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Week 6: Enchantment

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The reason for the topic

Because

The modern 'Re-enchantment' of western society,

Or desire for 'Re-enchantment' amongst some people

Is widely assumed by sociologists to be a major reason for the modern growth of belief in astrology (as well as alternative spiritualities, New Age ideas, the occult and so on).

Astronomers often appeal to the wonder or awe of the sky to justify astronomy

DEFINITIONS OF ENCHANTMENT

Literally from the Latin *cantare*, to sing.

In English to 'chant' is to utter words often in a monotone, or with little variation in tone, often to achieve an enlightening effect – as in plain chant in religious ritual.

(also repetitive chanting in political and sports crowds)

The Oxford Concise Dictionary:

'enchant as to : 'Bewitch, charm, delight...(*cantare* sing...), from the French chanter, to sing.

Associations with witchcraft, magic

Spanish *encantar* = to love

Marsilio Ficino : 'remember that song is a most powerful imitator of all things. It imitates the intentions and passions of the soul as well as words'.[\[1\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Ficino, Marsilio, *Three Books on Life*, ed. Kaske, Carole C. and Clark, John R., Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, Binghamton: State University of New York at Binghamton, 1989, III.21, p. 359.



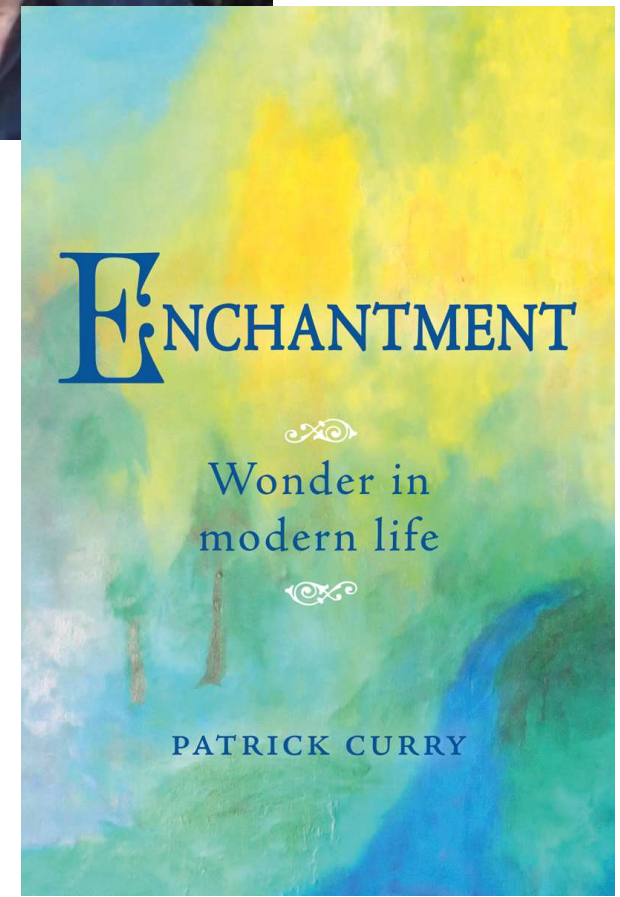
What is Enchantment?: Patrick Curry

Perhaps best defined by the state of being in love, in which the entire world becomes full of meaning, and ordinary perceptions of individuality, time and space disappear.

Primary enchantment: occurs spontaneously

Secondary enchantment: is evoked by ritual, action (singing, reciting myth, dance, theurgy, magic....)

All Patrick's papers are on his website
www.PatrickCurry.co.uk



Enchantment, Relationality and Wonder

- 'A fundamental characteristic of **enchantment** is that it is **relational**. The extent of reciprocity varies with the degree of intensity, but it **is always wonder** at another – not power over them. It takes place as an encounter, a meeting across a gap of difference. Those boundaries remain, but they no longer matter. So, **enchantment is neither hot ecstatic unity, in which both self and other disappear, nor cold, one-way control over the other. And when enchantment is radical it is most relational, with both parties – whoever and whatever they are – apprehending and affecting the other.**'
- Patrick Curry 'The Enchantment of Nature and the Nature of Enchantment', in *Honoring Nature*, ed. Lis McLoughlin (Human Error Publishing, 2021),



