

Between Enchantment and Rationality: Astrology and AI in the Cosmology of Modernity

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Master's Degrees by Examination and Dissertation

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Abstract

This thesis explores the meaning of astrology and artificial intelligence (AI) as systems of meaning-making in the context of modernity. It builds on Max Weber's theory of disenchantment and subsequent critiques by Patrick Curry, Charles Taylor, Michael Saler, and others. The research investigates whether AI might occupy a comparable role to astrology in terms of reasons behind their usage. Historically, astrology has functioned as a participatory cosmology that situates individual within a broader universe, conversely AI is framed as a rational technology. Both share an element of opacity; their inner workings are not fully understood by lay users, who nevertheless rely on the outputs that they provide.

The study gathered data through a quantitative questionnaire which was distributed online, it generated 40 responses from participants with varying degrees of knowledge about astrology and AI. Questions explored trust, decision-making, reasons for usage, perceived reliability, and whether each of these systems make them help sense of the world.

Findings suggests that astrology remains a strong cosmological framework for many, as it provides meaning, reassurance, and existential orientation. AI, on the other hand, is more likely seen as a rational tool, yet a significant minority expressed either agreement or ambivalence that attributed cosmological potential to it. These results reflect a broader tension in modernity; the authority of rationality dominates while enchantment persists. AI is a new technology that might blur the boundaries between rational calculation and symbolic meaning.

1. Introduction

Humans have always sought ways to interpret uncertainty and orient themselves in the world. From ancient divinatory practice to religious traditions and modern scientific methods. The essence of these different systems is to provide insight into whatever is the questioner inquiring. In modernity, which is often associated with Max Weber's disenchantment: a notion that the world shifts from its dependence on magical thinking to rational and calculated thought. This perception of the world takes away the authority from divination and gives it to science and technology. Yet, astrology, one of the oldest forms of divination continues to appear in popular culture. At the same time, Artificial Intelligence (AI), a rational technology, increasingly guides decision making in everyday life. The seeming similarity between these two systems raises a question whether rational technologies such as AI, can occupy similar roles once attributed to divination.

Despite the substantial scholarship on enchantment, disenchantment, divination, astrology, cosmology, and even the similarities between divination or astrology and AI, little has been asked about AI and its possibility of being considered a part of the cosmology of modernity. Previous scholarships have examined astrology and cosmology, such as the works of Patrick Curry and Nicholas Campion. Others have looked at divination from a cultural perspective such as Jørgen Sørensen, and Ze Hong and Joseph Henrich. Max Weber introduced the concept of disenchantment while Michael Saler and Charles Taylor advocate the existence of enchantment in modernity. Furthermore, Leona Nikolić, and Sharday Mosurinjohn and Jordan Loewen-Colón speak on the similarities of AI and divination from different perspective. Their work remains theoretical, what is missing is empirical research on how ordinary people perceive astrology and AI, if they use them for similar purposes. This raises the central question of this thesis: 'whether AI, since it is a technology hence it appears to be rational and more palatable to people in modernity, occupies a role in the cosmology of modernity similar to that of astrology?' In order to answer this question, the research investigates: how people use astrology and AI in their everyday lives; whether they see these systems as sources of reassurance, guidance, or meaning; which of these systems are more meaningful and trustworthy; and whether AI is seen as more than just a technology. The investigation will begin with introduction of these scholarships in the literature review, then it will introduce the methodology of the research which is a quantitative questionnaire. This will be followed with the statement of the findings including graphs. Lastly, the findings will be interpreted in the discussion part of the dissertation which will also consider the limitation this thesis will have faced, additionally it will open up opportunities for future research.

Furthermore, to answer the thesis question definition of key terms is needed:

Cosmology

The definition of cosmology given by Nicholas Campion in his work "Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions" will be used to conduct this research. He describes cosmology as a meaning-system that helps us understand our reality, which ranges from purely mythical or religious perspectives to scientific ones depending on societal context.¹ This is because in modernity, cosmology is usually interpreted as a "theory or study of the universe as an orderly system, and of the laws that govern it..."² however, the premodern meaning of cosmology concerned the "understanding of the nature of existence"³ In both senses, cosmology is description of understanding how our existence relates to reality and vice-versa.

Divination and Astrology

Patrick Curry regards divination as a practice which is: "ubiquitous throughout human history and societies ... a special but characteristically human enterprise".⁴ Divination has ancient roots that managed to spread all the way to modernity, affecting most, if not all, humanity in the process. Furthermore, he states that astrology makes one of the richest case studies of systems that give divination a cosmological and epistemological dimension.⁵ He describes: "astrology as the most durable, widespread and complex form of Western divination"⁶

Enchantment and Disenchantment

Enchantment and disenchantment stand in direct opposition to one another. At its core, Max Weber explains disenchantment as the process of intellectual rationalization.⁷ A disenchanted world embodies the authority of science, progress and calculation. On the opposite end, enchantment is embodied through the works of Patrick Curry, Michael Saler, and Charles Taylor as an otherworldly sensation. Taylor connects it to religious belief, Saler to fantastical and romantic world. Curry does not give a specific definition but states that enchantment is generated through fleeting feelings of awe and wonder.

¹ Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (New York: New York University Press), pp. 1-2

² Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, pp.4

³ Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, pp.4.

⁴ Curry, Patrick. 2010. *Divination: Perspectives for a New Millennium* (Ashgate), pp. 1-2.

⁵ Curry, Patrick. 1999. 'Magic vs. Enchantment', *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 14.3, pp. 8.

⁶ Curry, Patrick. 2010. *Divination: Perspectives for a New Millennium* (Ashgate), pp. 4.

⁷ Weber, Max. 2004. *The Vocation Lectures* : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation', pp. Xxx.

Awe and Wonder

Curry sees these abstract terms in connection with enchantment. He situates wonder as a way of knowing and understanding the world, a perspective that allows a person to things in it as meaningful.⁸ Furthermore, he connects it to senses like humility and compassion. He equates awe to wonder and wonder to enchantment.⁹

Artificial intelligence (AI)

In this thesis, AI is understood as a technical system that has cultural function. It carries meaning and expectations. It is important to note that there is not one singular definition of what AI is. Haroon Sheikh et al. state that this difficulty lies in the fact that it is: “an imitation or simulation of something we do not yet fully understand”.¹⁰ For this reason, in this work AI will be predominantly defined by its relation to algorithms, Haron Sheikh state that it is one of the most common definitions and that: “The term ‘algorithm’ is derived from the name of the ninth-century Persian mathematician Mohammed ibn Musa al-Kharizmi and refers to a specific instruction for solving a problem or performing a calculation.”¹¹ I have chosen this specific definition because it directly ties to disenchantment.

Black Box

A black box is essentially understood as program whose complexity is hidden from the user. Generally, black boxes are not considered to be transparent, because of this it is not always clear that any kind of relationship with them is two sided. People know what they are asking for but they usually do not understand what they give back for these answers.¹² Sharday Mosurinjohn and Jordan Loewen-Colón state that: algorithms are often “black boxes,” with their inner workings opaque to both makers and users”.¹³

⁸ Curry, Patrick. 1999. ‘Magic vs. Enchantment’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 14.3, pp. 6.

⁹ Curry, Patrick. 2018. ‘The Work of Wonder’, *Western Humanities Review*, 72.2 <http://www.patrickcurry.co.uk/papers/The%20Work%20of%20Wonder.pdf>, pp. 1.

¹⁰ Sheikh, Haroon, Corien Prins, and Erik Schrijvers. 2023. ‘Artificial Intelligence: Definition and Background’, *Research for Policy*: 15–41 https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-21448-6_2, pp. 16.

¹¹ Sheikh, Haroon, Corien Prins, and Erik Schrijvers. 2023. ‘Artificial Intelligence: Definition and Background’, *Research for Policy*, pp. 15.

¹² Loewen-Colón, Jordan, and Sharday Mosurinjohn. 2023. ‘The Age of (the Algorithmic) Aquarius: How AI Meets Our Esoteric Needs’, *American Religion*, 5.1 (Indiana University Press): 137–47 <https://doi.org/10.2979/amerreli.5.1.10>, pp. 142.

¹³ Loewen-Colón, Jordan, and Sharday Mosurinjohn. 2023. ‘The Age of (the Algorithmic) Aquarius: How AI Meets Our Esoteric Needs’, *American Religion*, 5.1, pp. 144.

2. Literature review

In this literature review, I will be introducing important scholarships that allow me to research whether artificial intelligence (AI) can function as a form of divination similar to astrology and if it can be considered a part of the cosmology of modernity. Firstly, I will focus on the concept of disenchantment using Max Weber's thesis to establish Western perception of disenchanted modernity and Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno to further point how rationalization functions in society. I will be following this with critiques of the disenchanted world, specifically scholarships of Charles Taylor, Michael Saler, and Akeel Bilgrami who argue that despite the rationalization, people still find enchantment in the modernity in different ways. Furthermore, I will introduce the work of Patrick Curry who focuses on the question why rationalism represses enchantment. In the next subchapter I will speak on divination and its function in society through the works of Jørgen Sørensen, and Ze Hong and Joseph Henrich. Astrology is a type of divination that I will be describing in more detail, mainly in regard to its history and how it relates to cosmology in the work of Nicholas Campion and Patrick Curry. Lastly, I will tackle the cultural meaning of science through Simon Locke and Bruno Latour and the intersection of AI and astrology which is spoken about by Leona Nikolić and Kenneth McRitchie. Furthermore, I will conceptualize this intersection to the experience of lay people through the research of Sharday Mosurinjohn and Jordan Loewen-Colón and the cosmological implications debated by Abou Farman.

2.1. Disenchantment and the Rationalization of Knowledge

Disenchantment is a notion that has been subjected to numerous discussions in different academic fields. In this part of my dissertation, I will focus on Max Weber's Disenchantment Thesis as it is a pivotal prediction and statement about the reality of the world – that enchantment does not play the same role in our society that it did in the past in favour of rational thinking. Weber's disenchantment theory is echoed by numerous academics; I will be mentioning the work of Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno who conceptualize disenchantment through the lenses of totalitarianism focusing on the negative societal implication that fully rationalised world has.

2.1.1. Max Weber and the Disenchantment Thesis

Max Weber is regarded as one of the most important social theorists of the twentieth century. According to Sung Ho Kim he is known as one of the principal architects of modern social science.¹⁴ While he has made contributions to other disciplines his most outstanding one is the birth of field of sociology where he focused on themes of rationalization and protestant ethics.¹⁵ Weber's formal introduction of the idea of disenchantment can be found in the "*Science as a Vocation*" lectures from 1917. However, the groundwork for his reasoning appears in his earlier work, "*Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*". Although he does mention disenchantment of the world in this particular source as well, it is in different context. Weber's "*Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*" predominantly tackles the begging and rise of capitalism from historical and cultural perspective. He argues that religious ethics, specifically Calvinism, is the reason for the advance of rationalism which inevitably leads to capitalism.¹⁶ Ultimately, the concept of disenchantment is pointed out as a symptom of an ongoing process of the emergence of capitalism.

At the same time, Weber positions disenchantment from another perspective in the notes of his "*Science as a Vocation*" lecture. As the title suggests, in this work Weber talks about the realities of scientific works under the conditions of modernity. What is meant by the conditions of modernity is the increasing bureaucratisation and rationalisation within universities and the transformation of scientific reasoning in a disenchanted world.¹⁷ The context of disenchantment in this work begins to shift focus on personal and spiritual experiences people have in the modern world as he brings the focus of the debate to the question of faith and its place in modern society. At its core, Weber explains disenchantment as the process of intellectual rationalization.¹⁸ He describes this process as not simply understanding conditions surrounding our existence but having the convictions that answers to these questions can be given to us at any time. For this reason, we are in a constant process of never-ending discovery; there are always questions ready to be asked and answers to be calculated. Weber borrows Leo Tolstoy's understanding of progress to point out that this reality inevitably shifts personal views on the meaning of life and death and deems it meaningless because of the lack of fulfilment, compared our predecessors that lived under different circumstances.¹⁹ The essence of disenchantment lies in Weber's belief that we can control everything that is unknown to

¹⁴ Kim, Sung Ho. 2017. 'Max Weber', Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stanford University) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/weber/>

¹⁵ Kim, Sung Ho. 2017. 'Max Weber', Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stanford University) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/weber/>

¹⁶ Weber, Max. 2013. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (Routledge), pp. lxi.

¹⁷ Weber, Max. 2004. *The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation',* ed. by David S. Owen and Tracy B. Strong, trans. by Rodney Livingstone (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub.), pp. xx.

¹⁸ Weber, Max. 2004. *The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation',* pp. Xxx.

