

# *Magical Thinking*

*Are we hard-wired for superstition?*



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*Would you ...*

*Would you ...*

*wear your grandpa's sweatshirt?*



*Would you ...*

*wear a serial killer's sweatshirt?*



*Would you ...*

*eat organic, grass-fed beef?*



*Would you ...*

*eat lab-grown meat?*



*Would you ...*

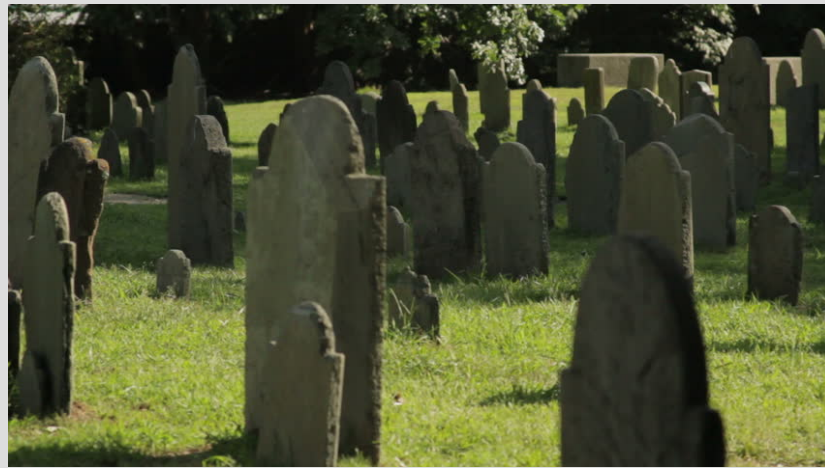
*visit the grave site of a loved one?*





*Would you ...*

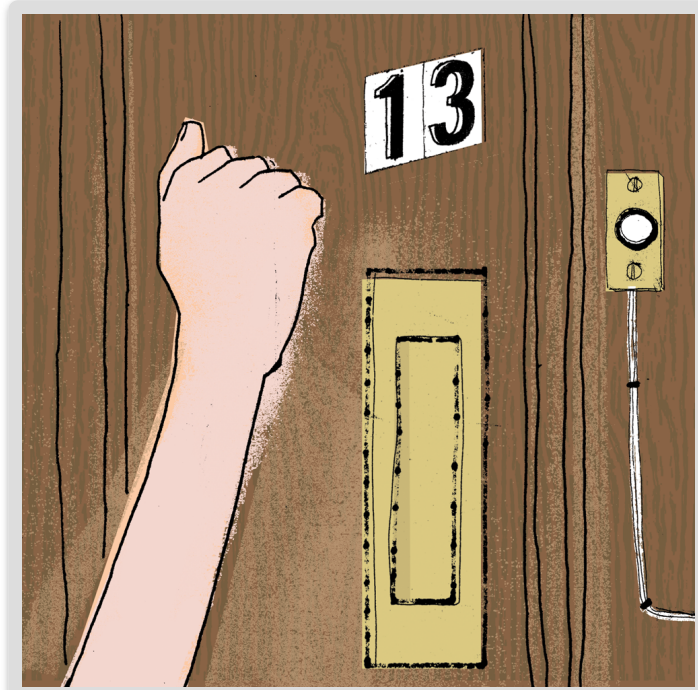
*sleep in an old graveyard?*





*Would you ...*

*knock on wood to avoid bad things happening?*



*Would you ...*

*use a Ouija board?*



# *Approaches to magical thinking*

## ***Embrace it:***

- "The world just is full of magic!"

## ***Dismiss it:***

- "It's nonsense, who are you kidding?"

## ***Tolerate it:***

- "It might work for you even if it doesn't work for me."

## ***Try to explain it:***

- "It shows us something about how the mind works."

# *Elements of magical thinking*

## ***Essentialism***

- Certain things have a fixed inner nature that explains what they do.

## ***Words and thoughts have power***

- Language, thoughts and symbols can make stuff happen in the world directly.

## ***Agents are everywhere***

- Disembodied spirits, ghosts, divine minds, etc. are always watching and might do things at any moment.

# *Essentialism*

- Some things have essential, permanent features built-in to them.
- These "essences" determine how things behave, and what their "natural place" in the order of things is and should be.
- It is *wrong* to treat things differently than what their essence demands.



*Is this a side-effect of our capacity to categorize things and form concepts?*

## *Words and thoughts have power*

- Words, symbols and thoughts can have a direct influence on events in the real world.
- Words and thoughts can evoke the dead, cause good or bad things to happen, counteract or enhance the effects of other words.
- Symbols and symbolic objects can influence events from a distance.



*Is this a result of our taking literally the power of language and symbolism to suggest and evoke ideas?*

## *Agents are everywhere*

- There are hidden beings with minds all over the place.
- Nothing happens by chance and everything happens for a reason.
- Hidden agents create and maintain order, administer justice, help or hinder our plans.



*Is this a side-effect of our hyper-developed social minds, coupled with a bias towards paranoia?*



# find out more

The Psychology of Magical Thinking

Why magical thinking works for some people

Essentialism in everyday thought



*Johannes Plenio*

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