

Uranus-Pluto: Individual Freedom Versus Institutional Control

by Bill Herbst

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At the heart of this decade are conflicts that surround the vexing question: Who decides what is permissible in society? Do individuals have the freedom to choose what they will or won't do, or do collective agencies — from public opinion to various kinds of dominant social institutions — have the power to determine what actions will and won't be allowed?

This is the essence of Uranus in Aries square to Pluto in Capricorn, which is the most significant astrological alignment of this decade. This activation of the Uranus-Pluto cycle implies that the 2010s represent a crossroads for human civilization in terms of how societies are organized and run.

Uranus passes through the sign Aries from its first entry into that particular section of the ecliptic in May 2010 through its final exit in February 2019. As a planet-sign pair, Uranus in Aries is a potent symbol for individual freedom. The Arian expression of Uranus implies heated and urgent action, often of a kinetic, physical nature, undertaken by individuals who may be motivated by either or both of two very different perspectives. One of these motives is straightforward personal desire (*"I want this, and I don't care what others want"*). The other motive is more complex: the intention to buck the tide of conformity, to be a thorn in the side of standard social expectations (*"I want this, at least in part because others don't want it, and I intend to show the world that I can't be controlled by society"*).

Pluto moves through Capricorn from its first entry into the sign in January 2008 through its final exit in January 2024. Pluto in Capricorn represents the traditional pecking order in society, where authorities at the top of the social hierarchies give orders that are to be obeyed by all those below. These "orders" may be literal policies and rules of social operation, or they may be less tangible instructions concerning what we all should believe about our culture and how we should conduct our social relations. In Capricorn, Pluto symbolizes the overwhelming power of large institutions, including governments, corporations,

and all social organizations (education, healthcare, the military, etc.), which may be either just (by taking account legally and morally of the greatest good for all in the attempt to serve the society) or unjust (by operating in secrecy to serve only the institution itself or the elites in power).

Put simply, the Uranian archetype is revolutionary, regarding the status quo as something to be avoided or changed radically. That change can be progressive or reactionary, depending on the individual. Pluto's archetype is endings-and-beginnings, or death-and-rebirth. Pluto's movement through any sign carries the implication of an eruption of extremes in that particular arena of human experience. In Capricorn, the relevant areas are economics, commerce, authority hierarchies in general, and all the major institutions of culture. The Plutonian process involves increasing extremes followed by collapse. During the 2010s, most institutions will suffer scandal after scandal as hidden frailties and fallibilities of the human beings who run these institutions come to light. Eventually, some of these institutions will collapse, necessitating the creation of new structures for organizing society. Certain institutions will change along the way, so that no collapse is seen, while others will refuse reform, setting themselves up for complete breakdown.

The fact that Uranus and Pluto are perpendicular during the 2010s (meaning 90° of zodiacal arc apart, called a "square") — not just once, but seven times, starting in June 2012 and culminating in March 2015 — implies that these two planetary symbols and the realities they represent within the respective signs through which they're currently passing reveal to astrologers that during this decade all the myriad facets of individual freedom as a human experience are juxtaposed against the many varieties of institutional power and control. Each is provoking and stimulating the other in mutual exclusivity. It's as if individual freedom and organizational hegemony, which are normally antipathetic, are now tied together in a life-and-death struggle to see which will win in any of the thousand different social arenas through which the conflict plays out. In poetic terms, those two categories of human experience, which are normally less than friendly, now hate each other with a vehement passion. Each is trying to kill the other.

Throughout the decade of the 2010s, we have already seen and will continue to see this conflict played out in the most extreme terms imaginable, accompanied by periodic shocks and surprises.

Without even considering possible resolutions, the conflict itself is neither simple nor straightforward. Many paradoxes exist. One paradox is the arising of seemingly contradictory social movements that embody the larger conflict — specifically, the individual pitted against the state. We've already seen this

phenomenon in the simultaneous welling-up of the liberal-progressive movement called "Occupy" and the conservative-libertarian "Tea Party" movement.

Occupy highlighted Wall Street's disdain for Main Street and lobbied for the economic rights and interests of individual Americans (i.e., consumers, investors, savers, etc.) who suffer financial loss and damage from the draconian manipulations of Wall Street financiers (i.e., mega-corporate, usually multi-national banks and brokerages), whose activities and policies are seen by Occupy as unethical, immoral, and often illegal, and presumed to threaten not just individuals, but the entire economy.