¹⁹ Weber, Max. 2004. *The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation',* pp. 13.

us by the means of calculation and thus we do not need to rely on mysterious, unpredictable forces.²⁰ Weber states that: "Unlike the savage for whom such forces existed, we need no longer recourse to magic, in order to control the spirits or pray to them. Instead, technology and calculation achieve our ends."²¹ For Weber, magic, mystery or any other unpredictable force is a sign of the lack of progress and intellect as he directly connects disenchantment to the intellectualization of society. He is adamant that science and the concept of God, or any other form of divine beliefs, are fundamentally antithetical.²² And thus Weber states that: "release from rationalism and intellectualism of science is the fundamental premise of life in communion with the divine."²³

Disenchanted world which embodies science, rationality and progress therefore stands in opposition to an enchanted world. The concept of enchantment in this context refers to pre-modern societies where religious beliefs of different sorts were so imbedded in society; there was no question whether anyone was partaking in them – it was given.²⁴

2.1.2. The Rationalization of Knowledge

The rationalization of knowledge shifts our perception of reality away from cosmological and spiritual frameworks to secular and increasingly formalized worldviews – a disenchanted world. Knowledge becomes something to be organized, quantified, and pursued through technical procedures. Max Weber's theory of rationalization distinguishes between *formal rationalization* (focused on efficiency, predictability, and calculation) and *substantive rationalization*, which is guided by deeper values or ends. He claims that the Western world tends to follow formal rationalization. While it enhances individual freedom as it helps people see what exactly their choices can achieve, it simultaneously conceals a deeper loss of meaning in social life. Weber fears that this kind of society which seems to be trapped under an "iron cage" has no room for deeper values and only holds to calculable routine. Therefore, according to Weber, while rationalization gives a clear view of reality, it also flattens it, stripping it of mystery and significance.²⁵

Rationalization reduces what can be recognized as valid knowledge by focusing on forms of inquiry that are technically precise and socially useful. As Simon Locke states, "Science, as one embodiment of technical action, has emerged to dominance... approximating to the ideal-typical form of technical

²⁰ Weber, Max. 2004. The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation', pp. 12-13.

²¹ Weber, Max. 2004. The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation', pp. 13.

²² Weber, Max. 2004. The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation', pp. 16.

²³ Weber, Max. 2004. The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation', pp. 16.

²⁴ Taylor, Charles. 2007. A Secular Age (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), pp. 25-26.

²⁵ Kim, Sung Ho. 2017. 'Max Weber', Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Stanford University) <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/weber/>

conduct in the sphere of knowledge production."²⁶ This reflects how rationalized modern societies ground the legitimacy of knowledge in what they deem useful or functional.

To further examine this notion, it is necessary to question what these thought systems lead to. Max Horkheimer and Theodore Adorno connect rationalization of knowledge to systems of domination. Horkheimer and Adorno were important figures of the Frankfurt school – a Western European Marxist tradition aimed at critique and transformation of society²⁷ – through which they critically analysed the rationality of enlightenment and its implications within modernity. The main focus of their work '*Dialectics of Enlightenment*' is to question the nature of enlightenment and why it has been expressing negatively. They state that: "Enlightenment, understood in the widest sense as the advance of thought, has always aimed at liberating human beings from fear and installing them as masters. Yet the wholly enlightened earth is radiant with triumphant calamity. Enlightenment's programme was the disenchantment of the world. It wanted to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge"²⁸. For Horkheimer and Adorno, rationalization of knowledge is associated with and related to power, technology, and domination of nature and natural phenomena.²⁹ According to them, domination of nature and is the reason humans are estranged from it and themselves which leads us to objectification.³⁰ This can be supported by their statement that "Animism had endowed things with souls; industrialism makes souls into things"³¹ which further points out how enlightenment, rationalization, blind progress takes away meaning from everyday life. This process of the renationalization of knowledge is understood as a never ending repetition disguised as regularity which imprisons humans in the belief that their freedom is subjected to the domination of nature.³² The belief that enlightenment helps us to escape from the unknown mythical world becomes a myth itself as rationalization traps us within its own ideology under the pretence of freedom.³³ Horkheimer and Adorno further argue that technology in essence represents knowledge, and its sole existence depends upon the exploitation of labour of other while lacking deeper understanding of its

²⁶ Locke, Simon. 2001. 'Sociology and the Public Understanding of Science: From Rationalization to Rhetoric', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 52.1: 1–18 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071310020023000>, pp 4.

²⁷ Celikates, Robin, and Jeffrey Flynn. 2023. 'Critical Theory (Frankfurt School)', *Plato.stanford.edu* <https://plato.stanford.edu/Entries/critical-theory/>

²⁸ Adorno, Theodor W, and Max Horkheimer. 2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press), pp. 1.

²⁹ Brunkhorst, Hauke. 2000. 'Enlightenment of Rationality: Remarks on Horkheimer and Adorno's Dialectic of Enlightenment', *Constellations*, 7.1: 133–40 <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.00175>, pp. 134.

³⁰ Adorno, Theodor W, and Max Horkheimer. 2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 22

³¹ Adorno, Theodor W, and Max Horkheimer. 2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 22.

³² Adorno, Theodor W, and Max Horkheimer. 2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 8.

³³ Adorno, Theodor W, and Max Horkheimer. 2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 8.

surroundings.³⁴ Advancement of technology can thus be viewed as a direct contributor to disenchantment.

The scholarships concerning the disenchantment of the world predominantly focus on how instrumental reason, intrinsic value and rational thinking actively changed dominant worldview. They critically state that despite rationalism presenting as neutral way of interacting with the world it tends to flatten the human experience. Disenchantment is something that shapes us to this day because of the rigid belief that everything can be explained scientifically and though the domination of nature.

2.2. Enchantment in Modernity

Is modernity truly disenchanted? In this chapter I will be focusing on various theorists and their critique of Weber's disenchanted world. Firstly, I will introduce theoretical frameworks that introduce a new point of view to disenchantment of modernity and how enchantment appears in modernity. Namely, I will focus on the work of Charles Taylor, Michael Saler, and Akeel Bilgrami who all believe that modernity introduces new ways to experience enchantment despite rationalization. Secondly, I will focus on Patrick Curry and his view that rationalism and enchantment are fundamentally incompatible. Instead of interpreting the new ways enchantment appears in modernity, Curry questions why rationalism represses enchantment.

2.2.1. Theories of Re-enchantment in Secular Age

So far, modernity has been described as fully rationalized, disenchanted and technological reality that lacks deeper spiritual meaning. This notion has been criticised for various reasons, some academics claim that humanity will begin the process of re-enchantment, others state that enchantment never disappeared – it just took on new forms.

Charles Taylor in his book 'A Secular Age' begins with the description of secularization within society. He agrees with Weber that the world has gone through the process of disenchantment and focuses on the concept of faith. He questions how faith was understood in the past: it is something that was a part of everyone's life, be it being born into European Christendom, paganism, polytheistic society or any other form of transcendent belief system, faith was a part of sharing the society with the collective.³⁵ This leads him to question how faith is understood in modernity, where it is usually believed that rationalization substitutes faith with the belief in scientific advancement.³⁶ Taylor focuses on this and introduces the concept of 'Immanent Frame', a representation of faith in

³⁴ Adorno, Theodor W, and Max Horkheimer. 2002. *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp. 1.

³⁵ Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press), pp. 25-26.

³⁶ Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*, pp. 366.

modernity that is much more individualised.³⁷ He describes the 'Immanent Frame' as the way we understand and learn about the world which is not depended on transcendence or divinity but that we can still choose to believe in the divine; it is an option not a requirement. Taylor states that the reason behind this is division of God and society by early Christian thinkers; they meant to divide them to protect the sacred. However, this also led to the realization that it is possible to go on without it. Thus, we gradually accepted secularization leaving only those who actively choose to seek transcendent meaning.³⁸ Furthermore, we can also actively choose the way to seek it, traditionally or through secular forms of enchantment; it is fully individual. Religion was often expressed through forms of art (music, poetry, dance and so on), the absence of religion in the everyday life opens these arts to secular attempts to give us a sense of fullness.³⁹ Taylor's describes this as 'cross-pressure' which suggests that this option of choosing to between rational world and seeking deeper meaning in transcendence creates tension.⁴⁰ Taylor believes that forms of enchantment are possible within modernity despite its rationality, as the desire for deeper meaning remains in a different sense.

Similarly, Michael Saler in his work *'As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality'* focuses on new ways it is possible to experience enchantment in modernity. He argues that despite rationalization of society, enchantment did not disappear but rather was marginalized in multiple ways; it was explained and subordinated to the secular phenomena of modernity.⁴¹ Enchantment existed even in the modern world but was not viewed positively as it was usually associated with social groups that were perceived to be inferior to the elite.⁴² However, Saler gives us multiple instances of a more gradual appreciation of enchanted phenomena appearing in the world despite being described as rational by academics. For example, he mentions James Cook, who points out the non-existent study of magicians in the nineteenth and twentieth century or simply the fact that science and technology were considered to be fostering wonder and awe.⁴³ He states that: "modernity remains enchanted in a disenchanted way, rendering the imagination compatible with reason, the spiritual with secular trends."⁴⁴ That is because people learned to seek enchantment but at the same time became aware how it separates from the values of modernity. He mentions that since the mid-nineteenth century, literary modernists have started to use irony to portray multiple meanings at once just like artists of modernity, specifically cubist and futuristic painters, look at

³⁷ Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*, pp. 541.

³⁸ Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*, pp. 542 – 544.

³⁹ Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*, pp. 615.

⁴⁰ Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*, pp. 595.

⁴¹ Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press), pp. 9.

⁴² Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, pp. 9.

⁴³ Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, pp. 12.

⁴⁴ Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, pp. 13.

multiple different angles simultaneously. At the same time, readers began seeking enchantment through the works of fantastic fiction while still being a part of the rational world.⁴⁵ For this reason, he introduces the concept of ‘ironic imagination’, a possibility to “embrace alternative worlds and experience alternative truth.”⁴⁶ Furthermore, with the Saler the genre of New Romance which produces imaginary worlds blends together the sense of wonder and rational thinking,⁴⁷ better yet, they make rationality appealing by returning to the conception of cognition associated with various philosophers of the eighteen century and poets of the early nineteenth century, which combines imagination with reason, feeling with thought, and analysis with intuition.⁴⁸ This thinking provides an alternative to rational way of thought and provides modernity with a new form of enchantment.⁴⁹ While Saler does believe that enchantment exists in modernity, he is clear about its existence being actively chosen by the people and not something that naturally comes from science and technology – wonder is something the modern people willingly choose to look for.

Another view on the existence of enchantment in modernity comes from Akeel Bilgrami. In his work “Secularism, Identity and Enchantment”, he uses these themes to focus on the topic of religion and politics. To fully understand his theory of enchantment in modernity, it is necessary to establish his view of secularism; a phenomenon that is always described in regard to religion, usually as its direct opposite, and as a political doctrine.⁵⁰ People of modernity entertain secularism because it stands for promoting moral and political concepts, while protecting them from religious harms. It does so on a different level than atheism does – while atheism exists to justify its own sake, secularism is focused on promoting deeper moral values.⁵¹ However, because moral values are not universal and tend to be more culture (or even just person-to-person) specific, consequently there would have to be multiple principles of secularism in which case it becomes universality challenged. When secularism loses its universal meaning, people will lack common moral grounding which will result in the feeling of emptiness and alienation.⁵² Therefore, Bilgrami’s main focus is not merely the disappearance of religion and mystery from society, but rather the fact that the ethical values are disappearing with it. The fault does not lie with the advancement of science but with the conviction that only science can answer the important questions about the world.⁵³ He points out that enchantment can be recovered in a disenchanted secular world without subjecting it to re-sacralization; through the intrinsic values

⁴⁵ Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If : Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, pp. 14.

⁴⁶ Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If : Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, pp. 14.

⁴⁷ Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If : Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, pp. 15.

⁴⁸ Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If : Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality* pp. 16.

⁴⁹ Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If : Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, pp. 16.

⁵⁰ Bilgrami, Akeel. 2014. *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment* (Harvard University Press), pp. 4.

⁵¹ Bilgrami, Akeel. 2014. *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, pp. 6.

⁵² Bilgrami, Akeel. 2014. *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, pp. 7.

⁵³ Bilgrami, Akeel. 2014. *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, pp. 156.

of nature.⁵⁴ That is because nature does not have to be viewed through divine lenses, it can be seen as a source of more significance on its own. Thus, he argues that this relationship people can have with nature is something they can collectively respond to – the response moulds our moral engagement with the world and with each other.⁵⁵

There are multiple angles to look at when considering the possibility of re-enchantment in modernity, Taylor introduces the Immanent Frame – the choice of participating in faith as it is separate from the rational reality or finding enchantment through secular means that were once seen as spiritual. Saler argues that because people crave enchantment they will create even through secular means, through ironic imagination – while being able to distinguish fantastic fiction from reality it still acts as a way to experience mystery and wonder in a secular world. Bilgrami focuses mainly on ethical and moral values surrounding existence in a secular society, he finds enchantment in collective response to the lack of universal meaning under secularism.

2.2.2. Patrick Curry and the Limitations of Modern Rationality

Patrick Curry is an essential figure for this research because he highlights the structural reasons why modern rationality resists or represses enchantment, rather than focusing only on how enchantment re-emerges despite that resistance. Unlike the theorists mentioned in the previous subchapter that focus on the conditions of reappearance of enchantment, he predominantly focuses on the critiques of rational scientific worldviews, especially when they dismiss enchanting forms of interaction with the world.

Enchantment is a pivotal phenomenon that plays a key role in understanding its relation to modern rationality. In his work *“Enchantment: Wonder in Modern Life”* he explores the meaning of enchantment, what it does and how it affects individuals and collectives alike. He understands it as something that cannot be fully described.⁵⁶ The definitions Curry gives us are poetic, abstract, and individual. Anyone can be enchanted by anything as long as it evokes the right feelings of awe and wonder and many people tend to be enchanted by similar things because we are fundamentally similar to one another.⁵⁷ Enchantment is important in our lives because it provides us with solace at the time of suffering, and that it can make life worth living.⁵⁸ Curry states that: “Far from being a matter of psychology, a purely subjective state of mind, enchantment can reveal profound truths,

⁵⁴ Bilgrami, Akeel. 2014. *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, pp. 157.

