



CRISES, CONSPIRACIES AND CORONA

Twelve Years of Pluto in Capricorn

Pointing out trends of phenomena that are still in full swing is something you have to be careful with, I once learned: the overview is lacking if you are still in the middle of it yourself. However, the events that are going on now seem to me to be an expression of something bigger that, moreover, has been going on for a while. So I'll take my chances.

Pluto in Capricorn

This story begins around January 2008. In that month, the planet Pluto entered the sign of Capricorn. Four years from now, on 20 November 2024, Pluto will finally leave this sign and enter the sign of Aquarius. Of Pluto's nearly 17 years in Capricorn, more than 12 have now passed. Enough to take stock of what this planet has brought us, what it brings us and what it may yet bring.

Pluto (Greek: Hades) is the God who rules the underworld. He works in the hidden and rules over matters of darkness, secrets, death, as well as all the treasures and riches that can be found in the underworld, such as precious resources and precious metals. In the sign of Capricorn, the Plutonic forces work (from a mundane perspective) mainly at the system level. These can be systems of all kinds, such as economic, political and financial systems, but also, for example, religious and physical systems (e.g. the earth as an ecological system). Pluto in this sign will also touch the leaders of these systems, those who have responsibility for the system.

Examples of systemic crises

Looking back over the past 12 years, we see Pluto in Capricorn active in numerous areas. Often in conjunction with other planets, but I will leave those dynamics aside here. I will mention some salient examples below. The defining characteristic of these situations is that systems and/or their leaders enter a crisis, usually in response to long-standing hidden flaws in the system and/or (supposedly) reprehensible behaviour of their leaders.

In October 2008, the credit crisis peaked. A major trigger was banks trying to make profits on bad mortgages. A kind of pyramid scheme that collapsed. When this crisis erupted, it was then found that banks worldwide had insufficient financial cover to absorb this blow, which then led to a global economic crisis.

In late 2010, the Arab Spring began. Revolts against autocratic regimes broke out across almost the entire Arab world. Anno 2020, by the way, the vast majority of these countries are back to square one.

The leaders of very different social systems have been questioned or pilloried over the past 12 years, because of improper behaviour, scandals or simply because 'the public' no longer believes or trusts them. Think, for instance, of the CEOs of banks and multinationals who are referred to as 'grabbers'. Think of the leaders of the Catholic Church who have been sued worldwide for (facilitating) sexual abuse, or celebrities in the entertainment industry who have been named, shamed or sued in connection with #Metoo.

In the past 12 years, in all sorts of places, leaders have fallen off their pedestals and the systems they represent are being questioned. The manifestations are numerous, for example doctors and the medical profession who are no longer trusted (e.g. the anti-vax movement), media whose reporting is no longer believed ('fake media') and scientists whose claims about, for example, global warming are questioned.

A final example of a systemic crisis concerns the climate crisis, a crisis that has far-reaching consequences for humanity. This crisis, too, has been dormant for much longer. Only in recent years has it come fully to the surface and reached mass consciousness.

The renewal of Pluto in Capricorn

The examples mentioned above indicate systems in crisis and leaders of those systems in crisis. The situations outlined are characterised by breakdown. At the systemic level, for example, this involves the breakdown of economic value or a political power structure; at the level of the leaders of these systems, it involves the breakdown of authority, prestige and credibility. Pluto tackles this process thoroughly: existing forms are destroyed to make way for new ones. It is therefore interesting to explore this other side of Pluto. So what emerges from the demolition? Again, I discuss some salient examples.

In recent years, we see a strong emergence of leaders who are critical of existing systems. This system criticism goes in all directions. Politicians like Trump, Johnson and (Dutch politician) Baudet are critical of globalisation and want to return to a situation where nation-states are in charge again. We also see tendencies towards autocracy in democracies (US, Russia, Turkey, Brazil, Hungary, etc.). Economic system criticism can be found with people like Bernie Sanders, Piketty and (Dutch politician) Jesse Klaver: they argue that the current economic system needs a deep overhaul in order to reduce inequality in society.

On a completely different front, Wikileaks seeks to expose government abuses by putting secret government documents online (Pluto in Capricorn: bringing system secrets out into the open). The last Pope, Francis, who took office in 2013, has been critical of his own institution, trying to reform it from within since taking office. On the climate front, Swedish schoolgirl Greta Thunberg is trying to impress upon current world leaders the importance of profound behavioural change in favour of the climate. As a 16-year-old, she accuses world leaders of immaturity, because they are not tackling problems decisively. Mark up the Capricorn theme: (im)maturity.

