

# Civilizational Astrology: *Part One*

by Bill Herbst

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Humans are pattern-seeking, pattern-recognizing, pattern-creating creatures. That is to say, human life is organized — hard-wired, so to speak — around patterns. For our species, meaning (i.e., making sense of life) emerges from and is sustained by seeking patterns, by recognizing patterns, and/or by creating patterns.

Astrology is a system for studying and revealing the patterns we seek, recognize and create through analogies between heavenly cycles and earthly experience — *As Above, So Below*. In one way or another, those cycles are all associated with relationships between astronomical bodies. The most fundamental of these bodies are the Earth, the Sun, our Moon, the major Planets, and the Solar System as a whole, as a single integrated entity. Astrology could go beyond those to include our Galaxy (the Milky Way) and perhaps even the neighborhood of local Galaxies of which the Milky Way is a member, but the time-frames of cycles at that cosmic level are so extended that they don't relate to human meaning. So, astrology tends to limit its focus to the Solar System, with the Sun at its center and the Earth as our primary point of reference.

In practice, astrology has two basic levels: *Personal Astrology*, which focuses on individual entities, most frequently human beings, and *Collective Astrology*, which considers humanity as a single group. In my understanding of astrology, the system doesn't tell us much, if anything, about other species. It is designed to reveal meaning by, for, and about humans.

Personal Astrology is based on natal or birth charts for a given individual, which reveal essential patterns presumed to be effective for a lifetime. The assumption of astrology is that whatever begins in a certain time-space moment will embody the archetypal patterns of that moment. Thus, the birth chart sets a tone for the entire life to come as a road map for the life-journey. That may sound overly limiting, but the possible expressions or manifestations contained within any natal chart are endless and nearly mind-boggling. Within an individual life, the study of cycles relevant to the personal chart reveals kaleidoscopic changes that occur within a given life. Relevant cycles and their various activation points may be uniquely timed for a particular individual, or they can be shared by various age-related cohorts in which that individual participates. As we move from any cycle that is happening only for the individual in question and integrate cycles of group participation, we shift the symbolism from the personal to the collective.

Collective Astrology is based on cycles not linked to a particular birth chart. Instead, astrology at this broader level reveals meaning through cycles that apply to humanity as a whole. The heavens offer many possibilities for revealing such collective patterns of meaning. Among these are the Precession of the Equinoxes, movement of individual planets through the zodiac (ingresses), sol-lunar eclipse cycles, and the shared dyadic cycles of the major bodies within the Solar System. Typically, the study of collective factors within the system is referred to as Mundane Astrology, although that term has acquired a distinctly political slant about nations.

Ingresses are commonly noted and written about by astrologers. Especially with the slower-moving outer planets, the passages of planets through signs reveal meaningful changes in the collective. Some astrologers look at not just the planet/sign relationship, but the entire ingress chart for that moment. This is less certain, however, when the planet makes multiple ingresses, moving back and forth across a zodiacal cusp, as happens often with outer planets. Endings and beginnings — in astrology as in life — are often a process rather than a single event.

The Precession of the Equinoxes is an Earth cycle that reveals various Zodiacal Ages of core meaning, each about 2,000 years in duration. Eclipse cycles typically involve special alignment between the Sun, Earth, and our Moon. I don't study either of those levels of meaning. Ages are too long to capture my interest or provide practical insights for my purposes.

Eclipses, while clearly significant — beyond the miracle of day and night, eclipses are the most spectacular events in the heavens — are limited in the specificity of their information. They tend to indicate fateful interventions, and thus are wild-cards in the system. My preference is for technical levels that provide me with more substantive information to share. Many astrologers study eclipses. I tend not to. The same is true of symbolic progressions. While many, probably most, astrologers use secondary progressions and solar arcs, I'm exclusively a transits guy. Transits are what grab me, yielding information I understand and can apply.

My primary sources of information about Collective Astrology are the paired cycles of the slower-moving outer planets. Many astrologers pay close attention to the shared cycles of inner bodies — the Sun, Mercury, Venus, and Mars — and that's fine, but those cycles are linked mostly to short-term or day-to-day fluctuations. I'm interested mainly in the longer-term implications for humanity, so I lean strongly toward the paired cycles of slower moving outer planets that occupy orbits further from the Sun, beyond the Earth and Mars.

I use the outer five major bodies — Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto. Yeah, I know, astronomers have demoted Pluto to minor-planet status, but astrologers haven't. For us, Pluto remains a big deal, the bridge between solar system consciousness and galactic consciousness, the symbol for death-and-rebirth, endings and beginnings, "transformation" through potent contact with

immense and often overwhelming power that can and does erupt from within the personal or collective unconscious.