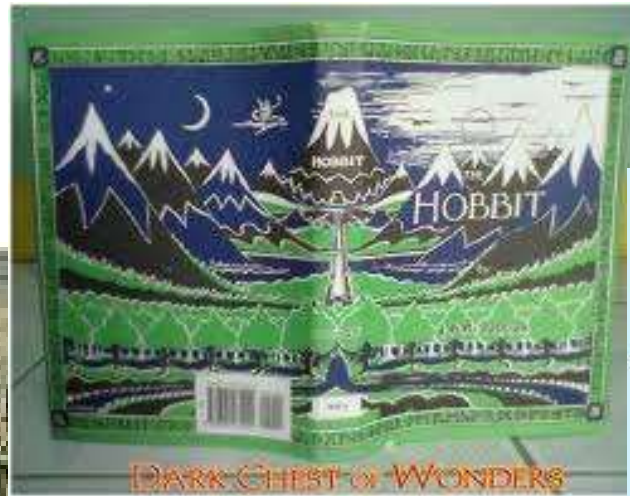
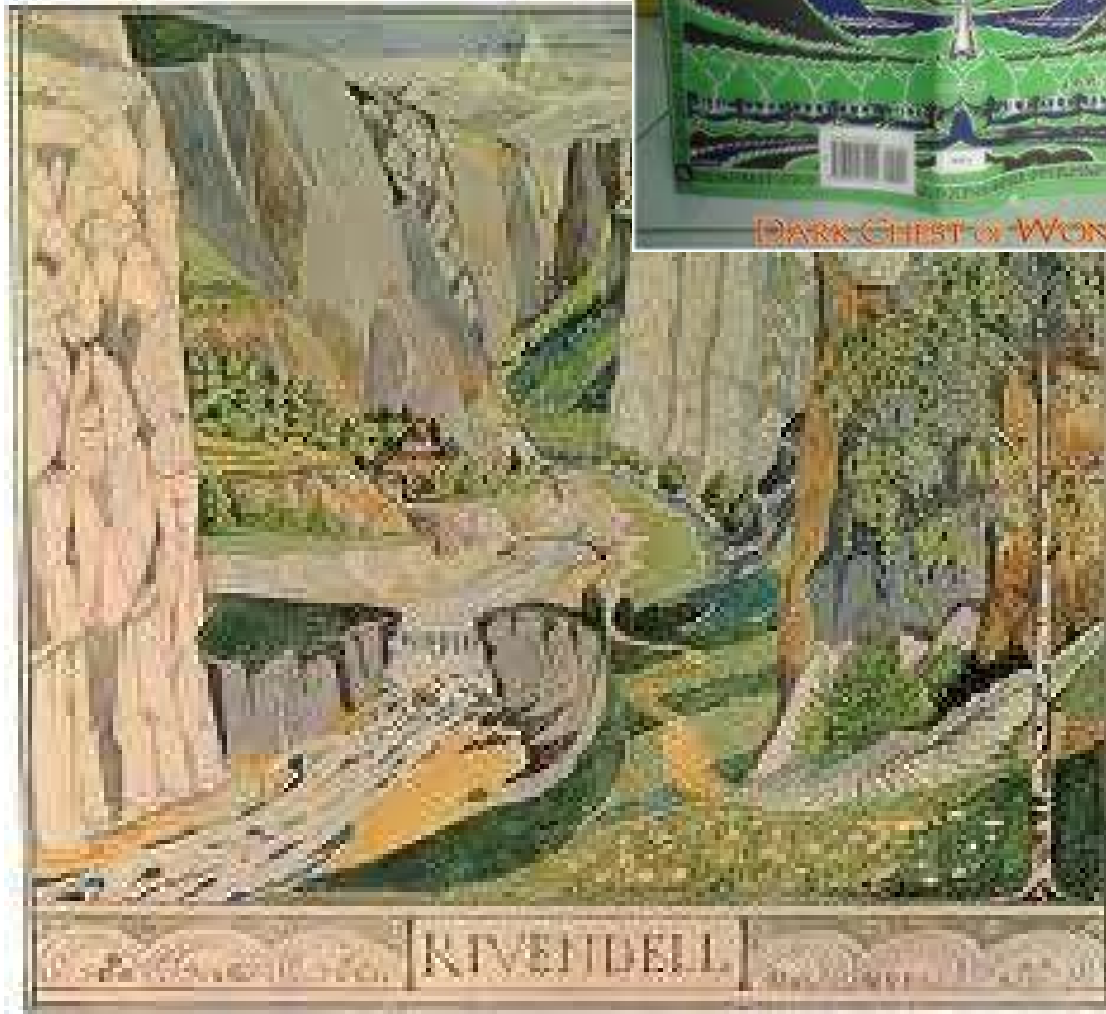
What is Enchantment?:

J.R.R. Tolkien

- *Faërie* contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons: it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men, when we are enchanted... *Faërie* itself may perhaps most nearly be translated by Magic – but it is magic of a peculiar mood and power, at the farthest pole from the vulgar devices of the laborious, scientific magician.[\[1\]](#)
- [\[1\]](#) Tolkein, J.R.R., *Tree and Leaf*, London: Unwin 1964, pp. 15-16.



