PYDI 2710 3. Magical Thinking



Are we hard-wired for superstition?



George Matthews, Plymouth State University $2020 \label{eq:2020}$

Would you ...

wear your granpdpa'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?



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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:

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

Elements of magical thinking

Essentialism

 $\circ\,$ Certain things have a fixed inner nature that explains what they do.

Words and thoughts have power

 $\circ\,$ 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" dtermine how things behave, and what their "natural place" in the order of things is and should be.
- $\circ\,$ 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?

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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

- $\circ\,$ There are hidden beings with minds all over the place.
- $\circ\,$ 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

