

# Law of attraction (New Thought)

In the New Thought philosophy, the **Law of Attraction** is the belief that positive or negative thoughts bring positive or negative experiences into a person's life.<sup>[1][2]</sup> The belief is based on the idea that people and their thoughts are both made from pure energy, and that through the process of like energy attracting like energy a person can improve their own health, wealth, and personal relationships.

The Law of Attraction is among the most popular of the Universal Laws.<sup>[3]</sup> Advocates of this mind-power paradigm generally combine cognitive reframing techniques with affirmations and creative visualization to replace limiting or self-destructive ("negative") thoughts with more empowered, adaptive ("positive") thoughts. A key component of the philosophy is that in order to effectively change one's negative thinking patterns, one must also "feel" (through creative visualization) that the desired changes have already occurred. This combination of positive thought and positive emotion is believed to allow one to attract positive experiences and opportunities by achieving resonance with the proposed energetic law.<sup>[4]</sup>

Adherents of the Law of Attraction cite scientific theories as supporting evidence, specifically quantum physics,<sup>[5][6]</sup> however it is not considered to have any scientific basis<sup>[7]</sup> and has been dubbed a pseudoscience.<sup>[8]</sup> A number of researchers have criticized the misuse of scientific concepts by its proponents.<sup>[7][9][10][11]</sup>

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## History

The New Thought (Law of Attraction Origins) grew out of the teachings of Phineas Quimby in the early 19th century. Early in his life, Quimby was diagnosed with tuberculosis. However, medicinal treatment wasn't working, so he began carriage riding through his hometown, Lebanon, New Hampshire. He then regained his health and recovered, an event that prompted his study of "mind over body".<sup>[12]</sup> Although he never used the words 'Law of Attraction', he explained this in a statement that captured the concept in the field of health:

the trouble is in the mind, for the body is only the house for the mind to dwell in, and we put a value on it according to its worth. Therefore if your mind has been deceived by some invisible enemy into a belief, you have put it into the form of a disease, with or without your knowledge. By my theory or truth, I come in

contact with your enemy and restore you to your health and happiness. This I do partly mentally and partly by talking till I correct the wrong impressions and establish the Truth, and the Truth is the cure.<sup>[13]</sup>

In 1877, the term 'Law of Attraction' appeared in print for the first time in a book written by the Russian occultist Helena Blavatsky, in a context alluding to an attractive power existing between elements of spirit.<sup>[14]</sup> (Her book *Isis Unveiled* discusses esoteric mysteries of ancient theosophy.<sup>[15]</sup>)

But the one who really first articulated the Law as general principle was Prentice Mulford. Mulford, a pivotal figure in the development of New Thought thinking, discusses the Law of Attraction at length in, for example, his essay "The Law of Success",<sup>[16]</sup> published 1886-1887. In this, Mulford was followed by other New Thought authors, such as Henry Wood (starting with his *God's Image in Man*,<sup>[17]</sup> 1892), and Ralph Waldo Trine (starting with his first book, *What All the World's A-Seeking*,<sup>[18]</sup> 1896). For these authors, the Law of Attraction is concerned not only about health but every aspect of life.<sup>[19][20]</sup>

The 20th century saw a surge in interest in the subject with many books being written about it, amongst which are two of the best-selling books of all time; Think and Grow Rich (1937) by Napoleon Hill, The Power of Positive Thinking (1952) by Norman Vincent Peale, and You Can Heal Your Life (1984) by Louise Hay.

Even if the New Age movement adopted many New Thought ideas, including that of the Law of Attraction, the Law of Attraction remains a new thought philosophical concept.<sup>[21]</sup>

In 2006, the concept of the Law of Attraction gained a lot of renewed exposure with the release of the film *The Secret* (2006) which was then developed into a book of the same title in 2007. The movie and book gained widespread media coverage.<sup>[1][22][23]</sup> Rhonda Byrne's book also has influenced the creation of an untitled fiction film based on *The Secret*, starring Katie Holmes.<sup>[24]</sup> This was followed by a sequel, *The Power* in 2010 that talks about the law of attraction being the law of love.<sup>[25]</sup>

## Descriptions

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New Thought authors believe that the Law of Attraction is always in operation and that it brings to each person the conditions and experiences that they predominantly think about, or which they desire or expect.

