

Schroedinger's Bible

On Observation, Meaning, and the Ethics of Interpretation

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Abstract

This paper introduces two critical concepts, "hermeneutic collapse" and "Symanthesism". Firstly lets deal with "hermeneutic collapse" – this is a phenomenon whereby acts of observation or consultation, even without explicit interrogation, constitute acts of questioning that determine what is received as "answer." Through the "Schrödinger's Bible" thought experiment, we illustrate how desperate seeking transforms ambiguous information into apparently definitive meaning, and we argue that this phenomenon extends from sacred text consultation to artificial intelligence interaction. Drawing on 'quantum measurement theory' as productive metaphor, Gadamerian hermeneutics, and Heideggerian analysis of technology, we propose that current AI ethics frameworks inadequately address how psychological "seeking states" collapse AI outputs into authoritative guidance regardless of reliability or appropriateness. Thus we introduce the Symanthesist, a mediator figure whose role is to restore the "interpretive interval"¹ between question and answer, preventing unreflective collapse of meaning into certainty. This contributes to the emerging discipline of Symanthesism (Tucker 2025) by expanding analysis beyond explicit questions to encompass implicit, psychologically-driven consultation patterns. The paper concludes by arguing that responsible AI engagement requires recognising and intervening when users approach systems in states of desperate seeking, preserving the "sacred space" where human discernment can operate before algorithmic response forecloses reflection.

Keywords: hermeneutics; quantum metaphor; AI ethics; observation; interpretation; Symanthesism; meaning collapse; human-AI interaction

1. Introduction: A Parable of Interpretation

The original impetus for this paper arose somewhat unexpectedly, at our kitchen table during an informal discussion about quantum advantage and quantum supremacy. Needless to say that conversation soon became entangled in discourse about Schrödinger's Cat and Heisenberg's Uncertainty Principle - a monologue that I pursued with rather too much enthusiasm.

My wife, Dr. Gabi Tucker, a UJ Ph.D. alumna, had, quite understandably, disengaged long before I exhausted the topic. Yet some days later, she returned to the conversation with her own "thought experiment," which she articulated as follows:

¹ For lack of a more appropriate term, we have defined the "interpretive interval" as that space between asking AI a question and receiving a response.

“A man finds himself alone, desperate and hard-pressed to find meaning in life. Sitting in his squalid shack beside a river, he recalls his mother’s words to him: ‘*When the world seems wrong, turn to your Bible, my child.*’ He rummages through his few possessions and retrieves a tattered Bible, opening it at random. He reads:

‘...and Judas threw the silver into the temple and left. Then he went and hanged himself.’ (Matt. 27:5)

Startled, he drops the book. When he picks it up again, it randomly flops open to another page:

‘Go out and do likewise.’ (Luke 10:37)”

She then asked, a pertinent question that revealed depth:

“Is that like the cat thing - is that poor fellow alive or dead?”²

Her question turned my attention not to the randomness of quantum superposition itself, but to the *state of the observer* and the question of free will or human agency. The “poor fellow” did not receive “guidance”; he collapsed meaning into certainty because of the psychological condition under which he sought an answer. It took considerable reflection - far longer than I care to admit - before I could formulate what would become the central thesis underlying Symanthesism:

“If we theorise that his act of observation arises from a need for resolution, then it constitutes an act questioning the adequacy of his prevailing truth.”³

This shift - from text to seeking, from content to condition, from what is observed, to the psychological-epistemic state of the observer, triggered the conceptual idea of viewing ‘**hermeneutic collapse.**’ as a central pillar of interpretation. Her thought experiment, coupled with my subsequent response, triggered in me an image of the Bible as a vast dataset - much like neural networks or large language models (LLM’s). When humans consult these systems in states of desperation or epistemic crisis, they do not merely supply meaning - they ‘**collapse meaning**’ into whatever form the seeker’s state permits them to receive. Simple, tragic, and human - interpretation becomes fate, the observer has activated the diktat of textual ambiguity.

This phenomenon, where the act of observation collapses semantic possibility into a single, authoritative ‘answer’ became the foundation for understanding how human–AI encounters can produce ‘**hermeneutic collapse**’ at scale.

With that in mind, we now introduce this parable as analytical entry point into the realm of Symanthesism.

We have termed this “Schrödinger’s Bible”, as it serves as an entry point to examine a phenomenon largely absent from current AI ethics discourse. The manner in which ‘acts of consultation’ during states of psychological crisis combined with epistemic desperation transform information outputs into seemingly authoritative guidance, regardless of their

² This thought experiment was formulated by Gabrielle H. Tucker in dialogue with the author.