Tolkein's enchanted landscape



Lands of Enchantment

A JRR Tolkien and Fantasy inspired Exhibition

Featuring the works of Ted Nasmith, Ruth Lacon,
Jef Murray and Peter Pracownik



Enchantment

- “As the negotiation of the gaps or disjunctures separating human beings from complete power over their lives, enchantment conjoins the plane of immediate human experience to a desirable state of affairs through the mediation of such symbolic devices as rituals, incantations or charms. [...] Enchantment consists of an apparatus of belief whose form of representation or enactment is thought to exert influence over the realities it configures.
- But enchantment is not limited to the spells and magic of premodern metaphysics (or modern consumerism). By means of religion, morality and aesthetics, Nietzsche once averred, “man likes to believe that ... he is touching the heart of the world”.
- D. Morgan, 'The Enchantment of Art: Abstraction and Empathy from German Romanticism to Expressionism', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 57 (1996), pp. 341. Citing F. Nietzsche, *Human All Too Human*, 16 (§4)
- (David Morgan – Duke University)



Participation Mystique

Lucien Levy-Bruhl

The 'illusion' amongst 'primitive' people that, as individuals, they can be fully integrated with the environment and cosmos, and actively engage with it, participate in it.

Lévi-Bruhl, Lucien, *How Natives Think*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985 [1912]).

Lévi-Bruhl, Lucien, *How Natives Think*, trans. Lillian A. Clare, London: George Allen & Unwin, 1926.

Lévi-Bruhl, Lucien, *The Notebooks on Primitive Mentality*, trans. Peter Rivière (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1975).



Participation Mystique: Jung

‘Participation mystique is a term derived from Lévy-Bruhl. It denotes a peculiar kind of psychological connection with objects, and consists in the fact that the subject cannot clearly distinguish himself from the object but is bound to it by a direct relationship which amounts to partial identity (q. v.). This identity results from an a priori oneness of subject and object. Participation mystique is a vestige of this primitive connection’.

C.G. Jung, Psychological Types, in The Collected Works, Vol. 6 (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971). ¶781.



Modern Enchantment?

Venus shop in Glastonbury



Zodiac Images: Enchantment (or Glamour?)



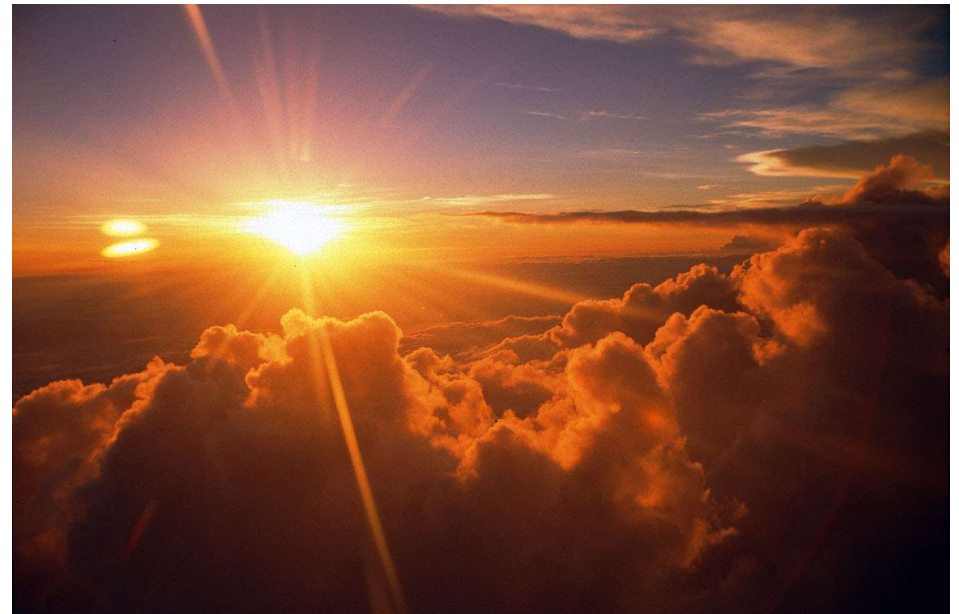
Awe and Wonder

The awe of the heavens as a theory for the origin of astronomy.

- E.g Pannekoek, A., *A History of Astronomy*, London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1961p 19-20.



- *‘The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork’*
Psalms, 19.1.



THE HISTORICAL THEORY

The Protestant Reformation in 16th century
Europe:

Rejection of the magic and mystery of the Roman
Catholic Church

Combined with rejection of folk magic amongst
ordinary people

THE HISTORICAL THEORY

The German playwright and poet Friedrich Schiller (1759-1805) referred to



die Entgötterung der Natur, the ‘disgoddling of nature’,

The ‘progressive removal of mind, or spirit, from phenomenal appearances’

= The Romantic rejection of the perceived alienating rationalism of the Enlightenment.

The classic model of Disenchantment. Max Weber 1864-1920

The combined effect of the Protestant Reformation and the scientific revolution was to 'disenchant' humanity.

In the 17th-18th century people in the west stopped believing in spirits, myths, magic etc.