Those five major outer bodies in the solar system form ten paired, two-planet (or dyadic) cycles. Below is the list of those ten:

Cycle	Avg. Length	Quarterly Phase Shift	Effective Transit Period
<b>Jupiter–Saturn</b>	20 years	every five years	12-14 months
<b>Jupiter–Uranus</b>	13-14 years	every 3–4 years	13 months
<b>Jupiter–Neptune</b>	13-14 years	every 3–4 years	11–12 months
<b>Jupiter–Pluto</b>	12-13 years	every 3 years	13 months
<b>Saturn–Uranus</b>	44 years	every 11 years	24 months
<b>Saturn–Neptune</b>	36 years	every 9 years	24 months
<b>Saturn–Pluto</b>	31-38 years	every 6–9 years	22–25 months
<b>Uranus–Neptune</b>	172 years	every 38-48 years	11–15 years
<b>Uranus–Pluto</b>	113–142 years	every 33-47 years	8–13 years
<b>Neptune–Pluto</b>	~493 years	every 70–170 years	17–24 years

Each of the five outer planets participates in four of the ten paired cycles. In each dyadic pair, the planet that moves faster through the zodiac is listed first; the slower-moving planet is listed second.

In Jupiter’s four cycles, Jupiter is always the faster-moving body. Saturn moves faster through the zodiac in three of its cycles, with Uranus faster in two, and Neptune faster in only one. In Pluto’s four cycles, Pluto is always the slower-moving body.

Pluto’s orbit around the Sun is highly elliptical and eccentric. It’s not circular; instead, it’s “squashed” and elongated. Viewed from the earth, Pluto’s apparent speed moving along the ecliptic (i.e., the zodiac) varies widely, depending on where it is in its orbit (the elongated ends of the squashed middle). Pluto moves faster through some sections of the zodiac (taking only 12-13 years to pass through Libra or Scorpio, for instance) and much slower through other sections (taking 31-32 years to pass through Aries or Taurus). A majority of people now alive on the earth were born during the period of Pluto’s fastest apparent motion, meaning that Pluto will move further through their charts over their lifetimes. This means that, on average, many of us will experience twice the number of major Plutonian cycle activations as our grandparents did. That has profound implications, but I’ll save those for another commentary...)

As a result of Pluto’s eccentric orbit, the four civilizational cycles involving Pluto — always as the slower-moving body — are not consistent in duration. They vary, sometimes significantly, from one cycle to the next. Jupiter moves fast enough (one sign per year) that this variation is minimal in the Jupiter-Pluto cycle. It’s either 12 or 13 years in length. In the Saturn-Pluto, Uranus-Pluto, and Neptune-Pluto cycles, however, the variation in Pluto’s apparent speed produces substantial changes in duration from one cycle to the next, and even within a given cycle in the length of its quarters.

Seven of the ten cycles involve Jupiter or Saturn. All of those seven are relatively short, with none more than four decades in duration. The three remaining cycles — Uranus-Neptune, Uranus-Pluto, and Neptune-Pluto — are much longer and change quarterly phases at wider intervals in time. These three are significant in that they indicate the subtext or unconscious tone the underlies the beliefs, assumptions, attitudes, hopes, dreams, and fears of collective humanity within the context of civilization. Their phase changes are less frequent than for the other seven cycles and indicate major shifts in the archetype field, zeitgeist, or collective unconscious — whatever we choose to call it.

One of the trans-Saturnian trio began its current cycle in the late-19th century; the other two began in the 20th century. All three of these current outer-planet cycles are still relatively young and moving through their early, waxing phases. That means that they're building and getting stronger during our lifetimes. It also implies that their symbolism may resonate in our psyches in ways that are more emotional than rational and more immature than adult. Below are the three most outer cycles, with dates and effective periods for the onset of their current cycle:

<i>Cycle</i>	<i>Exact Date</i>	<i>Effective Period</i>
<b>Uranus-Neptune</b>	3 passes in 1993	Jan 1988 – Jan 1999
<b>Uranus-Pluto</b>	3 passes in 1965 and 1966	Oct 1961 – Jul 1970
<b>Neptune-Pluto</b>	3 passes in 1891 and 1892	Jul 1883 – Jun 1900

The **Neptune-Pluto cycle** is the longest of the three, with only two complete cycles per millennium, and symbolizes the empowerment of dreams. Humanity is moving through a roughly 3,000-year period where every Neptune-Pluto cycle begins in the sign Gemini. The current cycle began in the final two decades of the 19th century, during the Gilded Age of the Industrial Revolution in America. The next quarter of the cycle, which represents more tangible manifestation, starts in the early 2060s. Like all Plutonian cycles, this one contains death/rebirth symbolism. Here it has to do with the end or death of old dreams for humanity, and the beginning of new dreams. During the 3,000-year Gemini phase of recurring Neptune-Pluto cycles (from 1400-4300 A.D.), our collective dreams are about travel, communication, and the wish for new stimulus. The current 500-year cycle is external rather than internal. We're not talking about deep, profound dreams or thoughtful communication, but instead a more superficial level of dreams. Twitter is a good example of the current Neptune-Pluto cycle's manifestation — instantaneous, momentary, and brief. Powerful but shallow.