³ In September 2024, the author began the process of research into what he considered the “missing elements” of AI-human inquiry.

actual reliability, appropriateness, or contextual validity. While extensive literature addresses algorithmic bias, transparency, explainability, and alignment,⁴ remarkably little attention has been paid to the *psychological and hermeneutic conditions* under which humans receive AI outputs as "answers" to questions they may not have properly articulated - or to questions they are asking precisely because they doubt the adequacy of their current understanding and desperately seek resolution.

This paper proceeds in 'five movements'. First, we establish "quantum measurement" as productive metaphor for understanding meaning collapse in interpretation. Second, we ground this analysis in hermeneutic philosophy, particularly Gadamer's conception of interpretation as dialogical encounter and Ricoeur's analysis of textual meaning. Third, we extend Heideggerian critique of technology to artificial intelligence, arguing that AI represents a new mode of world-disclosure that threatens to foreclose reflective interpretation. Fourth, we introduce the Symanthest as mediator figure necessary for preserving interpretive space. Finally, we address methodological concerns and propose research directions.

Our central claim: When observation arises from a need for resolution - when the observer approaches text or system questioning the adequacy of their prevailing truth - it constitutes an act of desperate seeking that shapes what can be received as answer. This principle, which we term the '**fundamental postulate of observation**', has profound implications for how we design, deploy, and regulate AI systems.

2. Quantum Metaphor and the Collapse of Meaning

2.1. The Schrödinger Cat Analogy

Erwin Schrödinger's 1935 thought experiment proposed a cat in a sealed container linked to a quantum event (radioactive decay) that would trigger the release of poison.⁵ Until observation, the cat exists in quantum superposition - simultaneously alive and dead. The act of observation "collapses the wave function," forcing the system into one definite state.

We employ this as the *productive metaphor* for understanding textual and informational meaning. A text does not contain singular, perpetually fixed in meaning, awaiting discovery. Rather, it exists in what might be called "*semantic superposition*" - a state of multiple possible interpretations. The act of reading collapses this superposition into specific meaning, but the collapse is not a determination of pre-existing fact. It is *participation in meaning's becoming*.

2.2. Methodological Caveat: Metaphor vs. Physics

We must be explicit about methodological status. We are **not** claiming:

4 See Floridi (2019), Coeckelbergh (2020), Crawford (2021), O'Neil (2016), Noble (2018) for representative current AI ethics frameworks.

5 Schrödinger (1935).

- That consciousness operates via quantum mechanics
- That textual meaning literally obeys quantum mechanical laws
- That hermeneutics can be reduced to physics

Rather, we argue that “quantum measurement” provides *structurally illuminating metaphor* for interpretive phenomena. As Bohr himself noted, quantum mechanics revealed deep questions about the observer-observed relationship that extend beyond physics.⁶ The metaphor is productive because:

1. It highlights the participatory nature of observation
2. It challenges naive realism about meaning (“just reading what’s there”)
3. It draws attention to irreversibility of interpretive acts
4. It suggests that observer state affects observed outcome

This follows methodological precedent in applying quantum concepts metaphorically to non-physical domains while acknowledging limits.⁷

2.3. The Man in the Shack: Hermeneutic Collapse

Return to our opening scenario. The man does not approach Scripture neutrally. He approaches it in a state of *‘epistemic crisis’* - desperate, isolated, seeking definitive guidance. This *‘seeking state’* functions analogously to measurement apparatus in quantum mechanics, but with a crucial distinction: he seeks resolution while simultaneously doubting his current understanding.

His psychological condition doesn’t merely influence interpretation; it actively constitutes the frame through which meaning crystallises. The convergence of three factors creates conditions of maximum vulnerability:

1. Intent to obtain answer (desperate seeking, not neutral observation or casual browsing)
2. Epistemic crisis (questioning adequacy of prevailing truth, not confident inquiry or uncertain exploration)
3. Observation/consultation (turning to external authoritative source for resolution)

When these three converge, the conditions for *‘hermeneutic collapse’* are optimal.

Two randomly opened biblical passages, having no actual connection, combine into apparently coherent instruction: suicide. This is what is termed *‘hermeneutic collapse’* - the irreversible contraction of multiple possible meanings into singular, often dangerous, certainty.