A rise in belief in spirits, myths, magic etc in the 20th century is evidence of re-enchantment (which in some readings is a flight from modernity/rationalism, which is generally regarded as harmful, but for some people (eg Patrick Curry) is positive)

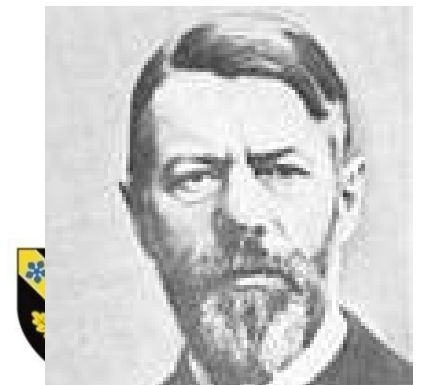


Weber defines Disenchantment

The increasing intellectualization and rationalisation do *not*, therefore, indicate an increased and general knowledge of the conditions under which one lives.

It means something else, namely, the knowledge or belief that if one but wished one could learn it any time. Hence, it means that principally there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means.

Weber, Max, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, ed. H.H. Garth and C. Mills Wright, London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1947, p. 139.



THE SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Widely accepted.

Generally:

Europe was disenchanted in the 16th/17th c

Science and technology are disenchanting.

The appeal of alternative spiritualities is their ability to re-enchant.

But is this true?

The Modern World as Disenchanted: Zygmunt Bauman

‘All in all, postmodernity can be seen as restoring to the world what modernity, presumptuously, had taken away; as a re-enchantment of the world that modernity tried hard to dis-enchant”

-

Bauman, Zygmunt, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, London: Routledge, 1992, p. x.



COUNTER-ARGUMENTS

1. Historical – was magic really banished by the Reformation and Scientific Revolution?

Did Protestantism, with its advocacy of an intense personal relationship with God encourage enchantment?

Were rural people untouched by developments amongst the educated elite?

2. Sociological

What is the evidence to suggest that ‘belief’ in astrology, spirituality, is increasing?

(NB In my PhD I argued that there is no evidence)

COUNTER-ARGUMENTS 2

3.Astrology

Regarding astrology in particular, is there any evidence that its appeal is based in a desire for enchantment?

4.Science and Astronomy

Is Weber's view too narrow.

Can science and astronomy be enchanting?

Can astronomy/ sky watching be enchanting?

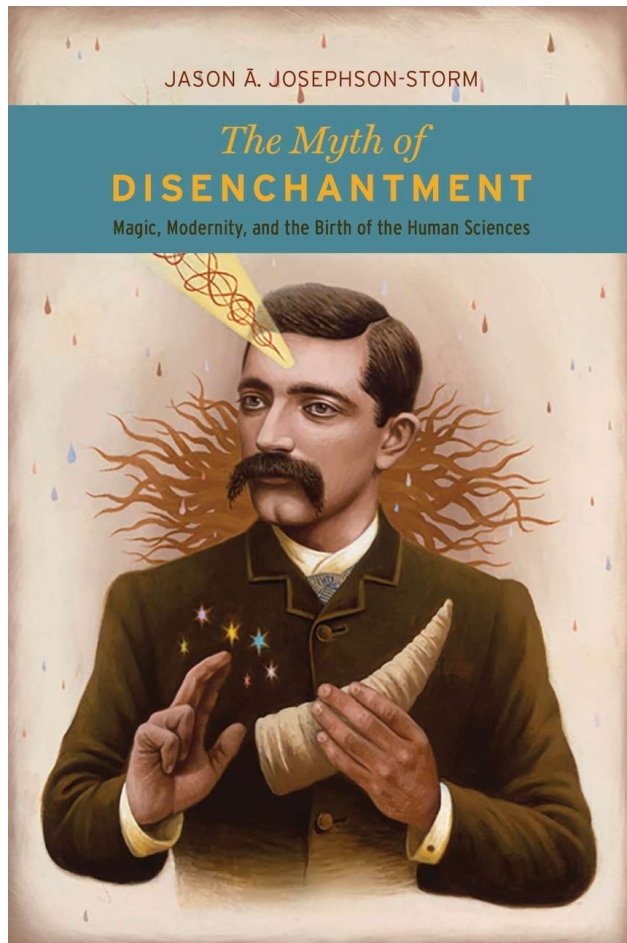
With the naked eye...

