

Saturn in Capricorn

Part One: Collective Meanings

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[This is the first installment of a three-part commentary on Saturn in Capricorn. It focuses on the collective implications of that two-and-a-half year passage, taking into account other current and upcoming astrological alignments.]

In astrology, the movement of the slower-moving outer planets (Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto) through the signs of the zodiac is one way that astrologers track the symbolism of collective humanity's evolution, which I call Civilizational Astrology.

While my own study of Civilizational Astrology tends to be based fundamentally on the ten major interplanetary cycles of the outer planets and their ever-changing interplay, I acknowledge that individual planets moving through signs is a contributing factor to the insights we can glean.

Consider Pluto, the symbol in astrology for death/rebirth and confrontation with primal forces that erupt from the personal or collective unconscious. [And yes, I understand that astronomy has downgraded Pluto to the reduced status of a "minor planet." In astrology, however, Pluto is still a significant and quite profound symbolic archetype, perhaps more now than when it's existence was confirmed in 1930.]

Pluto's passage through Scorpio, Sagittarius, and Capricorn were each accompanied by major changes and serious challenges for humanity. Below is a brief summary of significant developments during Pluto's movement through each sign:

Pluto in Scorpio 1984-1994 — sex becomes death (AIDS), onset of profound changes in the meanings of sex (gay rights movement), plus extremes of back-pedaling reactions (gay-bashing and homophobia); also beginnings of extremism in financial systems and wealth transfer upwards (junk bonds, S&L scandal).

Pluto in Sagittarius 1995-2007 — death of civility in social discourse, onset of cultural fragmentation and polarization, plus extremes of back-pedaling reactions through religious fanaticism (the sometimes violent

fundamentalist rejection of science and modernity, plus "New Age" spiritual escapism) with an underlying "us versus them," "good versus evil" mentality.

Pluto in Capricorn 2008-2022 — *death of authoritative government, business, and social institutions through political/financial corruption; possibility of global economic collapse; onset of mass social revolts by populations, plus extremes of backpedaling reactions in governmental and corporate attempts to maintain power and deepen control through force.*

So, planetary movement through signs can be quite revealing. That's somewhat easier to see when the sign passages are long, as with Pluto (14-30 years), Neptune (13-14 years), and even Uranus (7 years). It's more difficult to pinpoint clear or obvious collective correspondences for planets such as Jupiter, which changes signs every year, or Saturn, which enters a new sign every 2 1/2 years.

Saturn has a cycle through the earth's ecliptic (meaning the signs of the zodiac) that takes 29 years to complete. Thus, Saturn's passage through any particular sign, as stated above, takes about 2 1/2 years. On December 19th, 2017, Saturn left the sign Sagittarius and entered Capricorn.

The last time that happened was almost three decades ago, in 1988. At that point, Saturn, Uranus, and Neptune all began to cluster in early Capricorn, in an intensification of symbolic archetypes that was rare and special. The period from 1988-1991 was clearly a very big deal from the perspective of astrological symbolism. Two obvious correspondences emerged from that three-planet alignment, one that was dramatic and a second that was subtle and cumulative. The dramatic event was the sudden and largely unexpected collapse and subsequent disintegration of the Soviet Union in late 1991. The more subtle correspondence, whose influence on the entire world of human civilization has proven ever-more massive and ongoing, was the rise of the Internet.

Can we draw similar inferences of equally significant correspondences from Saturn's re-entry in Capricorn now? No, because the tight alignment of three outer planets in Capricorn at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s dissipated by the mid-1990s as each planet moved on. Neptune is now in Pisces, and Uranus will soon leave Aries and enter Taurus. So, Saturn's entry into Capricorn this time is not accompanied by an equivalent "oh-my-god" factor of similar concentrated symbolism. With one major exception that I'll detail later in the commentary, the passage of Saturn through Capricorn now underway for the coming two years doesn't share much, if any, of the symbolic potency that was present in 1988.

That's not to imply, however, that Saturn's journey through Capricorn here at the tail end of the 2010s will be uneventful. The reason for that is that we're coming around to the beginning of another Saturn-Pluto cycle.

Saturn and Pluto are what are called “malefics” in astrology. That is to say, while their symbolism contains what we would consider positive implications — in Saturn’s case, ambition to achieve success and gradual maturation in the overcoming of long-term obstacles, and in Pluto’s case, renewal through sweeping away old or worn-out structures — these two archetypes correspond frequently to expressions in real life that we consider negative. Saturn can correspond to failure, rejection, and denial, and Pluto can be associated with the use of massive power to achieve domination or repression. Together, they tend to imply harsh and repressive authority.