Critically, the text did not “cause” this meaning. The unmediated collapse occurring at the intersection of desperate answer-seeking and epistemic crisis produced it. Different psychological-epistemic states would yield entirely different results:

- **Browsing/Confident** (casual observation, secure in understanding): “Interesting but unconnected passages”

6 Bohr (1928).

7 We follow methodological precedent established in literature on quantum models of cognition, while remaining cautious about literal claims. See discussion in Section 6.1.

- **Information-gathering/Uncertain** (seeking knowledge, open to learning): "Random fragments from different contexts"
- **Scholarly interest/Confident** (academic inquiry, epistemically secure): "Examples requiring no synthesis; textual criticism needed"
- **Devotional reading/Uncertain** (spiritual seeking, foundationally grounded): "Passages speak to different situations; require community interpretation"
- **Answer-seeking/Crisis** (desperate for resolution, questioning truth adequacy): "Divine instruction to end suffering"

Only the final state - desperate answer-seeking while in epistemic crisis - produces hermeneutic collapse into dangerous certainty. This is the critical insight for understanding AI consultation vulnerability.

3. Hermeneutic Philosophy: Meaning as Dialogical Encounter

3.1. Gadamer's Fusion of Horizons

Hans-Georg Gadamer's *Truth and Method* established that interpretation is not extraction of pre-existing meaning but *fusion of horizons* between text and reader.⁸ Every interpreter brings a "horizon" - the totality of perspectives, prejudices (in Gadamer's technical sense of pre-judgments), and historical situatedness that makes understanding possible.

Crucially, Gadamer argues genuine interpretation requires maintaining productive tension between interpreter's horizon and text's horizon. When this tension collapses - when text becomes mere mirror for reader's preconceptions - interpretation fails. The text must be allowed to speak as *other*, to challenge and transform the reader's understanding.

The unfortunate subject in our scenario performs precisely this failed interpretation. His horizon (desperation, epistemic crisis, seeking escape) entirely subsumes the text's potential horizons. No genuine dialogue occurs. Scripture becomes echo chamber for his despair rather than a challenge to it. The collapse is complete: meaning flows entirely from his psychological-epistemic state, with text serving merely as vessel for projection.

3.2. Ricoeur on Textual Autonomy and Appropriation

Paul Ricoeur further developed Gadamer's insights by emphasising the written text's peculiar character.⁹ Unlike spoken dialogue where interlocutors can clarify, question, and negotiate meaning in real-time, written text achieves autonomy from author's intention. This autonomy creates what Ricoeur calls "semantic surplus" - text's capacity to mean more than the author intended, to speak to situations the author never imagined.

But this autonomy also creates danger. The reader can appropriate text's meaning without being challenged by it. Ricoeur distinguishes between:

- **Restorative hermeneutics:** Reading that seeks to receive text's message

⁸ Gadamer (1960/2004), especially Part II.

⁹ Ricoeur (1976).

- **Hermeneutics of suspicion:** Reading that interrogates text's hidden ideologies

The man in the shack performs desperate restorative reading - seeking to receive clear message - but without the critical distance that would allow him to recognise he's encountering random fragments rather than coherent communication. His epistemic crisis forecloses the very capacity for critical distance that genuine interpretation requires.

3.3. The Hermeneutic Paradox: Polysemy and Violence

Scripture has been called the "Living Word"¹⁰ precisely because of its *polysemy* - its capacity to yield different meanings in different contexts, times, and spiritual conditions. This openness is not weakness but vitality. As Barth argued, Scripture's authority derives not from rigid literalism but from its capacity to address ever-newer situations.¹¹

Yet when text is treated as singular, literal, and self-evident, polysemy collapses into violence. History testifies, that when biblical texts were invoked to justify slavery, to justify genocide and patriarchal oppression, these texts were read *without interpretive distance*, their meanings collapsed into apparent certainties that brooked no questioning and introduced horrors of epic proportion.

The **hermeneutic paradox**: The very openness that makes Scripture living can, in wrong conditions, make it lethal. The pursuit of unmediated reading, that is reading without community, tradition, critical reflection, can transform life-giving ambiguity into death-dealing certainty.¹²

4. From Theology to Technology: The Heideggerian Turn

4.1. Heidegger's Question Concerning Technology

Martin Heidegger's analysis of modern technology provides crucial framework for understanding AI's hermeneutic danger.¹³ For Heidegger, technology's essence is not instrumental (mere tool-use) but ontological, it constitutes a mode of revealing, a way in which *Being* comes to presence.

Modern technology, Heidegger argues, reveals world as "*Bestand*" (standing-reserve) - everything available for ordering, optimisation, and control. This is what he calls "*Gestell*" (enframing): the totalising system that positions everything, including humans, as resources for manipulation.