Eclipses

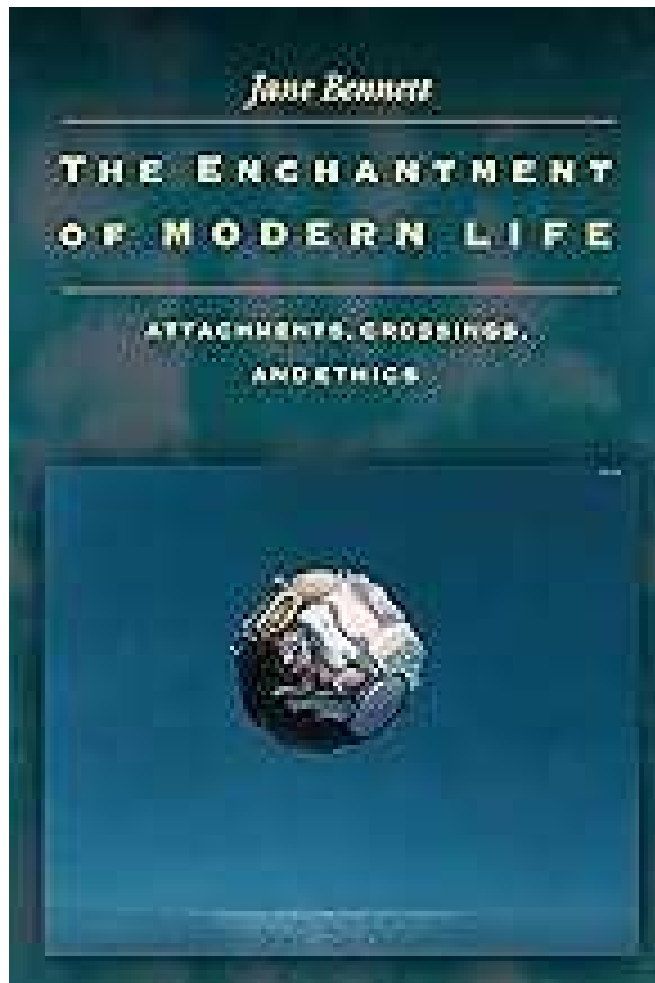
Crescent Moons

With a telescope...

First sight of the rings of Saturn or the phases of
Venus



The idea that people in the west stopped believing in spirits, myths, magic etc. is false



The idea that technology is disenchanting is false.

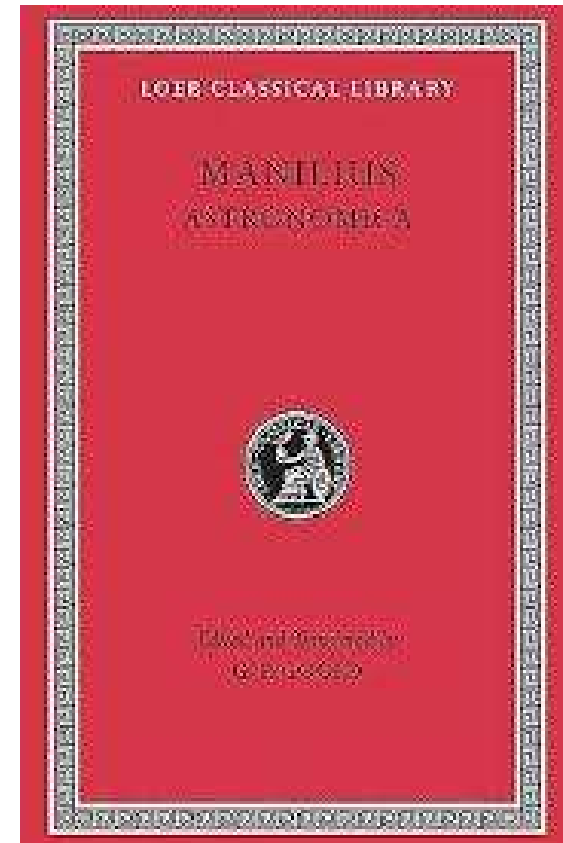
Instead, it can be enchanting.

(see Campion, Nicholas , 'Enchantment and the Awe of the Heavens', in Corsini, Enrico, (ed.), *Proceedings of the sixth conference on the Inspiration of Astronomical Phenomena*, Provo, Utah: Astronomical Society of the Pacific, 2011, pp. 415-22.)

Manilius: Reason as Liberation (not disenchanting), 1st c BCE/CE

Before their times man lived in ignorance: he looked without comprehension at the outward appearance and saw not the design of nature's works: he gazed in bewilderment at the strange new light of heaven, now sorrowing at its loss, now joyful at its birth....It (reason) freed men's minds from wondering at portents by wresting from Jupiter his bolts and power of thunder and ascribing to the winds the noise and to the clouds the flame.

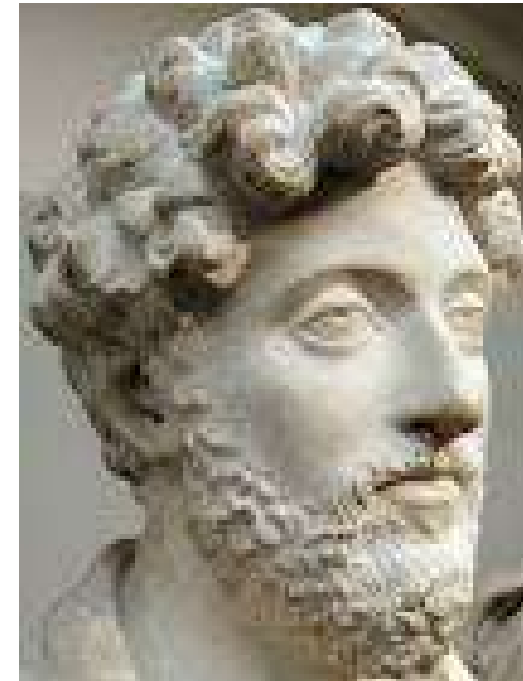
Manilius, *Astronomica*, l. 66-69, 105-8.



