

# Thinking about Social Phenomena

## *Constructing Puzzles*



*Lecture dt. Jan 23, 2020*

# Magical thinking



'Illusion is the first of all pleasures'

--*Voltaire*

# Magical thinking

The tendency to believe that we can influence the outcome, even when it is out of our control

*e.g. I believe I am lucky. Buy a lottery ticket, spend x amount of money (cost to oneself).*

*Either I (realistically) wait for the outcome or (unrealistically) begin to spend money before the result is out.*

# Magical thinking

- *I believe vaccines are harmful. No counter evidence convinces me.*

[i.e. ignoring evidence]. **Confirmation bias.** Or, I abstain from sources giving counter evidence. **Self-deception.** Belief comes first, behaviour later.

- *Someone in college is ignoring me. I conclude he/she does not like me.*

# Magical thinking

- I hurt someone. I blame them for making me hurt them.

**Rationalization** (justification) of one's behaviour.

Behaviour comes first, belief later.

# Monday's puzzle

People rarely admit, to themselves and others, that they are ignorant.

*Explain the theoretical basis and mechanism.*

# Monday's puzzle

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- What are the components of the puzzle?
- Plausible explanation/hypothesis (what?)
- Mechanism (why?)

# Monday's puzzle

People rarely admit, to themselves and others, that they are ignorant.

- What are the components of the puzzle?
  - Ignorance to oneself; to others
- Plausible explanation/hypothesis (what?)
  - Admitting a mistake painful (to oneself)
  - Pride in appearing rational (to others)
- Mechanism (why?)
  - Intolerance of uncertainty; pattern-seeking



## Essay: deadline Thu, 6 Feb 2020

1. You are part of a group protesting on campus. You demand a change in University policy which could positively impact all students. Your friend is part of another group that opposes the protest. This group believes that protesting would make no difference. This conflict persuades a professor to present two research papers to both groups: one showing the positive effects of protests on policy, the other showing negative effects. In your opinion, how would your group and your friend's group assess the findings? Make a theoretically informed argument. Use examples.

OR

2. I am deeply motivated to do something. I, therefore, act on my motivation and do it. Would you agree with these statements? Discuss, giving examples.