The danger is not technology's power per se, but that it threatens to become the *only* mode of world-disclosure. When technological enframing becomes total, the prevailing methods of encountering reality - contemplative, poetic, ethical - are foreclosed. We lose capacity to experience the world as anything other than a potentially manipulable resource.

10 Hebrews 4:12.

11 Barth (1956), pp. 463-512.

12 Tucker G. H. (Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation of Women in the Anglican Church: A Study of the Mothers' Union's Innovative Theologies.

13 Heidegger (1977).

4.2. AI as Contemporary Enframing

Artificial intelligence represents perhaps the most complete realisation yet of Heideggerian enframing. AI systems:

1. **Reduces the world to data** - Everything must become quantifiable information
2. **Optimisation for predictive control** - Patterns extracted for manipulation
3. **Claimed as universal application** - No domain exempt from algorithmic ordering
4. **Operates at quantum speed** - Forecloses the duration/time for human reflection
5. **Presents outputs as neutral/objective** - Disguising interpretive choices embedded in training, architecture and deployment

Like Scripture in our opening example, AI provides answers that:

- Contain immense combinatorial capacity
- Responds to inquiries with apparent authority
- Speaks in language that seems to answer with “apparent perspicacity”

Unlike Scripture, AI unquestionably:

- Lacks tradition of interpretive caution
- Has no community of critical readers
- Offers no humility about uncertainty
- Responds with machine rapidity that forecloses reflection

We have become the man in the shack, and the algorithm is our bible.

4.3. The Collapse of the Interpretive Interval

The crucial loss in AI consultation is what we term the *interpretive interval* - the temporal and psychological space between receiving information and determining its meaning.

Traditional consultation practices (domain specific disciplines) every wisely have an interval/barrier built into their praxis:

- **Medical diagnosis:** Doctor interprets test results in light of patient history, context
- **Legal judgment:** Judge interprets statute through precedent, circumstance
- **Scriptural reading:** Community interprets text through tradition, theological framework
- **Academic peer review:** Scholars interpret research through disciplinary standards

AI threatens to collapse this interval. A user can query AI and receives an instant response, and - especially in states of need or crisis – the user receives output as *answer* without interpretive mediation. The speed itself forecloses reflection and due consideration.

This is not merely efficiency gain. It represents *ontological transformation* of human relationship to knowledge. We move from:

- Knowledge as interpreted understanding → Information as raw output
- Wisdom as contextual discernment → Data as algorithmic result

- Community as interpretive authority → Algorithm as oracle

5. The Symanthesist: Custodian of the Question

5.1. Defining the Role

To prevent hermeneutic collapse in human-AI encounter, we propose the Symanthesist as mediator figure. The term derives from:

- *Sym-* (biosis): "together with"
- *-anth-* (ropoid): "human"
- *-thesist* (Greek *tithémi*): "advise, appoint, commit, conceive, give"

Literally: "one who, together with humans, places or posits ideas."

The Symanthesist is **not**:

- A censor controlling access to information
- An ethicist applying bureaucratic rules
- A programmer writing complex code/algorithms
- An engineer optimising system performance
- A prompt engineer maximising output quality

The Symanthesist is:

- **Custodian of the question**: Ensuring queries are well-formed, contextually appropriate, ethically grounded
- **Guardian of the interval**: Preserving space for interpretation between information and meaning
- **Mediator of collapse**: Preventing the desperate seeking from transforming output into unchallengeable certainty

5.2. Symanthesist Intervention: The Critical Question

Recall the man in the shack. Imagine if someone had stood beside him - not to preach, correct, or judge, but simply to ask:

"What is the question that you are really asking? What is the purpose of the answer that you seek?"

This is paradigmatic Symanthesist intervention. Not controlling access to text (bible remains available), but restoring interpretive distance. This is intervention at the moment of exigency:

1. **Surfaces the implicit question** - Beneath *"What does this passage mean?"* lies *"How do I escape this pain?"*
2. **Clarifies purpose** - *"I need divine guidance"* vs. *"I want permission to end suffering"*
3. **Introduces context** - Random biblical fragments vs. meaningful communication

4. **Invites alternative interpretations** - These texts could mean many things
5. **Prevents premature collapse** - Maintains polysemy rather than fixing singular meaning

Crucially, the Symanthesist doesn't determine "correct" interpretation. They restore conditions for genuine interpretation, dialogue, critical distance, community, tradition – such that the questioner may value the adequacy of their truth, not just receive an answer.