⁵⁵ Bilgrami, Akeel. 2014. *Secularism, Identity, and Enchantment*, pp. 173.

⁵⁶ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*. (S.L.: Floris Books), pp. 6.

⁵⁷ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 6.

⁵⁸ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life.*, pp. 7.

lead to deep values, and become central to a life well-lived.”⁵⁹ He further notices that enchantment stands in an opposition, and thus can be understood by comparison, to rationalism; although our understanding of what is enchanting may differ, not every single perception a person can have can only be enchanting. Enchantment is definite, not infinite and quite rare to experience which makes it even more meaningful and important.⁶⁰ To fully grasp what Patrick Curry means by enchantment it is essential to focus on how he understands disenchantment as they both signify what the other does not, more importantly they reduce one another. Disenchantment is a standard experience of the world; the time and space are experienced abstractly: both have strict allotted slots. We experience time through the clock – seconds turning into minutes turning into hours and so on, when we move through space the places where we spend our time are usually identical. This causes everything to feel the same, and when nothing stands out nothing really matters. The modern condition only offers boredom that descends us into nihilism.⁶¹ Enchantment is little sparks of wonder that we briefly experience on our journeys through modernity, it brings meaning where there is none.

Curry names three modes of being that are possible to achieve in our current world, they set the values people hold and perceptions by which they choose to perceive their surroundings. Other than enchantment he speaks of the Dionysian mode which is about intense emotions. It lets people get carried away in pleasure and ecstasy so intensely their sense of self vanishes. This differs from enchantment because “even radical enchantment doesn’t obliterate boundaries. It simply crosses them, rendering them permeable.”⁶² Meaning that even though people can experience intense emotions, they do not lose themselves in the process of it as the boundaries of everyday life and pleasure remain intact. The Apollonian mode, on the other hand, is described as the “mode of coldly rational mastery, achieved through imposing order and system.”⁶³ The most important thing in this mode is instrumental value – other people and our surroundings are only valuable as long as they can be used.⁶⁴ The Apollonian mode directly resembles rationalism and thus separates itself from enchantment which is life affirming because it allows for pleasure that the Apollonian mode forbids without overindulgence of the Dionysian mode. Furthermore, Curry states that: “rationalism is inherently disenchanting.”⁶⁵ Not because it embodies logical thinking but because it is an -ism. Rational thinking or thinking in general is not incompatible with enchantment, what causes the issue is that it is an ideological system. Using our minds to observe the world around us is compatible with

⁵⁹ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 7.

⁶⁰ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 7.

⁶¹ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 7.

⁶² Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 9.

⁶³ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 8.

⁶⁴ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 8.

⁶⁵ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 9.

enchantment however, the belief that it is the only reliable source of information is not.⁶⁶ Most of ideological systems, including rationalism, tend to see the world through their own lenses and expect to understand the world only using their own ideologies; they reduce everything to their own agenda.⁶⁷ As rationalism becomes a dominant worldview, it forces everyone to evaluate their surroundings and their experience only using reason and logic. It makes the world something to be conquered and dominated by unnecessary explanation. If everything can be explained using logic, the living experience becomes greatly flattened. Curry sees the solution to this approach in refraining from focusing on the explanations of the phenomena in the world and instead describing it and experiencing wisdom they have to offer.⁶⁸

To summarize, Patric Curry gives us reasons why modern rationality actively suppresses enchantment. Enchantment and rationalism are fully incompatible because the point of rationalism is to explain everything while expecting that everything is logically and scientifically explainable. When rationalism tries to analyse enchantment, it strips it of its uniqueness and reduces it to something else. As an ideological system, rationalism, stands for the dominance of the natural world through assessing its instrumental value. On the other hand, enchantment perceives the world as something to surrender itself to often through feelings and non-verbal experiences which secularism usually distrusts. When compared to the previous theorists who mostly focused on the re-emergence of enchantment through various means that are compatible with rationalism, Curry perceives enchantment as specific wondrous instances that take us away from rationalism for a moment.

2.3. Astrology as Cosmological Divination

This subchapter focuses on the cultural meaning of divination and its role within society. Firstly, I will be focusing on the epistemological meaning of divination in general and how that relates to cosmology. That it does not create information out of randomness but that there is a specific cultural and symbolical system. But also, that it is not only a prediction system but also a part of cosmology as it can help make sense of one's reality. I will do so using the scholarship of Jørgen Sørensen, and Ze Hong and Joseph Henrich. Secondly, my focus will shift specifically to astrology as a divinatory system and its historical value as described by Nicholas Campion and Patric Curry.

⁶⁶ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 9.

⁶⁷ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 9.

⁶⁸ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 9.

2.3.1. Divination as Epistemology and Cosmological Practice

Patrick Curry describes divination as a practice which is: “ubiquitous throughout human history and societies ... a special but characteristically human enterprise”.⁶⁹ Divination has ancient roots that managed to spread all the way to modernity, affecting most, if not all, humanity in the process. Despite manifesting differently across cultures and times, it is still actively affecting us to this day. As a practice, it involves not only mind but also the body and the contact of the diviner, or a collective, with the cosmos.⁷⁰ More importantly, it is a symbolic system that aligns with specific worldviews and at the same time does not require to be scientifically explained.⁷¹

Jørgen Sørensen who studies divination from an analytical perspective looks where he predominantly considers its epistemological and symbolic dimensions. In his work, *‘The Rhetoric of Divination: A Comparative Approach’* Sørensen points out that divination generates meaning by transforming seemingly randomly occurring phenomena into sound interpretations of culturally specific symbols.⁷² This suggests that at its core divination is not irrational but that it follows a symbolic epistemic system which controls the ambiguity of predictions through culturally structured interpretation of uncertainty. Sørensen specifically states that: “as production and interpretation of signs, divination involves a process of metamorphosis, in which the sign originally produced or observed is transformed into authoritative and useful speech.”⁷³ Divination allows a person to observe their surroundings through symbolic lenses which it interprets to specific situations. It is about contextual plausibility that is systematically interpreted by the diviner who recognizes patterns that align with their cultural symbolisms to make a statement about desired knowledge that is unknown or uncertain at the moment.⁷⁴ Moreover, divination meaningfully engages with the world, it recognizes patterns which it uses to reveal hidden truths, this process supports implementation of divination within cosmologies. Sørensen states that: “At the most basic level, any form of divination implies both a cosmology and a religious authority. ... In this most elementary sense, divination is utilization of cosmology, ...” Divination is thus a direct form of participation in cosmology and not merely a predictive tool.

Cosmology is often understood as the study of the questions regarding the origin of the universe.⁷⁵ However, Nicholas Campion in his work “Astrology and Cosmology in the World’s Religions” describes

⁶⁹ Curry, Patrick. 2010. *Divination: Perspectives for a New Millennium* (Ashgate), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁰ Curry, Patrick. 2010. *Divination: Perspectives for a New Millennium*, pp. 7.

⁷¹ Curry, Patrick. 2010. *Divination: Perspectives for a New Millennium*, pp. 5.

⁷² Podemann Sørensen, Jørgen . 2021. ‘The Rhetoric of Divination: A Comparative Approach’, in *Theoretical and Empirical Investigations of Divination and Magic*, ed. by Jesper Frøkjær Sørensen and Anders Klostergaard Petersen (Leiden: Brill), pp. 41.

⁷³ Podemann Sørensen, Jørgen . 2021. ‘The Rhetoric of Divination: A Comparative Approach’, pp. 46-47.

⁷⁴ Podemann Sørensen, Jørgen . 2021. ‘The Rhetoric of Divination: A Comparative Approach’, pp. 68.

⁷⁵ Cambridge Dictionary. 2022. ‘Cosmology’, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/cosmology>

cosmology as a meaning-system that helps us understand our reality, which ranges from purely mythical or religious perspectives to scientific ones depending on societal context.⁷⁶ This is because in modernity, cosmology is usually interpreted as a “theory or study of the universe as an orderly system, and of the laws that govern it...”⁷⁷ however, the premodern meaning of cosmology concerned the “understanding of the nature of existence”⁷⁸ In both senses, cosmology is description of understanding how our existence relates to reality and vice-versa. The undertone of this understanding is specified by societal beliefs and practices; if the culture is based on rationalism, then scientific cosmology will be preferent, in not it will be spiritual or religious.

In their work “The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices” Ze Hong and Joseph Henrich describe divination as epistemic technology, which they define as tools and methods that reveal hidden information.⁷⁹ This particular definition allows for divinatory practices to function as legitimate sources of knowledge that are a part of most, if not all human societies.⁸⁰ Furthermore, the authors provide concrete evidence that people among multiple different cultures seek out divinatory practices that help them with decision-making.⁸¹ They do so despite the fact that divinatory predications might not be accurate, that they can conclude false information.⁸² However, Hong and Henrich state that giving false prediction does not mean that the whole of divination is inaccurate, similarly, if a doctor gives a wrong diagnosis, it does not mean that medicine is not legitimate.⁸³ There is also cultural bias – if people believe or were taught that divination is legitimate, they are less likely to question the efficacy of the outcomes.⁸⁴ The opposite is also true: Hong and Henrich explicitly state that modern western scientific societies are culturally biased to perceive their surroundings though rational lenses: “many lay people in such science-reliant cultures also develop a sense of how knowledge should be reliably generated; for example, one does not need to be a scientist to know that evaluation of the efficacy of drugs requires randomized, controlled trials (minimally, some kind of experimentation), or that a neighbour's anecdotal story of her horoscope correctly predicting her personality does not qualify as evidence for the validity of astrology.”⁸⁵ Therefore, epistemology is closely tied to culture and the only reason people might perceive divination as implausible is because

⁷⁶ Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (New York: New York University Press), pp. 1-2.

⁷⁷ Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, pp.4

⁷⁸ Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, pp.4.

⁷⁹ Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. ‘The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices’, *Human Nature*, 32 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12110-021-09408-6>, pp. 623-24.

⁸⁰ Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. ‘The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices’, pp. 623.

⁸¹ Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. ‘The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices’, pp. 629.

⁸² Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. ‘The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices’ pp. 628.

⁸³ Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. ‘The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices’, pp. 628.

⁸⁴ Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. ‘The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices’, pp. 636.

⁸⁵ Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. ‘The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices’, pp. 644.

their narrative. Despite this, divination prevailed in many different societies in many distinct forms such as astrology, augury, I-Ching, Chicken Oracle and so on.⁸⁶ The reasons for this, according to Hong and Henrich is that: “divination is a way to (1) claim political legitimacy and power, (2) reduce anxiety, (3) circumvent indecision and resolve disputes, or express particular intuitions.”⁸⁷ Their arguments suggest that forms of divination have a particular role in society: firstly, they are a legitimate response to uncertainty under specific cultural beliefs that adapt over time and secondly, they are partially used for secular reasons. Hong and Henrich provide legitimate reasons why divination can be seen as a source of information, and that it prevails in society not only because of its verity, but mainly because of its cultural and psychological connotations.

Divination is tightly knitted within many cultures and thus has a place in them despite its faults and despite manifesting in different forms. Because of its specific ties to cultures and their specific symbolisms, it can be said that divination has epistemological and cosmological value.

2.3.2. The Case of Astrology: Divinatory Role and Cosmological Significance

Patrick Curry argues that astrology makes one of the richest case studies of systems that give divination a cosmological and epistemological dimension.⁸⁸ He describes: “astrology as the most durable, widespread and complex form of Western divination”⁸⁹ Curry explicitly speaks about the connection between astrology, divination, and worldview.⁹⁰ Nicholas Campion points out that although it manifests in different forms, generally it can be described as the interest in the night sky in some form or another that was and is present in every culture⁹¹ which suggest that it functions as part of premodern cosmological systems. Campion focuses on the link between astrology and religious behaviour.⁹² He states that: “There is no human society that does not somehow, in some way, relate its fears, concerns, hopes, and wishes to the sky, and to the organizing principle behind it, the cosmos.”⁹³ Although there are many forms of astrology around the world, the general notion is the assumption of a relationship between celestial objects and individuals and events on Earth.⁹⁴ The

⁸⁶ Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. ‘The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices’, pp. 623.

⁸⁷ Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. ‘The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices’, pp. 623.

⁸⁸ Curry, Patrick. 1999. ‘Magic vs. Enchantment’, *Journal of Contemporary Religion*, 14.3, pp. 8.

⁸⁹ Curry, Patrick. 2010. *Divination: Perspectives for a New Millennium* (Ashgate), pp. 4.

⁹⁰ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture : Pulling down the Moon* (Oxford: Berg), pp. 55.

⁹¹ Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World’s Religions* (New York: New York University Press), pp 2

⁹² Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World’s Religions* pp.2

⁹³ Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World’s Religions*, pp. 1.