There has also been an explosion of conspiracy theories in recent years, which, under the influence of social media (which also work virally), are spreading faster and faster among large groups of people. What these theories have in common is the idea that humanity cannot rely on existing systems and their rulers, for instance in politics, media, business or science. Typically, secret or invisible forces are assumed within these systems that do not have humanity's best interests at heart (the workings of Pluto in Capricorn).

Trump versus Thunberg

The list of examples presented here can be expanded at will. What matters is that Pluto in Capricorn reveals not only demolition but also conversion to new forms. These new forms turn out to be very diverse. In short, from Trump to Thunberg. By contrasting the two -as examples-, we can discover the duality behind the new forms. Thunberg insists that world leaders are not adequately picking up their responsibility for the planet and calls for change. Trump denies that there is a climate problem and takes measures that actually increase CO2 emissions.

We see a typical Capricorn trait emerge in this example: taking responsibility. The example of Trump and Thunberg makes it clear that shirking responsibility will eventually lead to a systemic crisis, in this case an ecological crisis, while taking responsibility, can (potentially) avert the crisis and bring about renewal.

The systemic crises revealed by Pluto in Capricorn involve negative manifestations of the sign of Capricorn. Translated to the actions of leaders: for example, irresponsible actions have been taken, responsibilities have not been taken, but also: dishonourable actions have been taken, acts of incompetence, untrustworthy actions, not in the interest of the greater good. Or: no action was taken where action should have been taken. Things have run their course. Capricorn calls for 'getting to work', not sitting still and letting things happen. It is these kinds of Capricorn expressions that have led to the systemic crises we have seen rapidly passing by in recent years.

The pandemic of the crowned

This brings us to the latest crisis, of which we have now -by mid-April 2020- only seen the beginning: the COVID-19 pandemic. This crisis is primarily a humanitarian one. Note that Pluto in Capricorn here mainly affects the elderly with death. However, the effects of Covid-19 go far beyond affecting individual 'biological systems'. Worldwide, public life has now ground to a halt, movement restrictions have been imposed on people, borders that had long been open have been closed again, loneliness among people is growing, as well as anxiety and depression. We see Capricorn's constraints popping up everywhere and certainly not least in the economic system: all the lock downs are already revealing an unprecedented contraction.

The exact scale of the economic crisis that will follow the humanitarian crisis remains to be seen, but that it will be a crisis of unprecedented proportions is already certain. What may be different about this crisis

is that a return to the (economic) situation before Covid-19 seems increasingly unlikely. Whereas in previous crises, such as the banking crisis and the Arab Spring, the systemic disruption was temporary and the pre-crisis situation often returned quickly, this seems less likely now.

By way of explanation, a vaccine is not expected in the short term (the current 'world record for vaccine development' stands at five years) and building up sufficient group immunity is also going to take at least one to two years. In this situation, any choice leads to a crisis outcome: keeping the economy locked and opting for healthcare capacity will -even if this situation lasts only a few months- deeply damages the economy for a longer period of time. Choosing to lift the current constraints sooner and thus get the economy going sooner will inevitably lead to an increase in infections, illnesses and deaths. Regardless of whether governments 'dare' to choose for this policy, this outcome too, will have numerous negative economic consequences. Some of these are already becoming apparent. Modern economies float on trust. The pandemic creates fear and lack of confidence, especially a lack of confidence in the future. This makes consumers hesitant to spend their money, companies make fewer investments, banks become more cautious about lending money, et cetera.

The current crisis seems deeper than all the crises cited above because not only is it a humanitarian crisis that has unprecedented implications for the economic system, the economic crisis in turn affects other systems, such as politics, science and technology. Consider, for instance, the much greater role governments play in economic transactions and the development of new digital surveillance techniques to monitor the spread of the virus in the population.

The choice between healthcare and the economy is certainly not the only Catch-22 choice at stake. In the background is also the ecological crisis, for instance. Returning to business as usual will lead to ecological disaster. In short, the Covid-19 pandemic calls for fundamental systemic choices.

The hallmark of a virus is that it goes viral. It does not care about boundaries set up by people, for instance based on state criteria, language or otherwise. When we examine the crises of recent years, it becomes clear that they all display viral characteristics. In each case, we see a pattern of toppling dominoes: the degradation of one system leads to the degradation of others. What the viral aspect makes clear to us is that as humanity we form one system, that -whether we like it or not- we are intrinsically connected to everything and everyone on earth. Just when isolation has become a daily reality for many, more and more people are becoming aware of their connection to and dependence on others. The awareness of being part of a greater whole is increasing. Also Pluto in Capricorn.