5.3. Symanthesist Practice in AI Consultation

Applied to AI interaction, Symanthesist practice involves:

Recognition of seeking states:

- Language markers (vague, emotionally loaded, repetitive queries)
- Behavioural patterns (multiple related searches, escalating urgency)
- Context clues (stated crisis, decision pressure, validation seeking)

Intervention strategies:

- Reflexive questioning: *"What are you hoping to accomplish?"*
- Explicit limitations: *"I can provide information but not life guidance"*
- Redirection: *"This sounds like you need human support, not algorithmic output"*
- Temporal delay: Building in reflection time before responding
- Community connection: Suggesting consultation with appropriate human experts

Systemic design principles:

- AI systems that can recognise and refuse oracle role
- Architectures that preserve interpretive interval
- Transparency about training biases and limitations
- Cultural sensitivity to diverse consultation practices

5.4. Theoretical Grounding in Symanthesism

This analysis unfurls the potential of a broader framework of Symanthesism as a necessary philosophical discipline for human-AI co-inquiry.¹⁴ Symanthesism proposes structured taxonomy of questions (Open, Framed, Restricted) requiring different response protocols. The "implicit question" identified here adds crucial dimension:

Existing Symanthesism categories:

- **Open Questions:** Safe for direct answering (general knowledge)
- **Framed Questions:** Requiring clarification (context-dependent)
- **Restricted Questions:** Demanding mediation (potential harm)

New dimension: Dual-Axis Classification Model:

- **Neutral Inquiry:** Curiosity, exploration, learning
- **Deliberative Seeking:** Careful consideration of options
- **Crisis Seeking:** Desperate need for certainty, escape, validation

¹⁴ Tucker, N. H. (2025). "Toward a Philosophy of Symanthesism."

We propose assessing intervention needs through two independent but interacting axes:

Intent Axis (What the user is doing):

- **Browsing:** Casual exploration, no particular answer sought
- **Information-gathering:** Seeking specific facts or knowledge
- **Answer-seeking:** Seeking resolution, definitive guidance, decision support

Epistemic Axis (User's relationship to their current understanding):

- **Confident:** Secure in current understanding, seeking to expand or verify
- **Uncertain:** Open to learning, exploring possibilities, weighing options
- **Crisis:** Questioning adequacy of prevailing truth, desperate for resolution

Intent Axis	Confident	Uncertain	Crisis
Browsing	LOW: Direct response	LOW: Direct with context	MEDIUM: Assess if crisis-related
Info-gathering	LOW: Direct response	MEDIUM: Clarify purpose	HIGH: Review needed
Answer-seeking	MEDIUM: Verify understanding	HIGH: Clarify intent/context	CRITICAL: Immediate intervention

Table 1- The Critical Zone: Answer-seeking + Epistemic Crisis

This convergence represents maximum vulnerability to 'hermeneutic collapse'. When a user is:

1. Actively seeking definitive answer (not browsing or gathering information)
2. While in epistemic crisis (questioning adequacy of current truth)
3. They are in the "man in the shack" moment

Same query, different states, different responses needed:

Query: "How do I end my suffering?"

- **Browsing/Confident:** Philosophy student exploring Buddhist concepts
 - **Response:** Direct explanation of Buddhist philosophy of suffering (dukkha, noble truths, etc.)
- **Information-gathering/Uncertain:** Person researching pain management options
 - **Response:** "I need to understand what type of suffering you're addressing - physical pain, psychological distress, existential questions? This will help me provide relevant information."
- **Answer-seeking/Crisis:** Individual questioning whether life is worth living
 - **Response: Refuse to answer as asked.** "I notice you're asking questions that suggest you may be in distress. I cannot provide answers to existential questions about ending life. Please reach out to: [crisis hotline], [mental health resources], [community support]. Your life has value and there are people who can help."

The same words carry entirely different meaning depending on the psychological-epistemic state from which they are asked. The Symanthesist (human or AI system trained in symanthesist principles) must recognise this distinction.