⁹⁴ Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World’s Religions*, pp. 11.

core notion of astrology is that the Earth and heaven mirror each other, linking astrology to cosmological thinking of premodern societies.⁹⁵ Historically, Western astrology can be linked as far as to ancient Mesopotamia around 2000BCE where many core elements, such as zodiacal signs, planetary identities, and more originate from. After which it was affected by ancient Greek (with Egyptian influence) geometric and Kinetic models as early as 4BCE, this brought in precises uses of angles and degrees. In Greece, astrology was also influenced by various philosophical schools including Empedoclean elements, Aristotelian Cosmology, and more.⁹⁶ Later, it spread to Persia, Eastern Asia and even India where it in came into contact with local cosmologies and blended with them.⁹⁷ A similar symbiotic relationship of astrology and local cosmologies/religion of Arabic societies also stemmed from Greece, and it was only thanks to the Arabic world that the study of Astrology got formally re-introduced to medieval Europe where it was met with tensions until the fifteenth century. After ancient Greece and before the fifteenth century, astrology existed in Europe however, it was not perceived in positive light by the clergy – it was usually associated with paganism and different negative forces. The revival of magical thinking that came with the Renaissance came to face another obstacle in the form of the Protestant Reformation.⁹⁸ The peak of astrological practice, including to publication of almanacs, falls to the seventeenth century after which any form of spirituality started clashing with the rise of rationalism. Interest in astrology started to come back only in the early modern period, where it is more individualistic than ever before. This opens up new doors on how⁹⁹

Astrology is an example of cosmological divination that presents incredibly strongly as it influenced many cultures and prevailed among people for millennia. It is because of this why Patrick Curry and Willis Roy in their book *'Astrology, Science and Culture : Pulling Down the Moon'* argue that the point of astrology it the participatory and symbolic nature of its practice. That is why they state: “we see the true business of astrology as participation in the greatest dialogue of all, the grand conversation of earth and heaven.”¹⁰⁰ Astrology assumes that cosmos, in a sense, answers because it is filled with meaning in the form of trans-personal and trans-cultural collective imagination¹⁰¹ that manifests through symbols not simply a way to tell the future but a practice that connects people with the world and with each other. Furthermore, Curry and Willis point out the reason for today's disenchanted world: the Western world has completely fragmented symbolic mythical consciousness

⁹⁵ Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, pp. 13.

⁹⁶ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 49.

⁹⁷ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 49-50.

⁹⁸ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 50.

⁹⁹ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 51-52.

¹⁰⁰ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 3.

¹⁰¹ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 3.

into sterile categories, including astrology.¹⁰² They argue that natural astrology (effects of the moon, functions of comets, the mathematical system of astrology) was absorbed by natural philosophy and consequently the rest of astrology that was seen more as symbolic and dealt with subjective concerns was not taken as seriously in the disenchanted world.¹⁰³ Which is why such ancient practices can still hold legitimate meaning that is simply misunderstood because it does not fit into scientifically made categories that cannot fit rich interconnected cosmologies. Curry and Willis note that the meaning of astrology does not lie in predictive accuracy alone but mainly in the relationship between human beings and the cosmos. They state that: “An act of divination necessarily requires both an enquirer with a question (‘subject’) and a world of which that subject partakes, including the cosmos that is essential to astrology in particular (‘objects’). It entails a ‘subjective’ participation in an ‘objectively’ embodied and embedded way.”¹⁰⁴ The uniqueness of astrology lies in its ability to be simultaneously personal and cosmic, subjective and objective. Astrology thus acts as a meaningful cosmological system that situates the individual withing the universe. Moreover, astrology is still relevant today, it is still practiced to this day giving it a deep cultural dimension as it stands in opposition to fragments disenchanted reality of modernity.¹⁰⁵

2.4. Divination in the Age of Artificial Intelligence

In this chapter, I will be focusing on the correlations between astrology and artificial intelligence (AI). Firstly, I will question the presumed rationality of science and the reasons why it is perceived as objective. I will do so using the work of Simon Locke who critiques the societal perception of science and Bruno Latour who introduces the concept of hybrids which are entities that belong into two distinct groups that in modern Western rationality cannot interact thus defying them and the understanding of the modern world. Secondly, I will be positioning astrology as a complex mathematical divinatory system which are used as patten recognition and comparing to language models of artificial intelligence. This will be done using the work of Leona Nikolić and Kenneth McRitchie. Furthermore, I will talk about the ‘black box’ nature of both astrology and AI though the work of Sharday Mosurinjohn and Jordan Loewen-Colón who focus more on the perception of lay people. Lastly, I will mention the work of Abou Farman and his focus on the progression of AI as a part of cosmology that might lead to re-enchantment.

¹⁰² Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 30.

¹⁰³ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 49.

¹⁰⁴ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 111.

¹⁰⁵ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 72

2.4.1. The Misreading of Science as Rational and Secular

According to Simon Locke, the portrayal of science as universally objective rational system needs to be challenged. He argues that the public understanding of science is not uniform and especially not rational as it is shaped by the societal and cultural contexts; science itself is socially constructed and influenced by particular institutions.¹⁰⁶ The way lay people understand science is full of ambivalence, people are often sceptical towards it and do not accept it without questions.¹⁰⁷ Locke references Weber's disenchantment as not something that describes current reality but a rhetorical statement that constructs a specific (rational) worldview. Disenchantment is only an assumed framing of the modern world that favours reason over symbolic meaning and not something that has been empirically proven.¹⁰⁸ Disenchantment is therefore an ideology constructed by society that does not portray the whole spectrum of human experience.

Bruno Latour also offers a distinct portrayal of the rational modern world. In his work "We Have Never Been Modern", he suggests that the premises of modernity are a product of misunderstanding, that science, knowledge, and society can be seen as fully separated from each other when in reality they are knitted together.¹⁰⁹ He argues that the world is not purely secular nor purely enchanted, but that it is filled with hybrids; elements that make up modernity tend to have more than one defining quality. Latour criticizes the modern assumption that there are two domains that exists in the world: nature (objective and non-human) and society (subjective and human). The epistemology of modernity is determined by the separation of nature from society; Latour refers to this process as 'purification'. However, in reality humans constantly create hybrids that are a part of both categories thus defying them.¹¹⁰ Science and the rational is not separate from society and culture just like it is not separate from nature, however it is deeply affected by the norms and prejudices of human beliefs.¹¹¹ Latour's hybrids are difficult to conceptualize as they challenge the socially learned rationality and objectivity of science, they reveal that the lines between scientific facts and social constructs are blurred. Latour further points out that with scientific advancement, knowledge is being produced by material things. These non-human actors, such as technology and so on, are sometimes validated

¹⁰⁶ Locke, Simon. 2001. 'Sociology and the Public Understanding of Science: From Rationalization to Rhetoric', *The British Journal of Sociology*, 52.1: 1–18 <https://doi.org/10.1080/00071310020023000>, pp. 3.

¹⁰⁷ Locke, Simon. 2001. 'Sociology and the Public Understanding of Science: From Rationalization to Rhetoric', pp. 2.

¹⁰⁸ Locke, Simon. 2001. 'Sociology and the Public Understanding of Science: From Rationalization to Rhetoric', pp. 2.

¹⁰⁹ Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), pp.3

¹¹⁰ Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*, pp. 3

¹¹¹ Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*, pp. 3

over human actors and therefore play a role in production of scientific facts further deepening the boundary between society and what falls outside of it.¹¹²

To summarize, the concept of science is not as strictly rational as it appears because it is affected by the social constructs of society. What is assumed to be objective science is full unanswered questions, trial and errors, and hybrids.

2.4.2. Astrology and AI as Paralel Acts of Divination

When it comes to the direct divinatory usage of astrology, it is a specific symbolic system that engages with patters. In their work 'Scientific and Ethical Dimensions of Astrology' Tejaskar Pandey et al. state that "Astrology operates on the premise that the positioning of celestial bodies, such as planets and stars, at the time of one's birth influences not only the individual's psychological makeup but also their relationship to the broader cosmic order"¹¹³ In the past, the ancient practice of astrology stemmed from observation of celestial bodies, astrologers then used complex mathematical calculations to interpret the patterns of those bodies. It was not only used to predict but it became a system of connecting the individual with the universe. Astrology served as an integral part of the scientific world where it combined teachings about nature, human behaviour and even spirituality.¹¹⁴ It is important to note that the interpretation of various astrological phenomena stems from previous experience and pattern recognition. L. Vigneswaran and N. Nagadeepa state that: "To make a forecast for a person, the astrologers analyze and compare the prior horoscopes. In addition, the astrologers have employed similarity analysis and diagnosis of person's prior horoscopes to foretell various occurrences in person's life in advance about him or her"¹¹⁵ The core of astrological prediction lies in association of qualities to specific celestial positions relevant to a specific person or event on Earth that is based on the previous occurrence of the same position. Astrological prediction, in essence, is about recognizing something that happened in the past and relating it to the future.

Artificial intelligence mimics the processes though which the prediction of astrology operates. Essentially, they are both systems that analyse existing connections between data (pattern

¹¹² Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*, pp. 23.

¹¹³ Pandey, Tejaskar, D. K. Singh, and Anil Kumar Porwal. 2023. 'Scientific and Ethical Dimensions of Astrology', *International Journal of Applied Social Science*, 10.11: 788–813 <https://doi.org/10.36537/IJASS/10.11&12/788-813>, pp. 789.

¹¹⁴ Pandey, Tejaskar, D. K. Singh, and Anil Kumar Porwal. 2023. 'Scientific and Ethical Dimensions of Astrology', pp. 792.

¹¹⁵ Vigneswaran, L., and N. Nagadeepa. 2022. 'Prediction of Research Studies Status on Astrological Data Using Machine Learning (ML) Classification Techniques', *International Journal of Health Sciences*: 9696–9710 <https://doi.org/10.53730/ijhs.v6ns6.12531>, pp. 9697.

recognition) to make predictions.¹¹⁶ Leona Nikolić further states that: “both [astrology and AI] are resolutely concerned with making forecasts and producing meaning about the world through processes of pattern recognition. As a ‘new tool of prediction’ for ‘decision-making, risk assessment, and governance’”¹¹⁷ In her work, “An astrological genealogy of artificial intelligence: From ‘pseudo-sciences’ of divination to sciences of prediction” she focuses on the possibility of algorithmic predictions being similar to astrology but also considers their similarity to magic and divination and further that AI might take on a similar role of oracles in modernity.¹¹⁸ The act of prediction has always been significant to people, it gives a spiritual purpose but it also dabbles into politics as it alleviates uncertainty. Thus, Nikolić further states that: “Much like the divine celestial bodies that humans may call upon for matters of the future, artificial intelligence may more aptly be framed as a mode of ‘artificial divination’”¹¹⁹ People seek answers to their questions, the only thing that has changed is it medium that is being used to acquire the answers. The similarity between astrology and AI goes even further, Kenneth McRitchie explicitly refers to astrology as language model.¹²⁰ Despite there being certain dissimilarities with classical language models, they are similar enough to influence and learn from each other.¹²¹ McRitchie claims that the major differences between the two models is the implication of a lifestyle context and cultural understanding.¹²²

While Nikolić and McRitchie focused on theoretical connection between astrology, divination and AI, Sharday Mosurinjohn and Jordan Loewen-Colón switch how the similarity of these systems is affected and perceived by people. They introduce the idea of ‘esoteric algorithms’ which refers to a blend of divinatory practices that have the ability to be used through AI because they share algorithmic values.¹²³ While there is a cultural bias against the accuracy and verity of divination, the scientific language models such GPTs are not without faults either, they are only deemed more palatable

¹¹⁶ Nikolić, Leona. 2023. ‘ECS-Ecrea Early Career Scholar Prize Winner - an Astrological Genealogy of Artificial Intelligence: From “Pseudo-Sciences” of Divination to Sciences of Prediction’, *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 26.2: 131–46 <https://doi.org/10.1177/13675494231164874>, pp. 133.

¹¹⁷ Nikolić, Leona. 2023. ‘ECS-Ecrea Early Career Scholar Prize Winner - an Astrological Genealogy of Artificial Intelligence: From “Pseudo-Sciences” of Divination to Sciences of Prediction’, 133.

¹¹⁸ Nikolić, Leona. 2023. ‘ECS-Ecrea Early Career Scholar Prize Winner - an Astrological Genealogy of Artificial Intelligence: From “Pseudo-Sciences” of Divination to Sciences of Prediction’, 133.

¹¹⁹ Nikolić, Leona. 2023. ‘ECS-Ecrea Early Career Scholar Prize Winner - an Astrological Genealogy of Artificial Intelligence: From “Pseudo-Sciences” of Divination to Sciences of Prediction’, 133.

¹²⁰ McRitchie, Kenneth. 2024. ‘The Marriage of Astrology and AI: A Model of Alignment with Human Values and Intentions’, *Correlation*, 36(1) <https://philpapers.org/rec/MCRTMO>, pp. 43.

¹²¹ McRitchie, Kenneth. 2024. ‘The Marriage of Astrology and AI: A Model of Alignment with Human Values and Intentions’, pp. 45.

¹²² McRitchie, Kenneth. 2024. ‘The Marriage of Astrology and AI: A Model of Alignment with Human Values and Intentions’, pp. 47.

¹²³ Loewen-Colón, Jordan, and Sharday Mosurinjohn. 2023. ‘The Age of (the Algorithmic) Aquarius: How AI Meets Our Esoteric Needs’, *American Religion*, 5.1 (Indiana University Press): 137–47 <https://doi.org/10.2979/amerreli.5.1.10>, pp. 138.

because of their rational background¹²⁴ To most people, astrology and AI operate as ‘black box’ systems, meaning their complex nature is hidden away.¹²⁵ The machinations behind these systems are opaque; they are not easily seen and understood by lay people which leave room for interpretive projective which is influenced by cultural background.¹²⁶ Lay people simply do not understand the mechanisms behind AI and astrology which lead them to symbolic interaction with language models that can resemble divination. Mosurinjohn and Loewen-Colón state that: “in the esoteric realm of algorithms, prediction is less about forecasting actual events and more about facilitating anticipatory reflection on how we might experience and interpret forthcoming occurrences.”¹²⁷ This frames AI not as a technology of certainty, but as symbolical and ritualized process that is designed to make sense of uncertainty, similar to divination.