The Tea Party, by contrast, focuses its sympathetic spotlight on business and capitalism, lobbying for complete freedom (i.e., deregulation) of individual businesses to allow them to conduct their commercial affairs as they wish, rather than laboring under the coercive thumb of governmental restrictions and controls. Tea Partiers regard commerce as sacred and feel that so-called "free markets" are essential to maintain the health of the economy and the vitality of civilization.

As disparate as these movements may appear on the surface — after all, one of them is anti-corporate and the other is anti-government — both perfectly embody the death-struggle between individual freedom and institutional control. In other words, disgruntled progressives and hard-core conservatives end up as strange bedfellows with more in common than is obvious, and much more than they may realize. While the two movements' orientations, goals, and hoped-for results are as different as night and day, the abstractions behind their stances share much in common. Both lobby for freedom and what they see as redress against the injustices of wrongful use of power to achieve control. In other words, both are prime examples of Uranus-Pluto in action, however paradoxical that may seem.

People who are aware of at least some of the symbolic meanings of the Uranus-Pluto square need to understand that Uranus in Aries and Pluto in Capricorn are both double-sided. One isn't "good" and the other "bad." That's far too simplistic. Each planet-sign pair has positive and negative meanings as judged by context and perspective. Uranus in Aries can mean standing up for individual freedom through the protection (and sometimes the reassertion) of personal rights against the draconian power of a collective — whether governmental, corporate, or social — that no longer considers the needs of individuals, which is the dark side of Pluto in Capricorn (rule by and for a privileged oligarchy). But the equations can work the other way, too. The power of the collective to force conformity against "outlaws" who harm society can be the cavalry riding to the rescue to defend the common good by preventing willful, insensitive, or even sociopathic depredations by individuals or companies whose actions harm

everyone's safety and well-being. Each kind of battle has its heroic champions and staunch opponents who are often in entrenched camps, neither of which will give an inch toward compromise.

Realizing this is critical to any serious understanding the meanings and mechanisms of Uranus in Aries square to Pluto in Capricorn, and it's equally necessary for any clear-eyed comprehension of what's happening in the larger world these days.

Consider, for example, the increasing power and influence of the National Security apparatus in America (and, again, around the world in other countries as well) in covertly collecting the communications data of individuals — phone calls, emails, texts, bank records, etc. The goal of these often invisible agencies is not merely the collection of some data, but all of it. They seek to intercept, retrieve, store, and analyze everything communicated by everyone, all in the name of national security, i.e., protection against terrorists. "Security" (Pluto in Capricorn) is always juxtaposed against "freedom" (Uranus in Aries), and here in the 2010s, as Uranus and Pluto reach the pinnacle of their grappling, the balance has tilted toward the extremes of both postures. Those who believe that some sacrifice of personal freedom is justified to achieve higher levels of security don't lose any sleep over the loss of individual privacy, since they are mandated with money, authority, and technical expertise to try, at least, to achieve total security, i.e. "safety." Interestingly, they don't see the Constitution as standing in their way.

Is whistleblower Edward Snowden a hero or a traitor to his country? Is he a true patriot, bringing to light terrible crimes against the American populace that undermine the very principles of "democracy," or is he a turncoat, someone entrusted with high-level state secrets whose theft and release of documents has threatened the security of America by making it easier for terrorists to operate with impunity? The answer depends on one's perspective.

For those who believe that individual privacy is an unaffordable luxury in an age where the possibility of terrible violence can and has already been inflicted upon innocents by disgruntled individuals (i.e., "terrorists") who belong to rogue movements that operate outside the rule of law, Snowden is a cowardly criminal. By contrast, to those who believe in the personal privacy guaranteed by the Constitution or who feel that the vaunted "War on Terror" is too often merely trumped-up propaganda designed as an excuse for mass control through illegal surveillance, Snowden is a hero, and a courageous one at that. Between those two views, never the twain shall meet. (I'm of the latter opinion, but that's neither here nor there.) In short, one person's evil terrorist who seeks to destroy the common good is another person's freedom fighter taking an heroic stand against oppression.

Each perspective excludes the other, of course, and the people who embrace either view didactically are not inclined to change camps. The only factor that is likely to decide that debate is the passage of time and the overall feeling that eventually comes to be held by the population. Those votes are not yet cast or counted.