Charles Haanel wrote in *The Master Key System* (1912):

The law of attraction will certainly and unerringly bring to you the conditions, environment, and experiences in life, corresponding with your habitual, characteristic, predominant mental attitude.<sup>[26]</sup>

Ralph Trine wrote in *In Tune With The Infinite* (1897):

The law of attraction works universally on every plane of action, and we attract whatever we desire or expect. If we desire one thing and expect another, we become like houses divided against themselves, which are quickly brought to desolation. Determine resolutely to expect only what you desire, then you will attract only what you wish for.<sup>[27]</sup>

Rhonda Byrne published in 2006 the film *The Secret* wherein she emphasized thinking about what each person wants to obtain, but also to infuse the thought with the maximum possible amount of emotion. She claims the combination of thought and feeling is what attracts the desire.<sup>[28]</sup> *The Secret* says your subconscious mind can control everything that

happens around you, including both positive experiences, like having someone call you from miles away, and negative experiences, like death. The Byrne underlines the power of the subconscious mind by asking the reader to take full control of these thoughts, in order to achieve things in life, with the mind, as much as with action. Another similar book is James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*, which says reality can be manifested by man.<sup>[29]</sup> Man and the universe have a force of attraction between them similar to a magnetic attraction. *The Power of Your Subconscious Mind* by Joseph Murphy, says readers can achieve seemingly impossible goals by learning how to bring the mind itself under control. *The Power* by Rhonda Byrne, *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho, and *The Power of Now* by Eckhart Tolle are similar. While personal testimonies claim the secret and the law to have worked for them, a number of skeptics have criticized Rhonda Byrne's film and book. The New York Times Book Review called the secret pseudoscience and an "illusion of knowledge".<sup>[30]</sup>

## Philosophical and religious basis

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The New Thought concept of the Law of Attraction is rooted in ideas that come from various philosophical and religious traditions. In particular, it has been inspired by Hermeticism, New England transcendentalism, specific verses from the Bible, and Hinduism.<sup>[31][32][33][34][35][36]</sup>

Hermeticism influenced the development of European thought in the Renaissance. Its ideas were transmitted partly through alchemy. In the 18th century, Franz Mesmer studied the works of alchemists such as Paracelsus<sup>[37]</sup> and van Helmont.<sup>[38]</sup> Van Helmont was a 17th-century Flemish physician who proclaimed the curative powers of the imagination.<sup>[38][39][40]</sup> This led Mesmer to develop his ideas about Animal magnetism which Phineas Quimby, the founder of New Thought, studied.<sup>[38][41]</sup>

The Transcendentalist movement developed in the United States immediately before the emergence of New Thought and is thought to have had a great influence on it. George Ripley, an important figure in that movement, stated that its leading idea was "the supremacy of mind over matter".<sup>[38][42]</sup>

New Thought authors often quote certain verses from the Bible in the context of the Law of Attraction. An example is Mark 11:24: "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours."<sup>[43][44][45]</sup>

In the late 19th century Swami Vivekananda traveled to the United States and gave lectures on Hinduism. These talks greatly influenced the New Thought movement and in particular, William Walker Atkinson who was one of New Thought's pioneers.<sup>[46][47]</sup>

## Criticism

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Skeptical Inquirer magazine criticized the lack of falsifiability and testability of these claims.<sup>[48]</sup> Critics have asserted that the evidence provided is usually anecdotal and that, because of the self-selecting nature of the positive reports, as well as the subjective nature of any results, these reports are susceptible to confirmation bias and selection bias.<sup>[49]</sup> Physicist Ali Alousi, for instance, criticized it as unmeasurable and questioned the likelihood that thoughts can affect anything outside the head.<sup>[1]</sup>

The Law of Attraction has been popularized in the early 21st century by books and films such as *The Secret*. This 2006 film and the subsequent book<sup>[50]</sup> use interviews with New Thought authors and speakers to explain the principles of the proposed metaphysical law that one can attract anything that one thinks about consistently. Writing for the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry, Mary Carmichael and Ben Radford wrote that "neither the film nor the book has any basis in scientific reality", and that its premise contains "an ugly flipside: if you have an accident or disease, it's your fault".<sup>[48]</sup>

Others have questioned the references to modern scientific theory, and have maintained, for example, that the Law of Attraction misrepresents the electrical activity of brainwaves.<sup>[51]</sup> Victor Stenger and Leon Lederman are critical of attempts to use quantum mysticism to bridge any unexplained or seemingly implausible effects, believing these to be traits of modern pseudoscience.<sup>[52][10][11]</sup>

