 11/26/2008
in Capricorn	11/27/2008 – 3/22/2023
in transition from Capricorn to Aquarius	3/23/2023 – 11/18/2024
in Aquarius	11/19/2024 – 3/8/2043

It is common practice among astrologers to consider Pluto in a sign to mark the cultural tenor of a generation. Certain defining moments in history shape that tenor, and often give rise to the core psychospiritual issues with which that generation wrestles. While a full account of this psychospiritual history is way beyond the scope of this newsletter article, we can nonetheless suggest a few of the more obvious milestones along the way to where we are now. We will start with Pluto in Cancer in this newsletter, and then continue with its journey through the other signs in newsletters to come.

## Pluto in Cancer: World War I

Pluto's passage into Cancer was marked historically by the advent of World War I, after the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria on June 28, 1914 (a month after Pluto's ingress into Cancer) at which point, Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia. By August, alignments were formed and most of Europe was embroiled in war. It would take the United States nearly 3 more years to join the fray, but by that time, the war had spread beyond Europe to Canada, the Middle East, Africa, the Pacific and parts of Asia.

By November 1918, when the last peace treaties had been signed, an estimated 9 million soldiers had been killed, 23 million wounded, and an additional 5 million civilians dead of military action, hunger and disease. Many soldiers who survived, returned with severe trauma, then called shell shock, now known as PTSD; many others sustained permanent disabilities. Those who fought the war were called the Lost Generation (Samuel Hynes, *A war imagined: the First World War and English culture*. Atheneum, 1991, pp. i-xii.)

*A generation of innocent young men, their heads full of high abstractions like Honour, Glory and (Country), went off to war to make the world safe for democracy. They were slaughtered in stupid battles planned by stupid generals. Those who survived were shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences, and saw that their real enemies were not the Germans, but the old men at home who had lied to them. They rejected the values of the society that had sent them to war, and in doing so separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance.*

Called the War to End All Wars – though it obviously didn't, this war earned that epithet by the sheer magnitude of the conflict, unprecedented in the previous history of the world. In the minds of many, it was a war waged for all the wrong reasons, that in the end, only served to pave the way for both fascism and communism. "In absolute numbers, this war defies previous understandings of war, and then defines future expectations of war," said Oxford professor Sir Hew Strachan, one of the world's most noted WWI scholars. "The lesson from this war still is that what we want to do is try and avoid war" (quoted by CBS News: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/the-war-to-end-all-wars-100-years-later/>) – a lesson we have obviously not yet taken to heart.

It is not hard to see Pluto at work here, showing us the dire consequences of our crude methods for resolving international conflict, and setting the stage for more serious developments that would emerge in the decade following its discovery in 1930. After World War I, Germany was branded an international villain and saddled with burdensome war reparations by the Treaty of Versailles, leading to high inflation and widespread discontent – conditions exploited by Adolf Hitler, who promised to return Germany to its former glory days through strong authoritarian leadership.

## The Rise of Extreme Ideologies: Fascism and Communism

Hitler was elected chair of the Nazi party in 1921. In 1923, he announced his intention to overthrow the government, a rebellion that was squashed, resulting in his imprisonment. In prison, Hitler wrote *Mein Kampf*, an autobiography that also

laid out his beliefs, and helped expand the Nazi party. By 1932, the Nazi's were the largest party in the Reichstag; in 1933, Hitler was named chancellor of Germany. He immediately started consolidating his power, limiting the rights of Jews, and rebuilding Germany's military. By 1936, Hitler had reclaimed the Rhineland, a portion of Western Germany occupied by the Allied Forces after World War I, with little response from the rest of the world. By the end of Pluto in Cancer, Hitler had allied with Mussolini in Italy and Stalin in Russia, and then, during Pluto's transition from Cancer into Leo, invaded Austria, as the first step toward the chain of events that led to World War II.