Astronomy as star-gazing and Enchantment: Marcus Aurelius, Roman Emperor 161-180

‘Survey the circling as though yourself were in mid-course with them. Often picture the changing and re-changing dance of the elements. Visions of this kind purge away the dross of our earth-bound life’.

Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. Maxwell Staniforth, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1964, V.47, p. 112; see also IX.29, p. 144. See also Plato, *Republic*, 2 Vols, trans. Paul Shorey, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1937, 516B.



Public descriptions of science:

description of a talk by the physicist Richard Feynman:

‘Scientists are sometimes accused of diminishing the beauty of the natural world by explaining it in terms of scientific ideas and processes. Not so, according to the late Nobel prize-winning physicist Richard Feynman, who says knowledge about the inner structure of flowers only adds to the excitement, mystery and awe of nature’.[\[1\]](#)

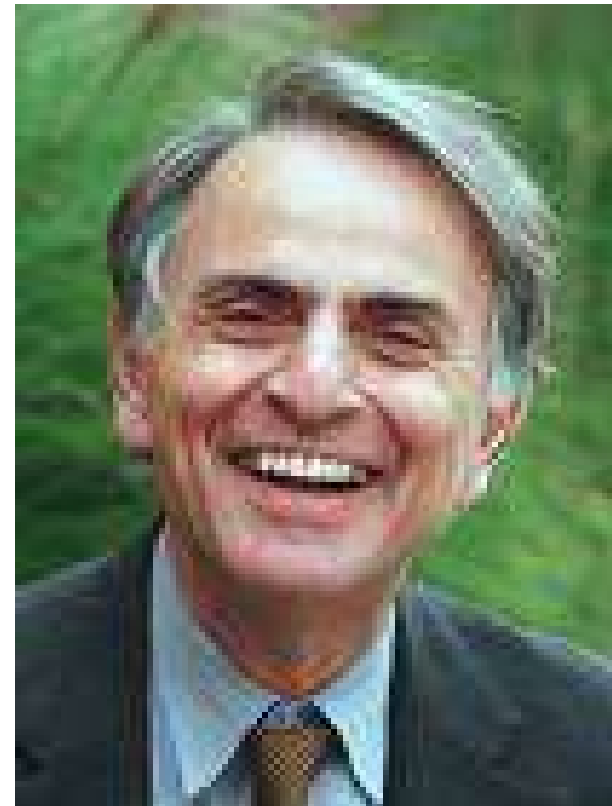
[\[1\] http://www.abc.net.au/rn/inconversation/stories/2008/2276846.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/rn/inconversation/stories/2008/2276846.htm)
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsgBtOVzHKI>



Carl Sagan

We have grown distant from the Cosmos. It has seemed remote and irrelevant to everyday concerns, but science has found not only that the universe has a reeling and ecstatic grandeur, not only that it is accessible to human understanding, but also that we are, in a very real and profound sense, a part of that Cosmos, born from it, our fate deeply connected with it. The most basic human events and the most trivial trace back to the universe and its origins.^[1]

^[1] Sagan, Carl, *Cosmos: the Story of Cosmic Evolution, Science and Civilisation*, London: Warner Books 1994, p. 12.



David Levy

- ‘I was filled with a sense of the solar system in motion... Instead of watching Mercury meander across a silent backdrop, we watched it move gracefully from one solar feature to another...the closest planet to the Sun is capable of putting up a marvellous show’.

- Levy, David H., ‘Our Memorable Mercury Transit’, *Sky and Telescope*, May 2007, pp. 84-5.



David Levy 2



- About a minute later I saw Mercury's first contact with the Sun's photosphere, the surface visible in white light. Experiencing that double entry was an adventure *we couldn't have enjoyed before the development of hydrogen alpha filters.*[\[1\]](#)
- (my italics)
- [\[1\]](#) Levy, David H., 'Our Memorable Mercury Transit', *Sky and Telescope*, May 2007, pp. 84-5.

David Levy 3



Levy's observing group included Eli Maor, author of the 2006 Princeton University Press publication, *Venus in Transit (1)*

Maor, Levy tells us, 'is as interested in how the mathematics of the solar system allow such rare events *as he is moved by the physical beauty of them*'.[\[2\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Levy, David H., 'Our Memorable Mercury Transit', *Sky and Telescope*, May 2007, p. 84.

[\[2\]](#) Levy, David H., 'Our Memorable Mercury Transit', *Sky and Telescope*, May 2007, p. 85.

Heather Couper

British astronomer and author

- 'Astronomy is not just about the science. It's *visionary, inspirational and romantic*'.[\[1\]](#)

[\[1\]](#) Heather Couper,
'Cosmic Quest', BBC
Radio 4, 29 May 2008.



technology
<https://www.vr-overview-effect.co.uk/>



VR Overview Effect experience

VROE recreate the Overview Effect using VR, guided meditation, haptic audio and binaural beats in a single immersive experience that can be used as an adjunct to workshops and therapeutic work. We also provide multisensory workshops that can help integrate the Overview Effect and teach key mental health skills. We aim for an experience as close as possible to real life, so that the Overview Effect can be experienced by a wider audience than the astronauts who have experienced it first hand.