Climate change (i.e., global warming) is similarly divided, especially here in America. Some people see environmentalists not merely as “tree-huggers,” but as “eco-terrorists” whose Luddite rejection of modern industrial civilization threatens the economic health of the entire nation (and of the world beyond). Such people see the Environmental Protection Agency, and most laws enacted to protect the environment, as infringements upon the personal freedom of individuals to conduct their businesses as they wish. They see themselves as the Uranus-in-Aries “good guys” standing up against the power-mongering Pluto-in-Capricorn conformist “bad guys” who would happily ruin the economy and our way of life out of a misguided concern for non-human species or for the presumed health of an environment the good guys feel does not need protecting anyway. But for every person who rails against the “false” propaganda of climate change is another person who believes — just as fervently — that the ecology scientists are correct, and that our foolish bias toward off-loading the costs of business by wrecking the commons is a crime that must be prevented before our environment is completely ruined as a healthy, life-giving biosphere.

Oddly enough, both sides in this debate see themselves as fighting for the rights of the individual by opposing the collective status quo, which they feel to be destructive. Although completely contrary, each view tends to regard itself as the underdog (Uranus), standing bravely (Aries) against the drastic and extremist upwelling (Pluto) of an oppressive business-as-usual born by heavy-handed herd-instinct beliefs about “the way things should be” (Capricorn).

Nearly every major developmental challenge in society these days can be accurately interpreted in this fashion: a lone crusader fighting for truth and justice against a tidal wave of unconscious but socially-accepted sentiment. The irony is that our lone crusader can usually be seen also as representing his/her own brand of unconscious and manipulative power-mongering that is harmful to society.

Along the way of the decade, some of these conflicts will be resolved, one way or the other. One view will “win” in the public forum. Will the overreach of the National Security State be rolled back? Maybe, but I personally consider it unlikely, given the direction that civilization is moving. To whatever extent we are able to keep the post-modern techno-industrial train moving, notions of personal privacy will probably become more and more antiquated.

Sometimes resolution will occur because one side or the other collapses of its own overreach or accumulated dead weight. This happened in the financial meltdown of 2007-2008, when major investment banks suddenly went belly up, but that crisis spawned a new and even larger conflict, that of the federal government stepping in to rescue financial corporations that were deemed "too big to fail." So, collapse is incremental, not all at once. For all the many Uranus-in-Aries versus Pluto-in-Capricorn conflicts about our civilization and how our social affairs will, should, or need to be organized and conducted, many incremental collapses will occur along the way. They will morph and shift, stretching out over the decade and far beyond. What is at stake will grow bigger with each new breakdown in any given arena until some substantive and fundamental change is finally agreed on, which is likely to be a forced necessity rather than a chosen remedy.

For instance, the future of the U.S. dollar as the world's "reserve currency" is under serious travail, with an uncertain future. Currently, much of what is being done in government and the financial sector is designed — whether through overt policy or covert manipulation, and whether legally or illegally — to prop up the value of the dollar. That will continue as long as the powers-that-be can keep the game going of U.S. dollar supremacy. If at some point the dollar finally goes down like Humpty-Dumpty falling off the wall, then a substantive change will be worked out with a new financial/monetary system. Until then, the appearance of the status quo will reign, even as erosion eats away at the reality.

Wherever human beings congregate to share similar interests or experiences, institutions develop. They may start out small and local, and many remain so: the Tuesday Night Bridge Club, for instance. Other institutions grow, becoming huge and amassing great power. The U.S. government is an example of a mega-institution that wields immense power, and whose influence extends into every nook and cranny of society, affecting the lives of nearly all citizens.

Like corporations, institutions are often chartered with specific aims and built-in limitations. As institutions grow, however, and especially as they achieve gargantuan size, they change. Megalithic institutions tend to morph away from service to the collective society, common good, or even to their own membership, moving instead toward stances and actions that are more and more self-serving, designed to insure their own continued power and survival, as well as feathering the nests of those executives at the very top of the institutions who run them. The Uranus-Pluto alignment of the 2010s implies that we have reached a point where that process must and will be reformed, for better or for worse.

None of this is new. It's been going on since the dawn of civilization. The conflict between the individual and the collective is inherent to human nature. Rule of the many by the few is historically the way things have been, with only sporadic and usually short-lived exceptions. What is relatively unusual about this decade are the extreme forms that now shape the conflict. Each side is more fervently committed to defeating the other side, and at whatever cost may be required to do so.

At least, that's part of what Uranus and Pluto tell us.