The work of Mosurinjohn and Loewen-Colón is mainly focused on symbolic and cultural experience of AI because of its ability to deal with uncertainty, in order to look at this issue though a wider lens the work of Abou Farman, specifically ‘Re-Enchantment Cosmologies: Mastery and Obsolescence in an Intelligent Universe’ is ought to be mentioned. He primarily focuses on the “scientific and secular tension between and freedom, disenchantment and re-enchantment.”¹²⁸ Especially in relation to The Singularity: “a loosely organized social movement of futurists planning for the advent of superintelligence.”¹²⁹ Farman argues that the rise of AI, mainly in connection to The Singularity, is a form of a new belief system: “The Singularitarian vision responds to and arises through science’s own aporias. By deploying the concepts of information and intelligence in particular ways, it proposes a science-based cosmology – addressing questions about destiny and purpose which science and secularism, in their disenchanting mode, have been unable, and unwilling, to answer.”¹³⁰ Farman argues that rising interest in technology is forming a new cosmological framework, one that brings back meaning and direction to our world that science and rationalisms decided to be without. Science gave us answers to questions that explain how things happen, such as regarding the origin of the universe, but it never answered the reason why that that would explain the meaning of life.¹³¹ This lack of answers to questions about meaning of life suggests to people with The Singularitarian

¹²⁴ Loewen-Colón, Jordan, and Sharday Mosurinjohn. 2023. ‘The Age of (the Algorithmic) Aquarius, pp. 140.

¹²⁵ Loewen-Colón, Jordan, and Sharday Mosurinjohn. 2023. ‘The Age of (the Algorithmic) Aquarius, pp. 142.

¹²⁶ Loewen-Colón, Jordan, and Sharday Mosurinjohn. 2023. ‘The Age of (the Algorithmic) Aquarius, pp. 144.

¹²⁷ Loewen-Colón, Jordan, and Sharday Mosurinjohn. 2023. ‘The Age of (the Algorithmic) Aquarius, pp. 146.

¹²⁸ Farman, Abou. 2012. ‘ReEnchantment Cosmologies: Mastery and Obsolescence in an Intelligent Universe’, *Anthropological Quarterly*, 85.4 (The George Washington University Institute for Ethnographic Research): 1069–88 <https://doi.org/10.2307/41857290>, pp. 1071.

¹²⁹ Farman, Abou. 2012. ‘ReEnchantment Cosmologies: Mastery and Obsolescence in an Intelligent Universe’, pp. 1070.

¹³⁰ Farman, Abou. 2012. ‘ReEnchantment Cosmologies: Mastery and Obsolescence in an Intelligent Universe’, pp. 1084-85.

¹³¹ Farman, Abou. 2012. ‘ReEnchantment Cosmologies: Mastery and Obsolescence in an Intelligent Universe’, pp. 1078-79.

vision that point humanity is at now is incomplete and there is a defining evolution to be had which a superintelligent AI.¹³² Because The Singularitarian view is a science based cosmology addresses these questions, in Farman's eyes it serves as the re-enchantment of the world: "It's not just that Singularitarians are re-enchanting their own little corner of the universe, but that a particular possibility for re-enchantment seems to be carrying echoes through a larger segment of society."¹³³ This scientific re-enchantment of the world is plausible because we cannot simply revive what was lost, the whole worldview has inextricably changed and can only be "transgressed and reshaped through the limits and principles of science itself."¹³⁴ Thus, according to Farman, the advancement in AI technologies that have the potential to surpass human intelligence will lead the world to re-enchantment.

To conclude, I have researched sufficient scholarships in order to analyse data about the usage of AI and its relation to divination, especially astrology, among people who interact with various AI language models and to specifically consider these two systems as parts of cosmologies of modernity. I have presented a systematic literature review that provides existing scholarships on the concept of disenchantment which is counterargued by studies that do find enchantment in modernity. Following this, the literature review continues to study the topic of divination which is followed by astrology specifically both from a theoretical and historical perspective. Lastly, it blends into scholarships that examine the social connotations of science and the similarities of AI and astrology.

¹³² Farman, Abou. 2012. 'ReEnchantment Cosmologies: Mastery and Obsolescence in an Intelligent Universe', pp. 1082-83.

¹³³ Farman, Abou. 2012. 'ReEnchantment Cosmologies: Mastery and Obsolescence in an Intelligent Universe', pp. 1084.

¹³⁴ Farman, Abou. 2012. 'ReEnchantment Cosmologies: Mastery and Obsolescence in an Intelligent Universe', pp. 1085.

3. Methodology

This thesis is going to use a quantitative questionnaire to gather relevant information because it allows me to reach a larger and more diverse online audience which is especially important since both AI and astrology are global phenomena. Furthermore, because I am mostly focused on the comparison of two subjects, it is essential to use standardized questions. Quantitative approach also allows me to bring out the patterns of both astrology and AI are perceived. Because this thesis deals with incredibly personal topic, an anonymous questionnaire is perfect for collecting the least biased data possible as the respondents have little to no bias.

In order to gather relevant data on the similarity of AI and astrology and the place of AI in the cosmology of modernity, I will be conducting a quantitative questionnaire. I will be assessing the specific views of people that are familiar with both AI and astrology and if/how these systems affect their decision making and if they provide existential reassurance. For this reason, I am targeting people that have some basic knowledge of both of these systems and who are over the eighteen years of age. Because of my focus on predominantly Western astrology, I am hoping the participants will be either from or currently live in the Western world. Because the questionnaire touches on intimate topics such as the personal belief in astrology, understanding of the world, and possible fears connected to technology, the questionnaire will be anonymous and the consent about data collection will be obtained through the introductory statement. Thus, anonymity of the participants is regarded very seriously. The responses will be stored on my personal cloud under two-factor authenticator and will be deleted after two years from submission of my thesis. The collection of the data might be limited by a bias for digitally active individuals, and the reports might be limited by individual's subjective interpretation of the questions.

The questionnaire will be divided into five sections, and the questions will be formatted as either multiple choice, selection of applicable, Likert scale, or short answers. The first section is an informative statement about anonymity and data collections. The participants will not be able to continue the questionnaire without reading and agreeing to this section. Section two will gather demographic information, namely age, gender, education level, ethnicity, and religious beliefs which directly relates to engagement with AI and astrology is shaped by a person's cultural, educational and generational beliefs and factors, which is connected to the research of Joseph Henrich and Ze Hong, and Jørgen Sørensen. Participants will also be asked to state their religious beliefs to establish how traditional religions intersect with alternative worldviews which can be linked to the world of Charles Taylor. Section three will assess the level of engagement with astrology, questioning how often they use it, how much they understand it, what do they use it for, or if it is a reliable source of information

as this reflect Patrick Curry's and Nicholas Campion's notion of astrology as not merely predictive art but a cosmological, participatory, and symbolic divination. Furthermore, it will draw on Sørensen's epistemological understanding of divination. Asking these types of questions regarding astrology provides insight into their contemporary perception as a meaning making system. In the following section the same questions will be asked regarding AI to allow for a direct comparison. The relation between these two subjects is drawn from the works of Leona Nikolić, and Sharday Monsurinjohn and Jordan Loewen-Colón who focus on specific similarities between AI and divination, questioning whether AI can take on similar role or that its similarity lies in its "black box" nature. Furthermore, this section will draw on Simon Locke and Bruno Latour to consider the idealised perceptions of technology. The last section will focus on comparison of astrology and AI to assess which of the two they find more meaningful, trustworthy, or which one they are more likely to turn to when facing a decision. These questions are important because they allow the participants to express how AI and astrology fits into their cosmological understanding. It is significant to the works of Curry, especially his claim about the cosmological nature of astrology, as well as the works of Taylor and Saler that seek out the intersection of enchanted and disenchanted world.

After sufficient number of participants is collected, the analysis of the data will begin. To put the numbers in perspective, the data will be converted into graphs in Microsoft Excel. Each graph is then going to be described in detail, including the number of responses for each answer with the percentages following that statement in the brackets. I believe that this detailed overview of the findings is going to provide a solid foundation for the interpretation of the data that has been gathered. After assessing the answers, I will begin identifying common themes and divide the questions into thematic categories. After the division of the data, I will begin interpreting their connections to the existing scholarships introduced in the literature review. Each category is going to be carefully considered and crafted in order to provide data that aim to answer the core thesis question.

4. Findings

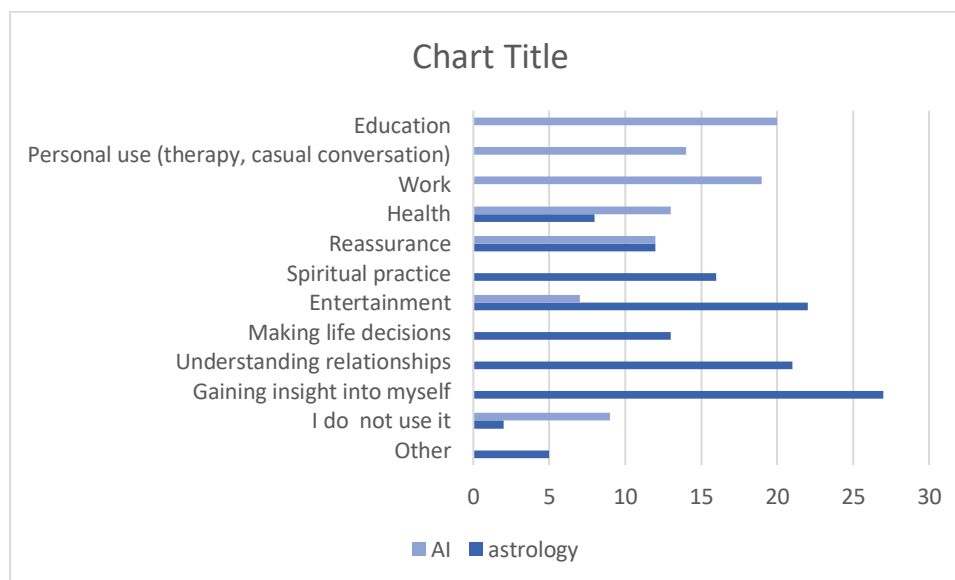
I have collected exactly 40 responses. 11 respondents (27.5%) are aged 25 to 29, 10 (25%) are 40 to 49, 7 (17.5%) are 18 to 24, 5 (12.5%) are 50 to 65, 3 (7.5%) are 30 to 34, 3 (7.5%) are 35 to 39 and 1 (2.5%) respondent is over the age of 65. Of these respondents 26 (65%) identified as female while the remaining 14 (35%) identified as male. Based on the age and gender distribution the findings present a good representative sample.

24 (60%) of the respondents are white Eastern Europeans, 6 (15%) are white Western European, 5 (12.5%) identified as White other, 2 (5%) are White American, 1 person (2.5%) is Southwest Asian Arab, 1 (2.5%) person is Mediterranean and 1 (2.5%) is biracial or multiracial. This suggests a more restricted representation; however, the thesis is predominantly concerned with Western astrology. Therefore, the sample of the findings based on ethnicity is sufficient.

Majority of the respondents 23 (57.5%) are not religious, 10 (25%) aligned with some form of alternative spirituality, and the last 7 (17.5%) believe in specific branches of Abrahamic religions.

The pivotal findings from the questionnaire come from the questions which are mirrored in the topic of astrology and AI. Namely they are:

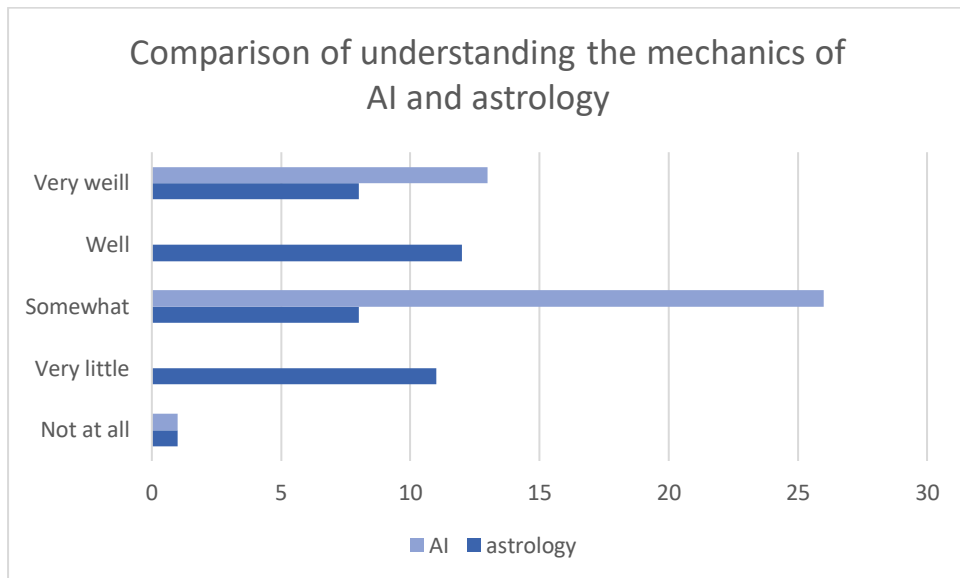
1. What do you usually use astrology for? / What do you usually use AI for?



When it comes to astrology, 8 (20%) usually use astrology for health related reasons, 12 (30%) for reassurance, 16 (40%) as a spiritual practice, 22 (55%) for entertainment, 13 (32.5%) for making life decisions, 21 (52.5%) to understand relationships, 27 (67.6%) to gain insight into themselves. 2 (5%) people do not use it and 5 (7.5%) people for something else.