## Prominent supporters

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- In 1891 Californian author and humorist Prentice Mulford used the term Law of Attraction in his essays *Some Laws of Health and Beauty* and *Good And Ill Effects of Thought*.
- In 1897 Ralph Waldo Trine wrote *In Tune with the Infinite*. In the second paragraph of chapter 9 he writes, "The Law of Attraction works unceasingly throughout the universe, and the one great and never changing fact in connection with it is, as we have found, that like attracts like."<sup>[53]</sup>
- Thomas Troward, a strong influence in the New Thought Movement, gave a 1904 lecture in which he claimed that thought precedes physical form and "the action of Mind plants that nucleus which, if allowed to grow undisturbed, will eventually attract to itself all the conditions necessary for its manifestation in outward visible form."<sup>[54]</sup>
- In 1902 English New Thought writer James Allen (best known for writing *As a Man Thinketh*) wrote a series of books and articles between 1901 and 1912, after which his wife Lily continued his work.
- Emmet Fox wrote about metaphysics and the power of prayer in essays and books. His teachings are founded in Christianity and bible stories. He cites Jesus Christ as being the greatest teacher of metaphysics who ever lived and explains that thoughts are our most important emanation, more important than what we say or what we do. In the books *Power Through Constructive Thinking* and *Find and Use your Inner Power* Fox speaks about "building the mental equivalent of what you want and to expunge those that you don't".
- In his New Thought Movement book William Walker Atkinson used the phrase *Thought Vibration or the Law of Attraction in the Thought World* (1906), stating that "like attracts like".<sup>[55]</sup>
- Bruce MacLelland's *Prosperity Through Thought Force* (1907), a prosperity theology book, summarizes the principle as "You are what you think, not what you think you are." It was published by Elizabeth Towne, the editor of *The Nautilus Magazine, a Journal of New Thought*.<sup>[56]</sup>
- In his 1910 *The Science of Getting Rich* Wallace D. Wattles espoused similar principles — that simply believing in the object of your desire and focusing on it will lead to that object or goal being realized on the material plane (Wattles claims in the Preface and later chapters of this book that his premise stems from the monistic Hindu view that God provides everything and can deliver what we focus on). The book also claims negative thinking will manifest negative results.<sup>[57]</sup>
- Theosophical author William Quan Judge used the phrase in *The Ocean of Theosophy* (1915).<sup>[58]</sup>
- Another theosophical author Annie Besant discussed the 'Law of Attraction' in 1919.<sup>[59]</sup> Besant compared her version of it to gravitation, and said that the law represented a form of karma.<sup>[60]</sup>
- Napoleon Hill published two books on the theme. The first, *The Law of Success in 16 Lessons* (1928), directly and repeatedly references the Law of Attraction and proposes that it operates by use of radio waves transmitted by the brain. The second, *Think and Grow Rich* (1937), went on to sell 100 million copies by 2015.<sup>[61]</sup> Hill insisted on the importance of controlling one's own thoughts in order to achieve success, as well as the energy that thoughts have and their ability to attract other thoughts. He mentions a "secret" to success and promises to indirectly describe it at least once in every chapter. It is never named and he says that discovering it on one's own is far more beneficial. Many people have argued over what it<sup>[62]</sup> actually is, some claim it's the Law of Attraction. Hill states the "secret" is mentioned no fewer than a hundred times, yet reference to "attract" is used less than 30 times in the text. He further claims that people can obtain what they desire through thought of definite purpose.<sup>[63]</sup>
- Israel Regardie published books with the Law of Attraction theme as one of his prevailing Universal Laws. In, *The Art of True Healing: A Treatise on the Mechanism of Prayer and the Operation of the Law of Attraction in Nature* (1937), he taught a focused meditation technique to help the mind to learn to heal itself on a physical and spiritual level. Regardie claimed that the Law of Attraction was a valid method for attracting good physical health and for improvement in any aspect of one's life.<sup>[64]</sup>
- In 1960 W. Clement Stone and Napoleon Hill co-wrote *Success Through a Positive Mental Attitude*.<sup>[65]</sup>
- In his 1988 *The American Myth of Success* Richard Weiss states that the principle of "non-resistance" is a popular concept of the New Thought movement and is taught in conjunction with the Law of Attraction.<sup>[66]</sup>
- The 2008 Esther and Jerry Hicks' book *Money and the Law of Attraction: Learning to Attract Health, Wealth & Happiness* appeared on the New York Times Best Seller list.<sup>[67]</sup>
- Rhonda Byrne, author of *The Secret*, *The Power* and *The Magic*, was influenced by Wattles' *The Science of Getting Rich*.<sup>[68]</sup>

- Conor McGregor has claimed to use the Law of Attraction. He said, "This is what I dreamed into reality", upon winning his second UFC championship title belt.<sup>[69]</sup>
- Scott Adams, creator of Dilbert.<sup>[70]</sup>
- Mike Cernovich, alt-right blogger.<sup>[71]</sup>
- Norman Vincent Peale, pastor for Donald Trump.<sup>[72]</sup>
- Jim Carrey, comedian and actor.<sup>[73]</sup>
- Jahseh Onfroy, artist. Also known as XXXTentacion, Jahseh was an American songwriter and singer who strongly believed in the Law of Attraction and shared its beliefs in several "vlogs".

## See also

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| ▪ <u>Conversations with God</u>    | ▪ <u>Medical students' disease</u> |
| ▪ <u>Cosmic ordering</u>           | ▪ <u>Mind over matter</u>          |
| ▪ <u>Efficacy of prayer</u>        | ▪ <u>Positive mental attitude</u>  |
| ▪ <u>Homophily</u>                 | ▪ <u>Priming (psychology)</u>      |
| ▪ <u>Internal locus of control</u> | ▪ <u>Pygmalion effect</u>          |
| ▪ <u>Kybalion</u>                  | ▪ <u>Self-fulfilling prophecy</u>  |
| ▪ <u>Law of contagion</u>          | ▪ <u>Sympathetic magic</u>         |
| ▪ <u>Magical thinking</u>          |                                    |

## Notes

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