Meanwhile, a parallel story on the opposite end of the political spectrum was unfolding in Russia. Although Russia had fought with the Allies in World War I, and helped defeat the Germans, it was ill-prepared to fight a war, which took its toll on a country that was already starting to unravel. From 1721 to 1917, the Russian Empire had covered an area in Eurasia of about 9 million square miles, ruling over 126 million people, and constituting the third largest empire in the history of the world. But World War I, following on the heels of Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1905, severely undermined the authority of the tsarist monarchy, and led to widespread unrest. As in Germany, the toll taken by the war – which aside from the same casualties as elsewhere in the world, widespread shortages of food and fuel, and uncontrolled inflation – opened the way for a radical change.

Although Russian history is a bit more complex than German history, the long and short of it, without going into details, is that after the Russian Revolution of 1917, a six-year period of chaos and confusion, and the Russian Civil War, ending in 1923, the Bolsheviks, led by Vladimir Lenin, had ascended to power. As in Germany, they moved quickly to establish authoritarian rule, and created a secret police force called the Cheka to ferret out and execute or punish "enemies of the state." With their political rivals eliminated, the Bolsheviks rebranded themselves as the Communist party, and began reclaiming the newly independent republics of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia and Ukraine as part of the Union of Socialist Soviet Republics.

After Lenin's death in 1924, Josef Stalin came to power. Like Hitler, Stalin was a brutal dictator, who modernized his country through authoritarian rule, and ruthlessly purged those he considered undesirables. Forcing collectivization of agriculture, and the liquidation of the rural peasantry (called kulaks), his First Five-Year plan led to the famine of 1930-1933, during which 6 to 9 million people died of starvation. Most of these people lived in the grain-producing areas of the Soviet Union, including Ukraine and Kazakhstan. Scholars differ in their assessment of whether this purge of kulaks was a matter of class dynamics or outright genocide.

In the Great Purge of 1937-1938, toward the end of Pluto in Cancer, Stalin targeted "anti-Soviet elements" in society, including former Bolsheviks, Socialist revolutionaries, priests, ex-White Army soldiers, and common criminals. It is estimated that another 950,000–1.2 million were killed outright during this campaign, while an additional 1.5 – 1.7 million people died in the brutal Gulag prison system. Estimates of total number of deaths that can be attributed to the Stalinist regime vary considerably, but by any measure, Stalin was every bit Hitler's counterpart.

It appears that Pluto's entry on the world stage during its years in Cancer was about a blatant demonstration of the devastating insanity of consolidated authoritarian power and brutal dictatorship, wedded to extreme ideologies on both the left and the

right of the political spectrum – providing lessons that it would appear we, as a human culture, have yet to learn nearly a hundred years later, as authoritarian governments are on the rise around the world (<https://www.eiu.com/n/democracy-index-2021-less-than-half-the-world-lives-in-a-democracy/>).

### The Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1920

These lessons were ushered in by World War I, which totally altered the political landscape and the balance of power within the world, creating chaos in which these extreme forces could gain a foothold. But World War I was only the opening salvo in a much broader arsenal of Plutonic wake-up calls. Right on the heels of the war, for example, came the Influenza Pandemic of 1918-1920, which killed an estimated 17 – 50 million people, making it one of the deadliest pandemics in history. Meanwhile, malnourishment, overcrowded medical camps and hospitals, and poor hygiene, exacerbated by the war, allowed the pandemic to do more damage than it otherwise might have. Unlike other previous outbreaks of influenza, this one disproportionately affected young adults.

Then, as now, public health measures included social distancing, masks, and vaccines, and then as now, there was resistance to these measures. News of the pandemic was often suppressed by wartime censors, in order not to further demoralize the populace. Then, as now, misinformation spread along with the disease, including rumors that noxious gases were rising from Flanders fields; that Germans were poisoning Bayer aspirin, or releasing poison gas from U-boats (Spinney, Laura. *Pale rider: the Spanish flu of 1918 and how it changed the world*. London: Vintage, 2018, p.70). Then, as now, children's education suffered; and the poor and disenfranchised were affected at a much higher rate than the wealthy. In more recent years, some have called this devastating health crisis at the beginning of Pluto in Cancer, the "forgotten pandemic" (Crosby, Alfred W., *America's Forgotten Pandemic: The Influenza of 1918*. Cambridge U Press, 2003), to underscore this bit of history not remembered that has repeated itself.

