











# 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:

o "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**

- $\circ~$  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.
- $\circ\,$  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?

## 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.

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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.
- Nothing happens by chance and everything happens for a reason.
- Hidden agents create and maintain order, administer justice, help or hinder our plans.

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