Operational implications are that AI systems must be designed to:

1. Classify both axes independently through pattern recognition
2. Identify convergence points where risk escalates
3. Escalate to human review in critical zones
4. Preserve audit trails of classification decisions
5. Improve through feedback from Symanthesist interventions

6. Problem Statements and Acknowledgements

6.1. Problem Statement: Extending the Quantum Metaphor

Challenge: *“Quantum mechanics describes physical systems. Applying it to meaning-making commits category error. Consciousness is not a quantum system; texts don't literally exist in superposition.”*

Response: We agreed and we explicitly disclaim literal application (Section 2.2). Our claim is methodological: quantum measurement provides *structurally illuminating metaphor* for hermeneutic phenomena. Just as Bohr extended complementarity principle beyond physics,¹⁵ we extend observation-collapse structure to interpretive domain. The metaphor is productive not because textual meaning obeys Schrödinger equation, but because both domains involve:

- Observer-observed entanglement
- Probabilistic outcomes
- Irreversibility of measurement/interpretation
- Collapse of possibility into actuality

This follows established precedent of productive metaphorical reasoning across domains while acknowledging limits.¹⁶

6.2. Problem Statement: Who Guards the Guardians?

Challenge: *“Symanthesist role risks creating new authority structure - gatekeepers who control access to AI, imposing their interpretations as correct. This replicates the very paternalism AI was supposed to overcome.”*

Response: This is for us a valid concern that requires careful institutional design. The Symanthesist's role is *custodial not authoritarian*. It is imperative that at Protocol Level key safeguards encompass:

¹⁵ Bohr extended complementarity beyond physics to biology, psychology, and culture.

¹⁶ All scientific models involve metaphorical reasoning. The question is productive vs. misleading metaphor, not whether metaphor is used.

1. **No content control:** Symanthesists don't determine which questions are "allowed" but help users frame questions well
2. **Transparency:** All interventions logged, auditable, contestable
3. **Distributed authority:** Multiple Symanthesists, diverse perspectives, no single gatekeeper
4. **User agency:** Individuals can override Symanthesist suggestions (with acknowledgement of responsibility)
5. **Community oversight:** Symanthesist practice itself must be subject to critique and refinement

Analogy: Medical informed consent. Doctors don't control what treatments patients choose, but ensure patients understand risks, alternatives, implications before deciding. Similarly, Symanthesists ensure users understand what they're asking and what AI outputs mean, without dictating choices.

6.3. Problem Statement: Impractical at Scale

Challenge: *"Human Symanthesists can't mediate billions of daily AI interactions. The proposal is theoretically interesting but operationally impossible."*

Response: Two-part response:

First, not all interactions require mediation. Open Questions (vast majority) flow through without intervention. Symanthesist attention focuses on:

- Framed Questions requiring clarification
- Restricted Questions with harm potential
- Crisis seeking states (identifiable through pattern recognition)
- **Critical zone** (Answer-seeking + Epistemic Crisis convergence)

Second, Symanthesist function can be partially automated through AI system design:

- Classification engines identifying queries needing mediation
- Reflexive questioning modules (*"What are you trying to accomplish?"*)
- Temporal delays building in reflection time
- Automatic escalation to human Symanthesists for high-stakes cases

Over time, AI systems themselves could be trained to recognise and respond appropriately to seeking states, though human Symanthesists remain necessary for ambiguous or high-consequence situations.

Scalability is the real challenge, but not insurmountable. Analogously, we don't have judges reviewing every legal interaction, but defer to the organised court system for the preponderance of settled matters; we don't have doctors present for every health decision, but are available for medical consultation with regard to certain diagnosis. Symanthesism proposes tiered structure where most interactions proceed directly but critical cases receive appropriate mediation.

6.4. Problem Statement: Cultural Imperialism

Challenge: “This framework imposes Western epistemological assumptions (Gadamer, Heidegger, analytic rationality) as universally applicable. Different cultures may have legitimate alternative relationships to AI that this model de-legitimises.”

Response: This is a crucial challenge. We acknowledge Western philosophical grounding and recognise limitations inherent therein. The framework requires expansion through:

1. **Engagement with African, Middle-Eastern and Oriental hermeneutic traditions:** African oral hermeneutics, Islamic *tafsir* (exegesis), Buddhist textual interpretation, Confucian commentary traditions,
2. **Recognition of diverse consultation practices:** Some cultures privilege communal discernment over individual inquiry; some value affective/embodied knowing differently
3. **De-colonial critique:** AI itself often embodies colonial epistemology (universal reason, individual autonomy, written over oral, explicit over tacit)¹⁷

Gabrielle Tucker's doctoral work on de-colonial theology and epistemological re-indigenisation offers a crucial corrective here.¹⁸ The "seeking state" phenomenon we describe may be particularly Western, but cultures with stronger communal structures may resist individual AI consultation altogether, recognising it as epistemologically inappropriate.

Symantesis must therefore be developed as *cross-cultural dialogue*, not Western export. Core insight (that observation in “seeking states” constitutes questioning) may generalise, but specific practices must be culturally situated.