At the same time, when it comes to AI 20 (50%) people usually use it for education, 14 (35%) use it for personal use such as therapy or casual conversation, 19 people use it as a work assistant (47.5%), 13 (32.5%) for health, 12 (30%) for reassurance, 7 (17.5%) for entertainment and 9 (22.5%) do not use it.

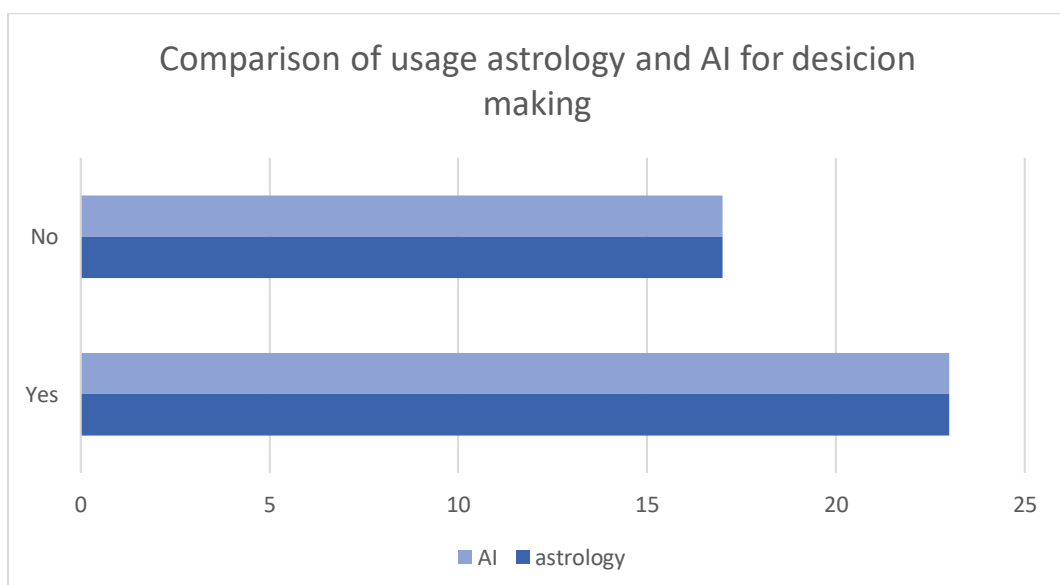
2. To what extent do you understand astrology? / Do you know how AI technologies work?



8 (20%) people stated they understand astrology very well, 12 (30%) well, 8 (20%) somewhat, 11 (27.5%) very little and 1 (2.5%) not at all.

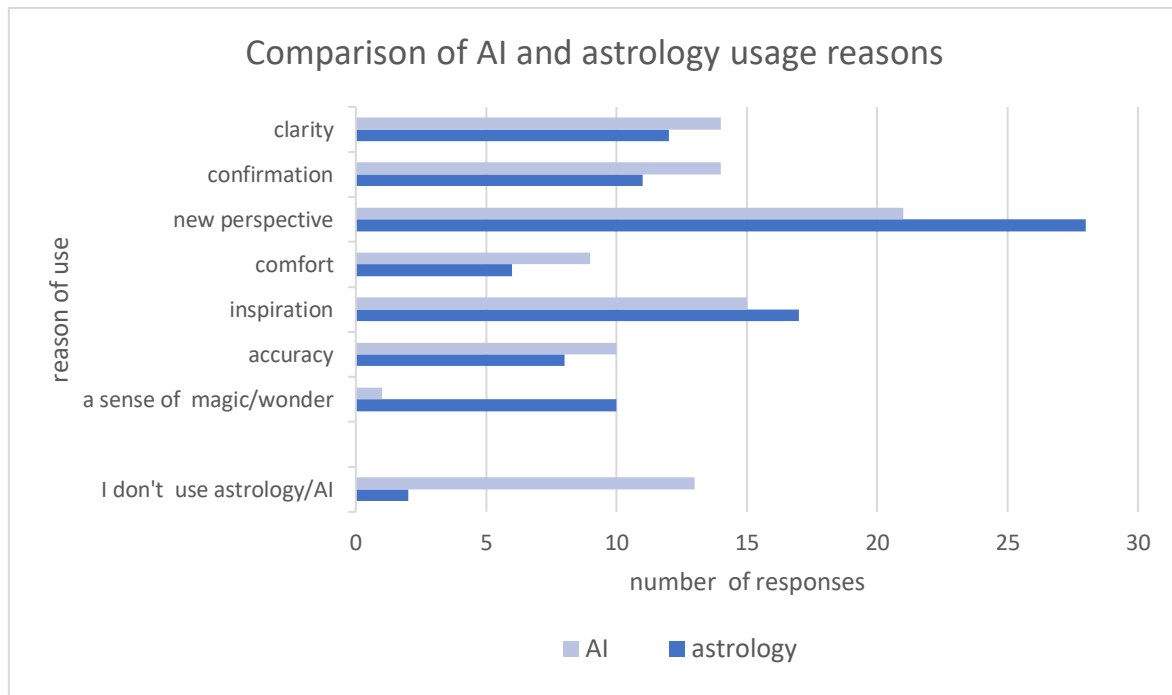
13 (32.5%) understand AI very well, 26 (65%) somewhat understand it, and 1 (2.5%) does not understand it at all.

3. Has astrology ever helped you make a decision? / Has AI technology ever helped you make a decision?



Out of 40 participants 23 (57.5%) have used both astrology and AI to make a decision and 17 (42.5%) have not.

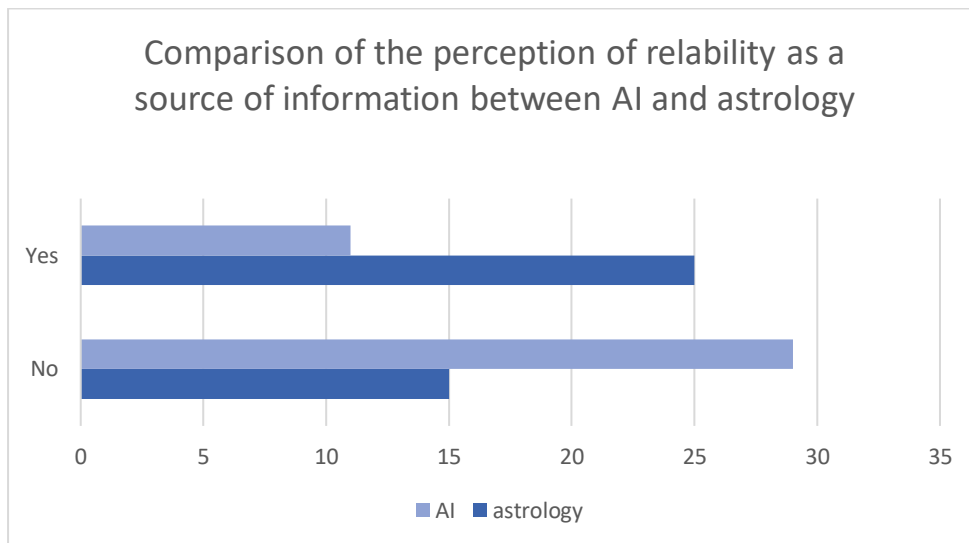
4. What are you looking for when you receive an astrological prediction/reading?
/ What are you looking for when you use AI?



When it comes for the reason behind the usage of astrology, 14 (35%) use it to gain clarity, 11 (27.5%) for confirmation, 28 (70%) for new perspectives, 6 (15%) for comfort, 17 (42.5%) for inspiration, 8 (20%) for accuracy, 10 (25%) to feel a sense of magic and wonder and 2 (5%) do not use it.

14 (35%) people use AI to gain clarity, 14 (35%) for confirmation, 21 (52.5%) to see a new perspective, 9 (22.5%) for comfort, 15 (37.5%) for inspiration, 10 (25%) for accuracy, 1 (2.5%) to feel the sense of magic and wonder, 13 (32.5%) do not use it.

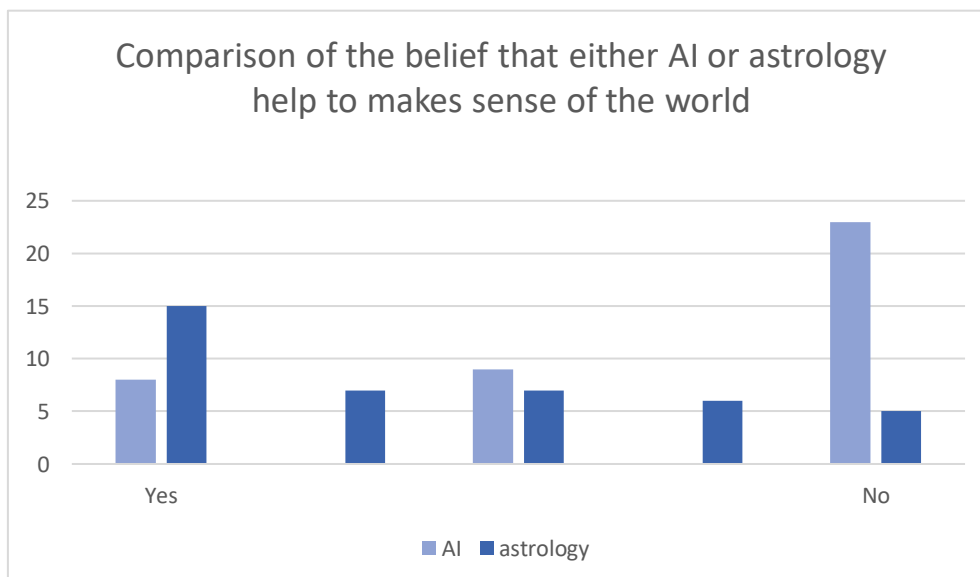
5. Is astrology a reliable source of information? / Do you consider AI a reliable source of information?



25 (62.5%) people believe astrology is a reliable source of information and 15 (37.5%) do not.

11 (27.5%) people believe AI is a reliable source of information and 29 (72.5%) do not.

6. Do you believe that astrology helps you make sense of the world? / Do you believe that AI helps you make sense of the world?

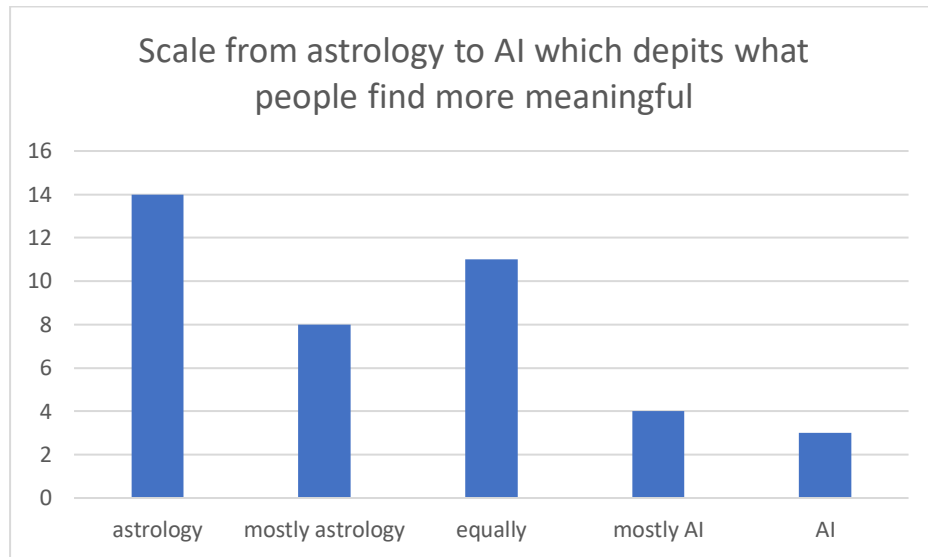


15 (37.5%) of respondents believe that astrology does help them make sense of the world, 7 (17.5%) believe it does but not completely, 7 (17.5%) are unsure, 6 (15%) believe it probably does not, and 5 (12.5%) believe it does not.

8 (20%) respondents believe that AI does help them make sense of the world, 9 (22.5%) are unsure, and 23 (57.5%) believe that it does not.