### The Great Depression of 1929 – 1939

The last major formative event within the Pluto in Cancer years, came with the crash of the Wall Street stock market on Black Thursday, October 24, 1929, which had a domino effect around the world. This economic crisis took place, not coincidentally from Pluto's point of view, just as Hitler and Stalin were coming to power. While some economies began to recover by the mid-1930s, devastating drops in personal income, plummeting international trade, and rising unemployment continued to impact millions of people up to World War II. Over 9,000 banks failed in the US alone throughout the 1930s; thousands of investors were ruined; and billions of dollars were lost (Friedman, Milton, and Anna Jacobson Schwartz. *A Monetary History of the United States, 1867–1960*, Princeton U Press, 1963).

In the agricultural heartland of the US, the economic collapse coincided with the Dust Bowl years of severe drought. In Germany, the economic crisis brought the political upheaval that allowed Hitler to rise to power. By contrast, the economy of the Soviet Union was not tied to the rest of the world, and it remained largely unaffected by the Great Depression, a fact that prompted some to look upon socialism with rose-colored glasses, despite the horrors of political suppression that played out behind the scenes when socialist ideals were orchestrated by totalitarian leaders.

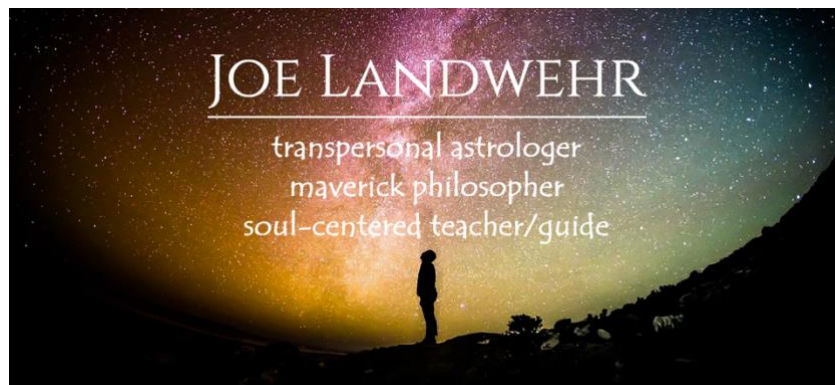
Ironically, in the US, President Roosevelt's response to the Great Depression ushered in a massive government program called the New Deal, which in some ways mirrored the socialist ideal of creating a support network for those at the bottom of the economic order, in this case, those most severely impacted by the economic collapse. The New Deal had programs for farmers, blue-collar workers, the unemployed, the poor, youth and the elderly, and in general, sought to level the playing field for those who were struggling. Roosevelt's policies created the Social Security Administration, FDIC insurance of bank accounts, a minimum wage, public housing and other social support programs, and imposed restraints on the banking industry, all of which proved popular enough to keep Democrats in power for the next 35 years.

Then, as now, Republicans opposed the progressive agenda, and increasingly began defining themselves in opposition to the liberal social and economic equalities it fostered. Meanwhile, according to the Encyclopedia Britannica, "perhaps the greatest achievement of the New Deal was to restore faith in American democracy at a time when many people believed that the only choice left was between communism and fascism," thus presenting a possible "middle way" between the deadly ideologies at either extreme of the political spectrum.

As we will see in the rest of this series of articles, Pluto's movement through the remaining signs has largely been a cosmic push toward this middle way in the face of extreme forces opposing it, while pushing us, and tempting us, off course. Along the way, Pluto has perpetually shown us the price to be paid for our willful ignorance, our lust for power, our xenophobic hatred of the Other, and our collective confusion between freedom and unmitigated self-aggrandizement. These are all lessons I believe Pluto is still trying to teach us, willing to decimate entire generations on the off chance that enough of us will listen to avert a more ultimate catastrophe.

Stay tuned for the next exciting episode as we look at how Pluto upped the ante while passing through Leo in my next newsletter!

And don't forget to let me know you want to receive it, if you do.



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