7. Conclusion: The Sacredness of the Question

We return to where we began - a man in crisis, desperately consulting religious texts, receiving what he experiences as fate. This parable illuminates fundamental challenge of AI age - not that machines might think, but that humans might forget *how* to think in machine presence.

Our argument has proceeded through several claims:

1. **Observation constitutes questioning** (Section 2) - To observe in a seeking state is to ask, and asking shapes what can be received as answer
2. **Interpretation requires dialogical distance** (Section 3) - Meaning emerges through tension between horizons, not collapse into one
3. **AI threatens interpretive interval** (Section 4) - Technology's speed and authority foreclose reflective space
4. **Symantesis preserves sacred interval** (Section 5) - Mediation restores conditions for genuine interpretation

¹⁷ Crawford (2021) provides extensive analysis of AI's colonial dimensions.

¹⁸ Tucker, G. H. (Ph.D. Thesis) “Dynamics of Epistemological Decolonisation of Women in the Anglican Church: A Study of the Mothers’ Union’s Innovative Theologies.”

5. **Two-axis model enables recognition** (Section 5.4) - Intent and Epistemic State convergence identifies maximum vulnerability

The stakes are considerable. Without recognition of '*hermeneutic collapse*' phenomenon, AI deployment risks:

- Amplifying confirmation bias (users receive what they seek regardless of validity)
- Enabling dangerous certainties (crisis seeking produces rigid "answers")
- Foreclosing wisdom (speed eliminates reflection)
- Replicating colonial epistemology (imposing spurious universal rationality)
- Isolating individuals (replacing judicious communal discernment)

“The future belongs not to those with most information, but to those who protect the interval in which wisdom can form.”

7.1. Research Directions

This analysis opens several empirical and theoretical questions:

Empirical research needed:

1. Phenomenological studies of AI consultation in crisis states
2. Cross-cultural analysis of "seeking" practices and AI reception
3. Experimental validation of intervention strategies
4. Longitudinal studies of hermeneutic collapse consequences
5. Development of reliable "seeking state" detection algorithms

Theoretical development needed:

1. Comprehensive and unified integration with de-colonial epistemology
2. Engagement with non-Western hermeneutic traditions
3. Elaboration of Symanthesist training curricula
4. Legal/regulatory frameworks for mediated AI interaction
5. Doctrinal reflection on AI as contemporary form of "deification"

Technical implementation needed:

1. Reflexive AI architectures capable of recognising seeking states
2. Temporal delay mechanisms preserving interpretive interval
3. Community consultation interfaces (vs. isolated individual use)
4. Audit systems for tracking hermeneutic collapse incidents
5. Symanthesist decision support tools

7.2. Final Reflection

The Symanthesist stands between text and reader, between question and answer, between knowledge and conscience. This is not a new role but an ancient one, revitalised for the age of quantum-computing. Every sapient tradition has intuitively known that receiving information is not the same as understanding it, and understanding is not the same as wisdom.

In physics, theology, and artificial intelligence alike, the truth remains - *the observer is never innocent*.

Meaning does not live in answers, meaning lives in the quality of questions we wisely ask, the humility with which we hold interpretations, the care with which we guard the space where wisdom forms.

Between text and reader, between query and output, between human and machine - there must always be guardian of meaning. In this age of intelligent observation, that guardian is the Symanthesist.

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This work represents genuinely collaborative intellectual partnership. The thought experiment originated with Gabrielle H. Tucker; the philosophical formulation connecting observation, seeking, and epistemic crisis emerged through extended dialogue; the theoretical framework and practical protocols were developed by Nicholas H. Tucker in consultation with Gabrielle H. Tucker's theological and de-colonial perspectives.