In a recent launch event of a VR video, developed to promote sustainable leadership, all participants reported feelings of awe and humility. Many talked about compassion for the planet, feelings of oneness, but also about remorse and guilt after witnessing the devastating consequences of human-kind's actions on Earth. Others talked about feelings of sadness, grief, vulnerability, but also about joy and inspiration.

Check our [blog post](#) for some astronaut reflections on their real life experience of the Overview Effect

Please add your name to our [mailing list](#) to express an interest in our work and we will be in touch soon!

[More about us](#)

TV Presenter Dara O'Briain on the success of the programme *Stargazing Live*, which has three million viewers as opposed to two million for his comedy shows.:

'With astronomy it's very easy to tap into a sense of wonder. It's elemental, it's one of the most fundamental things, it's the wonder of gazing up and recognising where we are in the universe'.

Dara O'Briain cited in Anon, 'Nerds don't care that cool kids like them at last', *The Times*, 10 June 2013, p. 7.

Times Mon 10 June 2013 p7 News



Brian Cox and Dara O'Briain, below, have inspired viewers to capture sights like these star trails in West Yorkshire

Nerds don't care that cool kids like them at last

The age of the geek is upon us. With the "Brian Cox effect" driving up the numbers studying maths and physics and a new *Star Trek* film grossing more than double anything seen by its rivals over its opening weekend, science has rarely been more at home in popular culture (Oliver Moody writes).

But Dara O'Briain, the comedian and presenter of *Stargazing Live*, is a bit fed up. "I for one am not really arsed about getting the cool kids involved [in science]," he said in an interview at *The Times* Cheltenham Science Festival, where he has been a guest director. "I'm happy to go for the nerds."

A new wave of science celebrities are focusing on keeping an increasingly wide and discerning base of viewers who are already knowledgeable about the subject happy, O'Briain said: "I'm not a huge advocate saying this is sexy or fun. I'm out there to find people who already think that. Not everything has to be a beach blockbuster ratings event."

Science programmes are forced to become increasingly intelligent to avoid patronising a core of well-informed viewers, he believes. "Essentially, academic proceedings used to be for the elite 5 per cent. Now people are more educated but still not doing jobs that are using that education and they want to be challenged."

O'Briain, who read maths and physics at University College Dublin before going into television and comedy, said self-identified "nerds" had become much bolder and more influential with the rise of the internet.

The constituency of science enthusiasts numbers in the millions. *Stargazing Live*, the BBC series O'Briain presents with Professor Cox, hit ratings of four million viewers a night at one point, more than have tuned in to watch *Mock the Week* or *Three Men in a Boat*, his other well-known shows.

"I've just settled back down to a healthy three million," O'Briain said. Amazon reported a six-fold increase in orders for telescopes after the first episode of last year's series, while demand for astronomy courses has risen by 40 per cent since the show began, according to O'Briain.

The presenter said astronomy had a peerless natural appeal. "With astronomy, it's very easy to tap into a sense of wonder. It's elemental, it's one of the most fundamental things, it's the wonder of gazing up and recognising where we are in the universe," O'Briain said.



Melissa de Witte, 'The power of awe and the cosmos', *Stanford News*, 6 September 2022.
<https://news.stanford.edu/2022/09/06/power-awe-cosmos/> [accessed 3 November 2023].

The power of awe and the cosmos

A cosmologist, cultural historian, and neurosurgeon discuss how outer space and otherworldly phenomena can inspire discovery across disciplines and bring people together.



BY MELISSA DE WITTE

The images to emerge from the James Webb Space Telescope have captured details of the cosmos never seen before, leaving the scientific community and public alike in a state of awe. In a Tweet, former President Barack Obama described them as “mind-blowing.” Even Stanford cosmologist Zeeshan Ahmed, for whom such images are commonplace, admitted: “You can’t contain it in your head. I think this is true for everybody – I mean, scientists are human still.”

“Awe is sort of this ineffable sense of transcendence,” said Stanford neurosurgeon and compassion scholar James Doty. “In some ways, you melt into it.”

Scholars across disciplines have long sought to understand the stirring – soul searching, even – emotions the universe evokes. Some have described a shakiness they call “cosmic vertigo.” Others have used the term “cosmic insignificance” when confronted with one’s littleness in a limitless universe. A few have found dwelling too long on such thoughts to be anxiety-inducing, an experience they label “neuroexistentialism.”



NASA's James Webb Space Telescope has been able to show new, finer details of the galaxy group, Stephan's Quintet. The rendering here was created from nearly 1,000 separate image files. (Image credit: NASA, ESA, CSA, STScI)

Astrology?

Now: Is astrology enchanting or disenchanting?

Then: Did it originate in enchantment?