The virus that causes all this is of the 'Corona' type, meaning crown or wreath, named after the shape of the virus particle. So it is about a crowned one, a king. What does it bring about? On the one hand, destruction of systems, on the other, renewal of the way we shape systems. We also see this picture in the systems crises of recent years.

What kind of king do we want to be?

If the preceding analysis makes anything clear, it is that Pluto in Capricorn makes us aware that we are part of larger connections, that we are connected to each other, but also that we are dependent on each other. And all this through the systems we are part of: the sick are connected to the healthy, healthcare to the economy, one economy to another, et cetera. As humanity, we form one living system. This is what Pluto in Capricorn is drawing our attention to in this period.

Do we as individuals take care of the bigger picture or do we mainly take care of ourselves? Are we taking responsibility and taking action for the systems we are part of (such as the community, the economy, the climate)? Do we deal responsibly with the resources made available to us from these systems? Are we acting in good faith? Can we be of service to the greater good? In other words, how do we shape our own leadership? How do we fulfil our role as 'king(s)'?

The descriptions of the various systemic crises show that in these cases, the higher interest always gave way to the individual interests of those involved within these systems. This led to them becoming unbalanced and damaged.

The Covid-19 crisis makes it clear that the leadership issue does not only concern formal leaders, but all of us. After all, we all bear responsibility for the bigger picture, each of us in our own way. The crisis we are now in, with no end in sight, invites us to reflect on our role, to take responsibility. It also calls for reflection on the leaders we choose. Do we choose leaders who have the greater good in mind or not? Who take responsibility or run away from it? Who act with integrity or act on their own agendas? Et cetera. All these choices influence the new forms and systems that will emerge.

Looking at the leaders who have emerged now and in recent years, we can see that these 'kings' (and queens!) are of both sexes. On the one hand, we see leaders emerging who want to disintegrate existing systems, who want to step out of larger contexts and who sometimes shamelessly choose their own interests. On the other hand, we see leaders pursuing the opposite. Pluto in Capricorn makes these processes visible. What was previously hidden comes out during this period and is brought into the light of our consciousness.

But now for the crux: the choices our leaders are facing, in fact we are all facing them. The climate crisis provides a good illustration of this. What do we choose to do? Do we -out of comfort, convenience and short-term self-interest- maintain our current way of life, at the expense of the ecological damage it causes? Or do we choose to change our way of life to avoid ecological disaster? These kinds of choices are happening now on all kinds of levels.

This is what Pluto in Capricorn is asking each of us: what kind of king(s) do you want to be? What interest do you want to serve? If we focus on the collective interest, Pluto will bring her treasures to us from the depths: systems (social, political, economic, ecological, etc.) that are healthy and in balance, that serve and support humanity. If we make other choices...well...in the year 2254, Pluto will start a new round through Capricorn.

In conclusion: what history shows

Pluto's previous circumambulation through Capricorn was from 1762 to 1778. A period that, like the current one, was marked by fundamental debates about how we shape our economic and social systems. In 1762, Rousseau's *Social contract* was published; 12 years later, in 1776, Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* was published. The first book focuses on the importance of the will of the people and the role of governments as serving that will. The second book also deals with the role of government in the sense that it should interfere in the economy as little as possible. The free market regulates itself and generates maximum wealth for all. By and large, both theories still form the basis of our current political-economic system: a free market economy coupled with liberal democracy.

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These theories saw the light of day in a period that, incidentally, was characterised by what has been called 'enlightened despotism': a form of state in which governments acted like former kings and drew a lot of power to themselves. Power was centralised and the state apparatus rationalised (e.g. with tax collection). These rather contradictory developments led to democratic revolutions all over the Western world, especially against absolutism, feudalism, and human rights limited by descent and religion. The idea that governments represented God also lost validity at this time. The bourgeois class came to power.

Generally, the profound changes of this period are seen as a prelude to the most fundamental revolution yet to come: the French Revolution. That took place in 1789, when Pluto was transiting Aquarius. Although the world in the second half of the 18th century looked very different from today, many parallels can be observed with today's situation. Back then too, it was about political, economic and also social reform of existing systems. Only when Pluto was transiting Aquarius did this lead to the fundamental revolution that continues to this day (Uranus was also discovered during this period).

To cut a long story short, the developments we are observing now may be nothing more than a harbinger for the systemic changes to come when Pluto enters the sign of Aquarius in 2024.

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