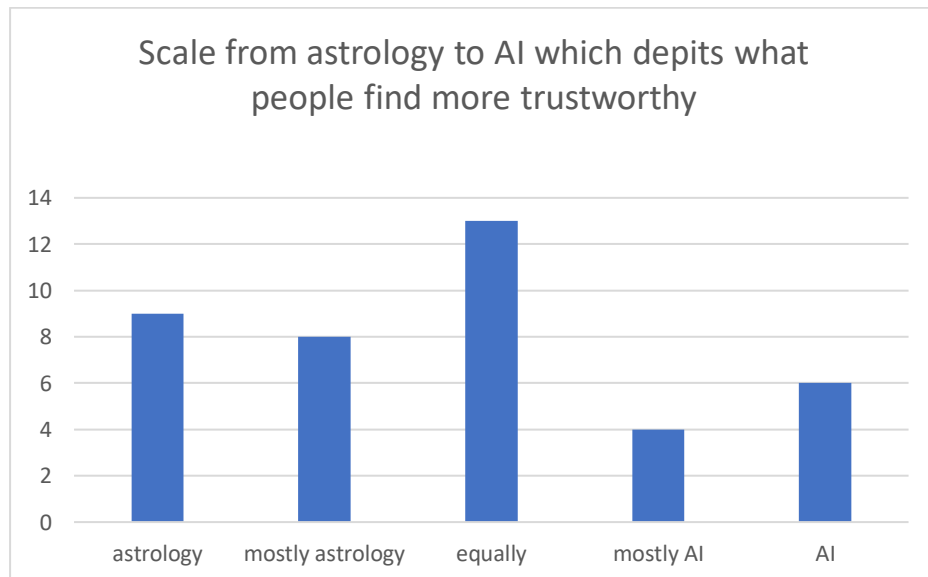
Furthermore, the respondents were directly asked which of the two they find:

1. more meaningful



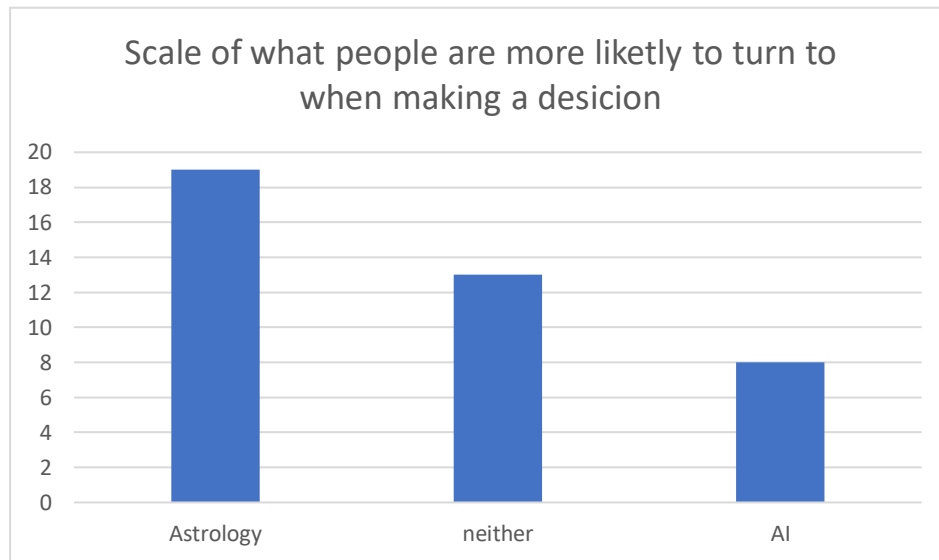
14 (35%) people believe astrology is more meaningful than AI, 8 (20%) that astrology is probably more meaningful, 11 (27%) believe they are equally meaningful, 4 (10%) that AI is probably more meaningful and 3 (7.5%) that AI is more meaningful than astrology.

2. more trustworthy



9 (22.5%) people believe astrology is more trustworthy than AI, 8 (20%) that astrology is probably more trustworthy, 13 (32.5%) believe they are equally trustworthy, 4 (10%) that AI is probably more trustworthy and 6 (15%) that AI is more trustworthy than astrology.

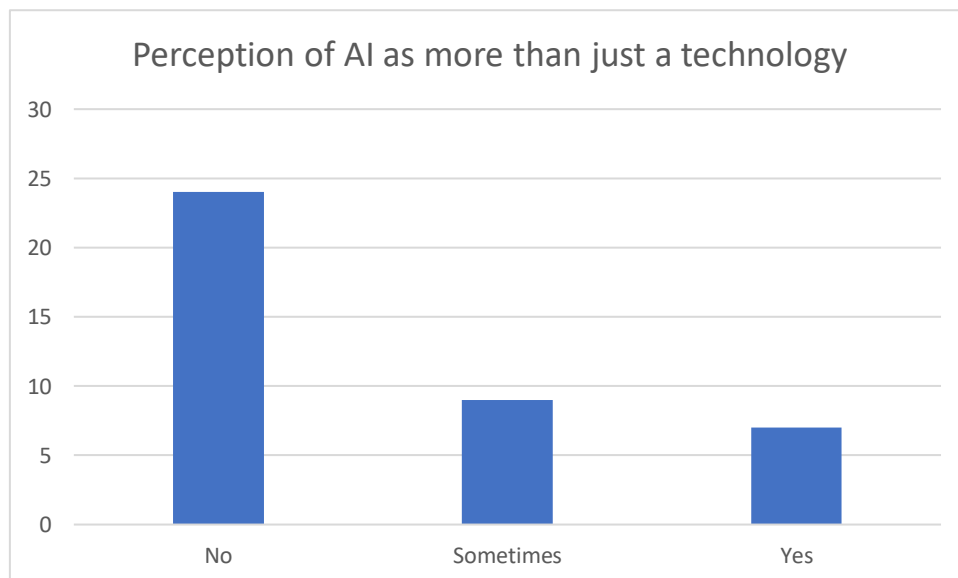
3. Which they are more likely to turn to when facing a decision



When facing a decision, 19 (47.5%) are more likely to turn to astrology, 13 (32.5%) to neither and 8 (20%) to AI.

Lastly, there is one singular question the respondent were asked:

1. Do you perceive AI as more than just a technology?



24 (60%) respondents stated that they do not perceive AI as more than just a technology, 9 (22.5%) stated that sometimes they do, and 7 (17.5%) stated that they do.

5. Discussion

This chapter covers the theoretical analysis of the findings. Firstly, it reminds the reader about the theoretical frameworks that are used in this research. Secondly it will thematically analyse the findings and how they relate to the usage and perception of astrology and AI. The themes for the analysis include prediction and guidance, authority and trust, and cosmology and worldview. Lastly, the limitations of this thesis and suggestions for further research will be mentioned.

5.1. Frameworks for Analysis: Divination, Enchantment and Rationlity

The theory of disenchantment as presented by Max Weber assumes that rational progress of the world pushes out divinatory and magical worldviews.¹³⁵ In his eyes, modernity is defined by the expansion of rationalization and calculation while, at the same time, it eliminates magic and mystery. Disenchantment represents the shift of the perception of reality, not simple disappearance of magic. The world stops being understood as a living or magical system and becomes a space governed by impersonal laws. Divination does not disappear, rather it loses its legitimacy, it is not regarded as a proper way to perceive the world. Simon Locke builds on this, he focuses the lay people's perception of science and that it is unjustly understood as completely rational, when it is full of ambivalence and trial-and-errors.¹³⁶ This is because the concept of science is socially constructed, and the same societal construction influence the view on astrology and other divinities. It justifies the authority of rational science over magical worldviews. Despite this, these practices have not disappeared, they still function in society to a certain extent.

To disagree with the disenchantment theory, there are two academics who present a symbiotic relationship of forms of enchantment and rationalism in modernity. Charles Taylor believes that humans have the freedom to choose to believe in religion, forms of the supernatural, or divination; rationality does not exclude enchantment from everyday life, but humans need to make the conscious choice to participate in it.¹³⁷ Similarly, Michael Saler also believes that enchantment is possible in modernity. For him, it takes different forms such as fantastical books.¹³⁸

Patrick Curry argues that enchantment exists in the modern world but believes that it is something fundamentally incompatible with rationalism.¹³⁹ He describes that enchantment is a specific feeling of

¹³⁵ Weber, Max. 2004. The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation', pp. 16.

¹³⁶ Locke, Simon. 2001. 'Sociology and the Public Understanding of Science: From Rationalization to Rhetoric', pp. 3.

¹³⁷ Taylor, Charles. 2007. A Secular Age, pp. 541.

¹³⁸ Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If : Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, pp. 12.

¹³⁹ Curry, Patrick. 2019. *ENCHANTMENT : Wonder in Modern Life*, pp. 9.

awe that anyone can feel from anything, as long as it is the right feeling. Astrology is one of the strongest forms of enchantment in Western society, Patrick Curry and Roy Willis describe it as a participatory practice; its essence lies in the relationship of humans and the cosmos: “The grand conversation of earth and heaven”¹⁴⁰. He argues that the practice of astrology is not simply a way to foresee the future but that its core role is meaning-making, that astrology helps people make sense of the world and their place in it. The importance of divination in everyday life is then further outlined by Jørgen Sørensen who frames it as a cultural technology that is designed to eliminate uncertainty.¹⁴¹ For him, divination is a set of culture specific symbols that are systematically generated. Ze Hong and Henrich add that what makes divination persist in modernity is its perception by the users; they do not expect complete certainty but are looking for reassurance.¹⁴² Lastly, Leona Nikolić draws explicit parallels between divination and AI. Her main argument is that the mechanics behind both of these systems are usually not completely understood by its users, while they offer usable outputs. Because of this AI has the potential to be perceived as a contemporary counterpart to divination.¹⁴³ Similarly, Sharday Mosurinjohn and Jordan Loewen-Colón see the similarities of these two systems in their unknowingly complex inner mechanisms.¹⁴⁴

To summarize, Weber points out the authority of rationalism of modernity over the enchanted ideologies of the past.¹⁴⁵ Numerous thinkers such as Taylor and Saler speak on why enchantment in specific forms still exists and matters in modernity and that it is compatible with it. Curry sets out the definition of divination and astrology as incompatible with rationalism but still prevailing. Sørensen, and Hong and Henrich reinforce this further by describing divination as a cultural symbolic practice that provides reassurance in uncertainty. Nikolić brings in similarities of divination and AI. This raises the central question for this study: Does AI, since it is a technology hence it appears to be rational and more palatable to people in modernity, occupy a role in the cosmology of modernity similar to that of astrology?’ In the following subchapter I will analyze the responses to the questionnaire in the light of this framework.

¹⁴⁰ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 3.

¹⁴¹ Podemann Sørensen, Jørgen . 2021. ‘The Rhetoric of Divination: A Comparative Approach’, pp. 68.

¹⁴² Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. ‘The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices’ pp. 628.

¹⁴³ Nikolić, Leona. 2023. ‘ECS-Ecrea Early Career Scholar Prize Winner - an Astrological Genealogy of Artificial Intelligence: From “Pseudo-Sciences” of Divination to Sciences of Prediction, 133.

¹⁴⁴ Loewen-Colón, Jordan, and Sharday Mosurinjohn. 2023. ‘The Age of (the Algorithmic) Aquarius’, pp. 142.

¹⁴⁵ Weber, Max. 2004. *The Vocation Lectures* : “Science as a Vocation, ‘Politics as a Vocation’, pp. 16.

5.2. Thematic Analysis of Responses

5.2.1. Prediction and Guidance

This section shows how respondents understand astrology and AI as tools for insight. This directly ties to the parallel questions common reasons for usage of astrology and AI and whether these systems have ever helped the participants to make a decision.

The questionnaire responses to the question of usage of astrology and AI revealed that a similar number of participants use both of these systems for the same reasons. Most commonly, the participants use both astrology and AI to gain a new perspective on matters that they are dealing with. This was followed by inspiration, clarity and confirmation. Some of the participants also use both off these systems for accuracy and comfort. The reason for usage that has a significant difference was the sense of magic and wonder where astrology was more common than AI. Another difference was that the number of people who do not use AI was significantly higher than number of people that do not use astrology.

The responses regarding the question whether the participants have ever turned to astrology or AI have identical answers. Exactly the same number of people have turned to astrology and AI when making a decision, the number of people who have turned to them is also higher than the people who have not turned to any of these systems.

This clearly shows that both astrology and AI are used for orientation, not only prediction. They offer guidance when situations of uncertainty appear, which directly connects to the research of Jørgen Sørensen. Furthermore, the interpretation of the responses aligns with Patrick Curry and Roy Willis' statement that astrology is not merely used for predictions but that it is a meaning-making system.¹⁴⁶ The respondents have shown that they use astrology for more than foreseeing the future. And because AI is used in similar manner, as a decision aid, it suggests it more than just a technical tool. The fact that it is exactly the same number of people who use both of these systems when facing a decision directly support Leona Nikolić's claim about their apparent similarity. The difference being the higher usage of astrology for the feeling the sense of magic and wonder reinforces Charles Taylor's argument that people consciously turn to enchanted experiences.¹⁴⁷ Both of these systems fill a similar cultural function, they provide guidance in the face of uncertainty, with the only difference being the framing: astrology is wondrous, AI is technological.

¹⁴⁶ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. *Astrology, Science and Culture*, pp. 3.

¹⁴⁷ Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*, pp. 541.

5.2.2. Authority and Trust

This section explores whether participants think astrology and AI is reliable. This directly ties to the parallel question of to which level do the participants understand astrology and AI, if they find them trustworthy and which of them, they find more trustworthy.

A significant number of respondents know astrology very well and consider themselves professional astrologers. The probable cause for this spike is the fact that the questionnaire circulated in astrological online groups, this also explains why astrology received higher level of trust compared to AI. More respondent were like to find astrology reliable than not whereas for AI it was inverted, more respondents were sceptical of its reliability. However, the highest number of respondents showed ambivalence, positioning themselves in the middle of the trust scale.

When looking at understanding of astrology, responses were relatively evenly distributed (from very little to professional knowledge), while responses regarding AI clustered around the middle (that they somewhat understand it). This suggests general understanding of AI but also a recognition of its opacity and technical complexity. Which reflects in the works of Sharday Mosurinjohn and Jordan Loewen-Colón who see the similarities between divination and AI through their 'black box' nature; the inapparent complexity behind these two systems.¹⁴⁸

The tension between trust and understanding reflects broader theoretical debates. When Weber's idea of disenchantment¹⁴⁹ is taken into account, astrology loses legitimacy in modern rational world because it cannot be proven scientifically. At the same time, Curry and Willis argue that astrology's true value lies in its provision of meaning that is generated through its participatory role.¹⁵⁰ For this reason, respondents that have deep involvement with astrology, be it at a professional level or a newly sparked interest that feels deeply to them, continue to trust it. This is also reflected by Hong and Henrich as they state that divinatory predictions do not have to be correct every time in order to be sought out, they continue to exist because of what they evoke.¹⁵¹

AI, in contrast, is defined by scientific principles and technology. However, as Simon Locke points out the authority of science is socially constructed and often overestimated by lay people.¹⁵² Many respondents expressed partial understanding of AI which suggests both awareness and uncertainty.