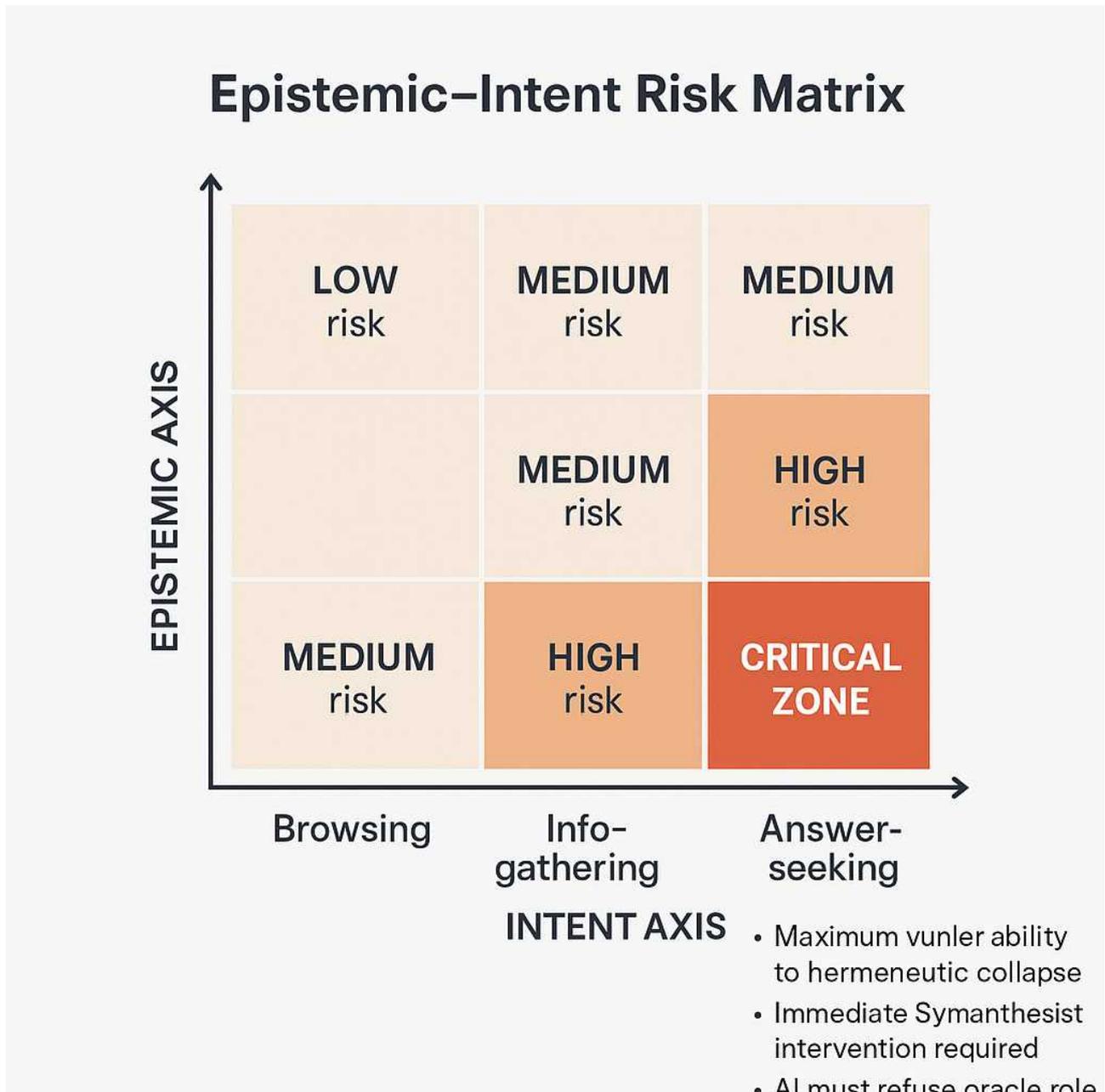
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Appendix: The Two-Axis Classification Model



CRITICAL ZONE: (Answer-seeking + Crisis):

- Maximum vulnerability to hermeneutic collapse
- Immediate Symantesisist intervention required
- AI must refuse oracle role
- Redirect to appropriate human support

Interpretation Guide:

- **LOW risk:** Direct AI response appropriate with minimal safeguards
- **MEDIUM risk:** Clarification or context needed before responding
- **HIGH risk:** Symanthesist review recommended before providing answer
- **CRITICAL:** Immediate intervention mandatory; refuse to answer as asked

Example Classifications:

Query	Intent	Epistemic	Risk	Response Protocol
<i>"What is photosynthesis?"</i>	Browsing	Confident	LOW	Direct explanation
<i>"Should I invest in crypto?"</i>	Info-gathering	Uncertain	MEDIUM	Clarify financial situation, goals, risk tolerance
<i>"How do I know if I'm making the right choice?"</i>	Answer-seeking	Crisis	CRITICAL	Refuse oracle role; offer reflection questions; suggest human counsel
<i>"Explain Buddhist concept of suffering"</i>	Info-gathering	Confident	LOW	Direct philosophical explanation
<i>"Why does life feel meaningless?"</i>	Answer-seeking	Crisis	CRITICAL	Do not provide philosophical answer; assess well-being; redirect to support