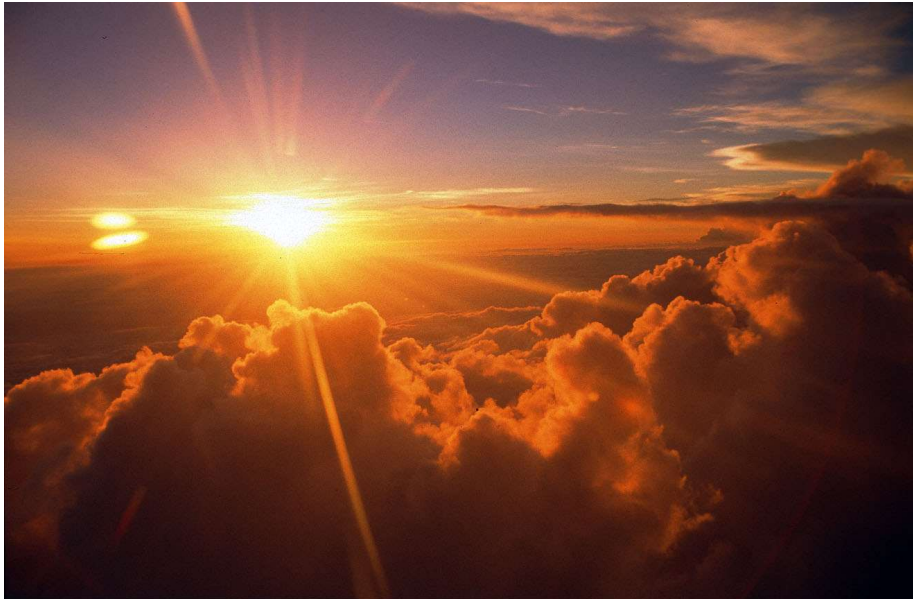
Does it require enchantment in order to be practised?

Does it require enchantment in order to be practised effectively?

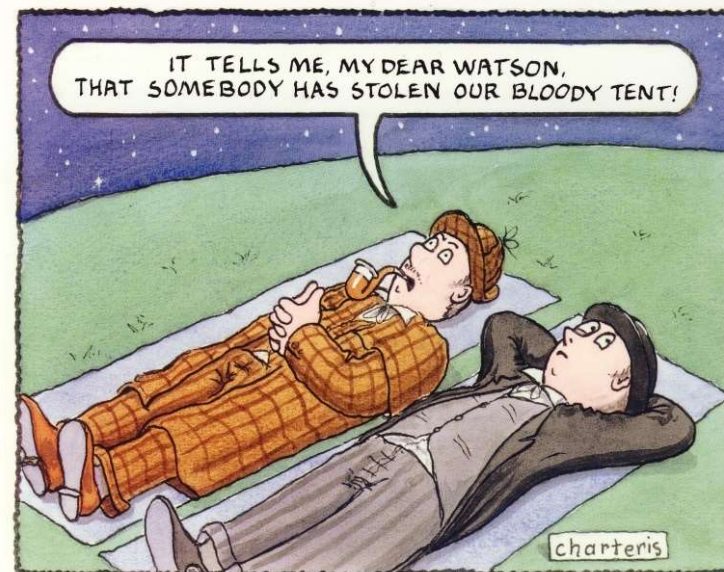
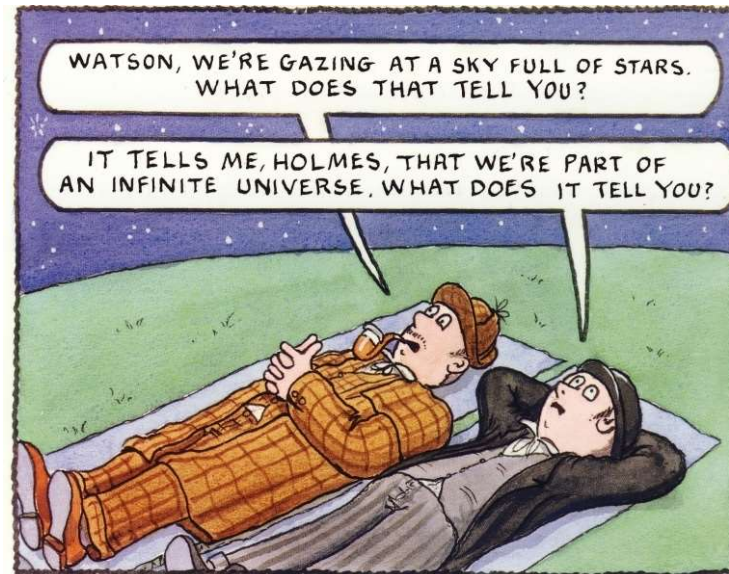
Sky-watching

Allowing ourselves to be enchanted.

Moving from detached observer to participation



Is everyone enchanted by the sky?



Conclusion

How is it possible for one person to tell whether another is enchanted?

The Historical and Sociological theories are persuasive and widely accepted.

But they are open to question.