¹⁴⁸ Loewen-Colón, Jordan, and Sharday Mosurinjohn. 2023. 'The Age of (the Algorithmic) Aquarius, pp. 142.

¹⁴⁹ Weber, Max. 2004. The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation', pp. 16.

¹⁵⁰ Willis, Roy, and Patrick Curry. 2004. Astrology, Science and Culture, pp. 3.

¹⁵¹ Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. 'The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices' pp. 628.

¹⁵² Locke : Locke, Simon. 2001. 'Sociology and the Public Understanding of Science: From Rationalization to Rhetoric', pp. 3.

This ties to Leona Nikolić's arguments that both astrology and AI operate in a way that might not be fully clear to people who are not overly invested.¹⁵³

The direct comparison question about trust showed a split with slightly more respondents leaning toward astrology being trusted more. This might be a result of the fact that higher number of people do not engage with AI at all. However, it might also point in the direction that technology and science are not the sole authority of modernity. Both are trusted because they provide meaningful guidance and not because they are completely understood by everyone.

5.2.3. Cosmology and Worldview

This section focuses on the participant's perception of astrology and AI as cosmological. Cosmology is not defined as simple belief but instead as a worldview. It situates astrology and AI not as tools used for meaning-making but as potential cosmological systems, a whole framework allows people to situate themselves in the universe. The analysis relates to the parallel question whether astrology and AI are people helping to make sense of the world, direct question about belief whether AI is more than just a technology, and a comparison question about the meaningfulness of the two.

Responses indicate that majority of participants see astrology as a means to make sense of the world, though a small group has a neutral stance or has rejected this claim. This finding reinforces Curry and Willis' view of astrology as a participatory practice that situates individuals within a cosmological dialogue. Nicholas Campion has shown that astrology functioned historically as a cosmology, it moulded worldviews across cultures, and data suggests that it continues to do so.¹⁵⁴ Respondents affirm astrology as meaningful, further supporting the claim of Charles Taylor and Michael Saler, that enchantment persists in modernity.¹⁵⁵

In contrast, an overwhelming majority has rejected AI in the same role, they reported at AI does not help them make sense of the world, although a significant minority stated that sometimes it does and another that it definitely does. This pattern suggests that participants have started to consider AI in cosmological terms. Leona Nikolić argues that the similarity between astrology and AI lies in the perception of the final message by the receiver and not how it was generated.¹⁵⁶ Bruno Latour reminds us that the world is full of hybrids that tap into many meanings. Thus, even rational

¹⁵³ Nikolić, Leona. 2023. 'ECS-Ecrea Early Career Scholar Prize Winner - an Astrological Genealogy of Artificial Intelligence: From "Pseudo-Sciences" of Divination to Sciences of Prediction, 133.

¹⁵⁴ Campion, Nicholas. 2012. *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions*, pp. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*, pp. 541. And Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If : Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, pp. 12.

¹⁵⁶ Nikolić, Leona. 2023. 'ECS-Ecrea Early Career Scholar Prize Winner - an Astrological Genealogy of Artificial Intelligence: From "Pseudo-Sciences" of Divination to Sciences of Prediction, 133.

technologies have the potential to carry cosmological weight.¹⁵⁷ Considering the ambivalence of responses to the question of making a sense of the world, AI is definitely starting to blur the lines between what is being considered a rational technology and enchanted cosmology.

The number of neutral stances among the answers is particularly revealing. Rather than indecision, these responses suggest a deeper ongoing negotiation between modern rational cosmology and new forms of enchantment. It does not lead to inconclusive results but functions as a cultural marker. As Max Weber argues, rationalism strips away the magical meaning behind the cosmos¹⁵⁸, and Simon Locke shows that even if uncertain, science takes on a dominant role.¹⁵⁹ AI allows to be treated as a technology on the surface, yet Charles Taylor and Michael Saler remind us that people can take on to believe in different and new forms of enchantment.¹⁶⁰ The data suggests that some participants are experimenting this very idea.

Astrology remains as a strong cosmological framework, still being used by people to orient themselves in the universe. AI is not yet seen this way by the majority of the participants but the ambivalence in responses suggests a potential to become a part of modern cosmology. In modernity, rational worldviews exist alongside enchanted ones, AI might have the potential to blur the boundaries.

5.3. Implications for Modern Cosmology

The central question of this thesis focused on whether AI can become a part of the cosmology of rational modernity because of its resemblance to divinatory systems, particularly astrology. According to the findings, astrology still holds an important role when it comes to cosmology as it brings out a sense of magic and wonder and is considered meaningful in a seemingly disenchanted rational world. Despite this, astrology and AI have been used for similar means; the scope of the answers regarding the reasons for usage of AI and astrology showed nearly identical answers. Relative to Leona Nikolić research about the similarities of these systems.¹⁶¹ This further suggests that even if AI is not yet fully considered to be at the same level as astrology when it comes to making sense of the world but because of the number of ambivalent and positive answers it might be considered as such in the future. The strength of AI comes from its hybrid-like nature, it is a technology, but it is up to the user

¹⁵⁷ Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*, pp. 23.

¹⁵⁸ Weber, Max. 2004. The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation', pp. 16.

¹⁵⁹ Locke, Simon. 2001. 'Sociology and the Public Understanding of Science: From Rationalization to Rhetoric', pp. 3.

¹⁶⁰ Taylor, Charles. 2007. *A Secular Age*, pp. 541. And Saler, Michael. 2012. *As If : Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*, pp. 12.

¹⁶¹ Nikolić, Leona. 2023. 'ECS-Ecrea Early Career Scholar Prize Winner - an Astrological Genealogy of Artificial Intelligence: From "Pseudo-Sciences" of Divination to Sciences of Prediction, 133.

what it is used for. Following Bruno Latour's perception that the world is full of hybrids¹⁶² that blur the lines between previously established categories.

In modernity, astrology remains a cosmological framework, not only a predictive practice. Nicholas Campion shows its historical role in structuring meaning across cultures. The respondents have further affirmed this by stating that they mostly do find meaning in practicing astrology and that it helps them make sense of the world aligning with the research of Patrick Curry and Roy Willis. The way enchanted worldviews appear in modernity strengthens the claims of Charles Taylor and Michael Saler, that while enchantment might not look the same way as it did in the past, people still have the choice to participate in it. This suggests that modern cosmology is not purely rational but that it accommodates symbolic worldview even if they are seemingly incompatible. Despite enchantment and rationalism being polar opposites, they coexists in one reality where its agents are, to a certain extent, influenced by all of its parts.

The case of AI is the opposite to astrology; it is assumed to be rational and technological with no relation to cosmology at all. Max Weber's disenchantment thesis¹⁶³ reminds us exactly of this, while Simon Locke adds that scientific authority is socially constructed which makes AI appear as more legitimate. Leona Nikolić suggested that AI has the potential to act as a contemporary divination as the process of their function is similar.¹⁶⁴ Majority of the respondents rejected AI as cosmological, but some do treat it as more than a technology. This further connects to Bruno Latour's study of hybrids in modernity. While not everyone sees AI in this particular light, there are people that do which suggests that it is on the way to blur the lines between enchantment and rational technology.

Jørgen Sørensen view that divination captures divination as a cultural phenomenon that manages uncertainty. It has been mentioned by Hong and Henrich that what people crave is some sort of reassurance and not verity or certainty.¹⁶⁵ Both of these logics can be directly seen in the data that I have collected; astrology is trusted for its deep cultural and cosmological meaning while AI is explored for guidance. This implies that astrology provides continuous symbolical cosmology where people can explore themselves and the universe and AI represents experimentation with technical enchantments. Modern cosmology is therefore not singular, but a hybrid that allows multiple systems of meaning to coexist

Astrology continues to be recognized as an established cosmology, while AI hints at emerging cosmological potential. This research suggests that there are broader implications that cosmology in

¹⁶² Latour, Bruno. 1993. *We Have Never Been Modern*, pp. 23.

¹⁶³ Weber, Max. 2004. The Vocation Lectures : "Science as a Vocation, 'Politics as a Vocation', pp. 16.

¹⁶⁴ Nikolić, Leona. 2023. 'ECS-Ecrea Early Career Scholar Prize Winner - an Astrological Genealogy of Artificial Intelligence: From "Pseudo-Sciences" of Divination to Sciences of Prediction, 133.

¹⁶⁵ Hong, Ze, and Joseph Henrich. 2021. 'The Cultural Evolution of Epistemic Practices' pp. 628.

modernity is neither fully disenchanted nor entirely rational. Instead, it is layered and to help people fully situate themselves in the complexity of the universe.

5.4. Limitations

The questionnaire was relatively small and produced only 40 responses, fewer than the fifty initially anticipated. Furthermore, some of the responses came from online communities that are already involved with astrology which suggests that some of the responses might be biased, as in the respondents may more strongly trust astrology, compared to AI. At the same time, AI is a relatively new and still developing technology therefore, its long-term cosmological potential might be understated in the data collected. Because the pool of the responses was quite small there is a limited representation of demographical data. For this reason, it is hard to generalize the findings to modernity as a whole. They represent particular online context.

This creates an interpretative challenge: I have interpreted the meaning of responses to particular questions so I cannot state universal truths. When tackling the topic of cosmology, I directly asked whether AI or astrology helps the respondents make sense of the world. While that is connected to how cosmology operates, cosmology itself has a deeper more personal meaning that is difficult to capture with a simple question. Despite these limitations, the study highlights the ways in which both astrology and AI are being actively experienced by individuals in their search for meaning. This points to the value of further research into how cosmological frameworks evolve in modernity.

5.5. Directions for Future Research

I believe further research is needed to fully grasp implications of cosmology in modernity. Because of the size and scope of the questionnaire, it would be beneficial to expand the number of respondents. This would also allow for a more diverse sample size that is not restricted to online communities. Furthermore, I propose a qualitative approach to data collection for a personal and deeper outlook on the meaning of astrology, AI, and cosmology. Because of the novelty of AI, this research would benefit from its study over time as AI will become even more embedded in daily life.

In my research I predominantly focused on astrology and its similarity with AI, however, to situate it within a broader field of cosmological resources in modernity it should be studied in connection with other types of divinations such as tarot, I Ching, numerology and so on, as well as different types of modern or traditional spiritualities or religions.

6. Conclusion

This thesis contributes not only to the literature on enchantment and divination but also to wider cultural debates about how humans orient themselves in the contemporary world. In order to answer the question ‘whether AI, since it is a technology hence it appears to be rational and more palatable to people in modernity, occupies a role in the cosmology of modernity similar to that of astrology?’ I created and distributed a quantitative questionnaire which compared the usage and cosmological perception of astrology and AI. The questions were constructed using extensive research of multiple scholarships. The study concluded that astrology continues to function as a cosmological framework, while AI is not yet fully seen this way. However, a number of ambivalent responses suggested that AI does have the potential to function as a part of a larger cosmological system because of the similarities it has with astrology.

Because majority of the respondents stated that astrology helps them make sense of the world and that it is meaningful which fully confirms Patrick Curry’s argument that astrology is cosmological and participatory, not a simple prediction. Astrology fosters enchantment in modernity the same way it did so in the past. While AI is not yet considered a cosmology by the majority of the respondents, the results of this thesis suggest that some people might be open to this idea and are experimenting with it. Furthermore, the study suggested that astrology and AI used for similar reasons, predominantly to gain a new perspective, inspiration, clarity and confirmation which strengthens the research of Leona Nikolić who points out that the core of both of these systems is the interpretation of their outputs. As well as to research of Sharda Mosurinjohn and Jordan Loewen-Colón who see the similarities between divination and AI through their ‘black box’ nature. AI does not yet show the same or similar cosmological strengths that astrology does, but it shows signs that one day it might. The reason for the rise of usage of AI for meaning making can be directly tied to Max Weber’s theory of disenchantment; science and technology takes precedence over enchanted practices. As well as Simon Locke’s argument that people are socially conditioned to science and technology more despite its unreliability. For this reason, systems like AI which take on similar roles astrology might be taken more seriously as it a technology and thus has the potential to be considered a part of cosmology of modernity. Nonetheless, enchantment persists in one way or another, as both Michael Saler and Charles Taylor have argued. This suggests that modern cosmology is not monolithic, is it full of discrepancies of enchanted and disenchanted perceptions of meaning, pointing toward its hybrid like nature that was presented by Bruno Latour. At the same time, the findings encourage a reflection on how authority is granted to systems that most people do not fully comprehend. Astrology, despite its marginalization, continues to function as a deeply participatory cosmology. AI, in contrast, carries

authority precisely because it is embedded in technological rationality, even though participants admitted only a partial understanding of how it works. It becomes clear that this thesis provides an insight into how big of a role AI play in everyday life of ordinary people. It forces the reader to consider how much do we relate to and use something that we do not fully understand and to what extent we let it shape us.

Despite the limitations that predominantly stemmed from a small pool of respondents and the novelty of AI, the research findings presented as sufficient to establish an answer to the research question. There are gaps that can be filled with future research, especially obtaining a larger pool of respondents, investigation different types of divination in relation to AI, and study of AI and its cosmological implications over time. Whether AI ultimately becomes a part of cosmology of modernity remains open, however, the very fact that it is already being approached as a tool for guidance suggests that enchantment is not but that it is merely shifting its forms.

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