The current **Uranus-Neptune cycle** is the youngest of the three, having begun at the end of the 20th century. This cycle has to do with techno-evangelism, the fervent belief in the wonders of technology. That has been with us for much longer than just the past two decades, but it was only in the 1990s that the present style of techno-evangelism moved to center stage in culture, government, industry, and commerce (since the cycle began in Capricorn). The Technology Revolution itself and the Age of Information are linked centrally to this current Uranus-Neptune cycle. Invention and development of the transistor, silicon-based microchips, and computers in the 1940s through 1960s opened that door initially, then the mass marketing of personal computers and the

implementation of the Internet and World Wide Web over the ensuing decades paved the way. More recently, smart phones, social media, data collection, and mass surveillance have changed how we live on the planet.

This cycle is still relatively new, however. From 2016 through 2021, the New Phase ends and the Crescent Phase begins. Over that six years, the passionate, headlong rush to develop new and more powerful technologies hits a series of speed bumps as various concerns — ethical, political, and practical — begin to be raised about technology's impact on the future of humanity. Cracks appear in the edifice of techno-evangelism as doubts emerge, largely from within the "church." For instance, technology might find ways to remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, and new, cleaner sources of energy may be invented to replace fossil fuels to power civilization's insatiable hunger for power, but technology cannot heal humanity's disconnect from nature and loss of the sacred, which are spiritual issues at the very heart of our problems. Throughout the 2020s and 2030s, as the Crescent phase of the Uranus-Neptune cycle unfolds, concerns will mount that question both the efficacy and the wisdom of technology.

The actual pace of technological change, which had been increasing at breakneck speed in this new century, may or may not slow. That will depend on many other factors, such as economics and finance. What is likely, however, is that the implementation of new technologies will meet greater resistance as disillusionment about the great dream of futuretech arises, fueling counter-revolutions from within the tech world.

In 2040, the cycle reaches the waxing square. At that point and beyond, through the second half of the 21st century, technology will probably assert itself aggressively, becoming perhaps the dominant force in humanity's future. This assumption depends, of course, on civilization's continued survival at its present scale. That is by no means guaranteed. Civilization might implode. Taken solely on its own, however, the Uranus-Neptune cycle suggests that, if we survive relatively intact, the Singularity may indeed occur to alter the biological basis of human life.

The **Uranus-Pluto cycle** symbolizes sudden upwellings of social change through radical shifts in our expressions of power. This can take shape from the grassroots, bottom up type of rebellion against the existing status quo, or it may occur from the top down as totalitarian force imposed on the population. Both are likely to happen as contrasting struggles whenever the cycle changes phase.

The current Uranus-Pluto cycle began in the 1960s, and its first-quarter transition has been the dominant astrological theme of the entire decade of the 2010s. The period became effective starting in about 2007, with a 13-year life expectancy.

I had hoped that the Uranus-Pluto transit would correspond to a renewed time of progressive changes in society, particularly through community relocalization, but I was wrong. Various movements toward social justice and economic equality did develop early on during the effective period of the transit, but these movements faded as they were overwhelmed by a resurgence of aggressively totalitarian

power from corporations and the state. The more potent rebellion against the status quo came from the extreme right and brought Donald Trump as its figurehead. America became even more militaristic, and the world more authoritarian. The rich got much richer, while the middle class shrank. That period will come to a close astrologically in 2020 (but probably not what's been wrought in real life, since the forces that were unleashed have considerable momentum and will likely continue).

One critical point to be made is that civilizational astrology — or any astrology, for that matter — doesn't directly address the core problems that bedevil humanity, including climate change, nuclear war, racism, inequality, and other issues. At best, astrology provides information about these challenges only indirectly or tangentially. Yes, astrology does offer significant insights into the hierarchical structures of society — including economics and politics — as well as changing patterns of popular belief. If, however, you're looking to astrology to address, in any direct or obvious way, serious questions surrounding such overarching topics as evolving human consciousness, our relation to nature, or the possible extinction of our species, you'll need to look elsewhere for answers.

Not all astrologers agree with me about this — I have no doubt that some don't — but I think they're wrong and engaged in magical thinking. After 50 years of studying astrology, I've concluded that the symbols that make up the system are value-neutral. Good or bad, higher or lower, evolved or unevolved are *human* considerations that we project onto the system. I believe that projection to be inevitable and sometimes rewarding (in terms of implied information or insight), but I definitely do not find it to be an inherent part of the system itself.

*[End Part One. In the second installment of this two-part commentary, to be posted next week, I'll discuss the seven cycles in civilizational astrology that involve Jupiter or Saturn. That will set up my Astrological Preview of the 2020s to follow.]*