Looking back through history, especially over the past century, the correspondences in the cultural zeitgeist that occurred during the major activations of Saturn-Pluto cycles are provocative:

- *Paranoia, xenophobia, ethnic cleansing*
- *The dark side of nationalism, patriotism, racism*
- *Cold ruthlessness by authority*
- *Manipulation that threatens or leads to mass violence*
- *The reality of destruction*
- *The urge for power and domination over others*
- *Courage or perseverance during extreme hardship or against seemingly insurmountable odds*
- *Moral or emotional staunchness, holding the line against negative or destructive forces*

The general tone of the cycle is, obviously, hard and cold. Gentleness and compassion tend to be pushed to the sidelines or banished entirely, at least during the active periods of the cycle.

The Saturn-Pluto cycle varies in length from 31-38 years. The last cycle began in 1982; the coming cycle officially begins in 2020, although the gestation period (when the two planets come together in the last third of Capricorn) extends from December of 2018 through January 2021. That initial phase sets a tone that will then permute over the entire cycle, until the next cycle begins in 2053-2054.

Coming as it will during the final waning influence of the Uranus-Pluto alignment (which has been the dominant astrological theme since 2007) is provocative in itself. When the Saturn-Pluto cycle kicks in just after the mid-term elections of 2018, we may see developments that appear to be logical extensions of what we’ve been grappling with for years, or we could find ourselves in a new period of “doubling down,” where division, polarization, and warring tribalism (such as the extreme partisanship of politics) descend to depths that would have seemed inconceivable in the past.

How powerful is the Saturn-Pluto cycle, and how seriously concerned should we be? In my opinion, it's somewhere in the middle of the astrological hierarchy. Saturn-Pluto is nowhere near as potent symbolically as Uranus-Pluto, but it's more focused and concrete, with obvious real-life repercussions, than a cycle such as Jupiter-Neptune.

Here's what makes the upcoming cycle more daunting than it might otherwise be: Saturn conjoins Pluto in the heavens at 23° of Capricorn, which is 4° away from the position of Pluto in the USA natal chart. That's significant, because America will soon experience its Pluto Return. That means that America has existed long enough as a country — much longer, in fact, than the majority of nations in the world today (the churn of changing national borders and governments over the past two centuries has been brisk) — that Pluto will have made one complete circuit of the zodiac since America's founding in 1776 and will return to the same degree of the ecliptic it occupied more than 250 years ago.

That is a very big deal. Wherever Pluto is located in a natal chart reveals an area of experience associated with primal power and deep compulsivity, like a volcano whose magma chamber is a fissure opening from the earth's molten inner core. In the most commonly used birth chart for the USA, that area is money.

For two and a half centuries, America has been compulsively driven by the lure of wealth through monetary gain. We are the bastion of business, where capitalism is sacred, and those who succeed in amassing great fortunes are celebrated. Yes, other idealistic values exist in American culture — individual freedom, social equality, the rule of law, etc — but, particularly over the past 40 years, money has emerged as the one value that trumps all others.

Our obsession with wealth is indicated by numerous factors and in various ways in America's birth chart. Of these, one that stands out is the presence of Pluto in the 2nd House. The implication is that money as a substantiation of personal value is connected to a powerful, transformative factor in the archetype field of the collective unconscious. Like the water in which fish swim, we tend not to consciously experience the potent amplification of money's importance in our lives, individually and as a nation. That remains largely unquestioned and invisible to us. Even people committed to rebalancing our values run up against the brick wall of money, which has become more important than any other consideration.

The Pluto Return is a watershed event in America's chart, where rebalancing occurs through death and rebirth. In the volcano metaphor used above, the Pluto Return implies that pressure in the magma chamber has reached a level where something has to give. An eruption is the most likely result — either an explosion or an implosion. Since America's Pluto Return occurs in late Capricorn, it indicates a financial meltdown with profound ramifications in commerce and

government. The precise time frame of the return is from March of 2021 through December 2023, although in practical terms we can add a couple years to either side.

In December 2017, I wrote a commentary about America's Pluto Return, so, rather than repeating that here, I'll simply link to the essay:

<http://www.billherbst.com/Comm71.pdf>

Basically, an overlapping quartet of alignments — the Uranus-Pluto square (2007-2020), Saturn's passage through Capricorn and the beginning of the next Saturn-Pluto cycle (2018-2021), and America's Pluto Return (2021-2023) — form a long cascade of provocative astrological symbolism that is serious and daunting.

The worst-case scenarios are almost too unpleasant to consider and might include America descending into civil war, with subsequent authoritarian lockdown by the government. I'm not predicting that, but the harsh symbolism is undeniable.

The best-case scenarios would be built around Pluto's meanings of purging, cleansing, sweeping away old structures or outmoded practices, and rebirth into an enlarged perspective. That might include America's awakening from our own past extremism of elevating money and wealth above all other values. It would almost certainly mean reforming our economy to better reflect reality rather than fantasy. If that were to occur, it would likely be the result of forced necessity rather than choice, but the outcome could still be positive.

I cast my personal vote for the best-case scenarios and a positive outcome, but I don't know if we have the wisdom or collective will to make that happen. Time will tell.

[In Parts Two and Three of my commentary on Saturn in Capricorn, I'll discuss the implications of that passage for individuals.]