

Magical Thinking

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Abstract

Magical thinking within the brain is critical to understanding many areas of science, ranging from political science to astrophysics.

Beyond Las Vegas magical acts, most people give little thought to magical thought itself, or illusions thereof. However, this deep mental phenomenon is central to who we are, and how we got here as a species. Magical thought is also a hidden component inside most scientific projections of the future. Magical thinking is integral to cultural and political history, and it is here today as it was long ago. In the medieval era, for example, science was magic, and magic was science.

This essay explores how we can perceive things subconsciously through the filter of magic, even when we are trying to be clear and conscious. Our future as humans in the anthropocene world of our own making depends on separating what actually works from what seemingly works. So far, the best mental tools we employ to solve great challenges are often not the best.

Much of what was functional in the traditional past has become dysfunctional, whether we admit to it or not. Our collective perch atop the species hierarchy is recent and likely will be brief. The descent velocity of our species from the brilliant top down to dark oblivion may somewhat depend on how wisely we manage our natural tendencies to think magically.

Our inner-brain psyches are those of cave people living in a space-age world. Cerebral psychology within our large outer brains is reasonably plastic, but not as plastic as the dialectical “thingness” of our accelerating creations. Dangerous systemic trends and new feedback loops in the biosphere are accelerating beyond everyday consciousness. Magical minds, always looking backward, choose to depreciate what our logical minds foresee.

It has been said that all things eventually balance out. This tendency for complex systems to stabilize, or at least harmonize, is somewhat true, with key exceptions. Homeostatic balancing could be expected in a cyclical world from the past. However, any new normal henceforth for fairly stabilized systems may be quite unpleasant compared to what normally preceded the changes.

Beyond the Novel Coronavirus Challenge

We humans have recently and briefly been at “peak humanity,” but the Covid-19 crisis now challenges our peak vanities. For a few centuries the idea of linear progress, with humans at the top, has prevailed. Creatures we consider inferior have fueled our lust for perpetual dominance. Every year mindless humans “slaughter and eat several billion animals,” thinking only of them as “meat.”

SARS-CoV-2 viruses are busy hijacking our unprepared host cells for their own perpetuation. Seemingly mindless Covid-19 virus particles “slaughter and eat several billion human cells.” To these assassins our cells are just the viral version of “meat.”

In 1918-1919 there was the Spanish Flu, which killed 50 to 100 million humans.¹ Today’s novel coronavirus has the potential to equal or exceed the earlier carnage. I know at least one mass burial pit in my home town from that WWI-era disaster.

*Ask yourself how the richest, most scientifically advanced country could now have a **quarter** of all the world’s Covid-19 infections – with only **four percent** of the world’s population.* In contrast, there are many “lesser” countries with far fewer fatalities in total and per capita.

How and why are they doing more with less; and we are doing less with more? There is no easy way to intellectually embrace this weirdness other than to inject the force of magical thinking into our messy model.

¹ <https://astronomy-links.net/swineflubirdflu.pdf>

Many people who live in today's technologically modern society arrogantly *assume* they are "scientifically literate" just by *cultural osmosis*, and thereby superior to lesser people elsewhere who rely on imagined tribal myths. Science fiction stories with happy endings are more popular in America than real science. Cultural arrogance among the prejudiced millions allows many to overlook or discount their own tribal and clan myths, and to shun to their peril inconvenient wise voices of science and humanism.

Glib would-be dictators and their cynical enablers sense the intellectual laziness among millions of Americans who are happy consuming pseudoscience. Tropes from America's unresolved slavery past are fecklessly fed to fearful minds.² The poison potion is now complete. Instead of governing with humane policies, zombie policy prevails.

Craven politicians and their spineless enablers, all powered by fundamental darkness, now facilitate early death for thousands of "undesirables" and elderly citizens. The new white nationalist kill strategy outsources *with plausible denial* what the rabid Nazis did to demonize and then fumigate their foes. Nowadays the killing "gas chambers" are outsourced Covid-19 viruses. You know real demonology is in control when demons call their victims demons.

Mysticism and Magic

It is easy to confuse magic and mysticism. However, they are not very similar. Magic that we enjoy has a winking component. When we are at a Las Vegas show we enjoy the illusions while we *consciously suspend* our doubt, and take in the show as amazing magic. We knew up front there would be occult tricks.

Vegas magic is *not* the pernicious sort of mental magic that many follow without questioning. Whereas we all wink at Vegas magic, our lower brains allow us to *uncritically* process magical lies with evil intent that we imagine will benefit our clan.

² <https://astronomy-links.net/FirstScientificExperiment.pdf>

Theological mysticism is at the core of many world religions. Some great religions rely on mysticism more than others, but there is always a reverence toward the mystical. The bridge between pure mysticism and “mystical scripture” for daily living involves some sort of magic. That form of magic often involves ritual manipulation to influence the gods. Priests, preachers, and assorted shamans are embraced globally as key intermediaries between laypeople and the mystical divine.

The German medieval theologian, Meister Eckhart, said that you “should never pray for any transitory thing: but if you would pray for anything, you should pray for God’s will alone and nothing else, and then you get everything. If you pray for anything else, you will get nothing.”³ This clear lesson was his Christian way of saying that proper prayer is not a form of manipulative magic, but a mystical communication with God.

Eckhart also noted that God is greater than our God. In other words, we can never know in what form is the ultimate mystical majesty. It follows that we can never hope to manipulate with magic something far beyond our understanding.

Science and Magic

In many respects *experimental science* has not emerged from magic. Overeducated scientists hate to admit they don’t really know how things work beyond the everyday. Magical maths and methods have provided scientists the dual illusions of certainty and ritual. As long as experimental results *appear to correlate* with pet theories – it hardly matters that real correlation may follow completely different *causal* models.

Theoretical science also has a deep connection with magic. Non-experimental science can be amusing, and I have written several essays dealing in part with their mansions in the sky. Mansions can be magnificent, if you don’t look out and down.

³ <https://www.eckhartsociety.org/eckhart/his-teachings>

Experimental and theoretical scientific questions have a way of extending beyond experimental boundaries and our constrained powers of theoretical proof. Modern scientists are tempted to *prematurely* elevate working hypotheses into grand proofs or laws, such as General Relativity.

Elite forms of folly surely follow when pure math leads to tidy absurdity. The best example is string theory and its ideas of truly vast numbers of mathematically possible universes. Closely allied are clueless claims that we all live in a 2D holographic universe. Such silliness will lead nowhere toward knowledge of all that is.

The proper path in science is similar to the proper path in religion. Keep searching, while never accepting that we fully know what we may think we know. To some degree we can define as working hypotheses unknowns within our *as-if* knowns. Alas, we can't in any way perceive the real unknowns within the unknowns. All types of scientific magic are thereby ultimately constrained by pure mysticism.

Several books could be written on things mentioned herein, but hardly anybody reads books for wisdom. Most people read just enough to reinforce their prejudices and self-illusions, or to make more money. Therein lies the real power of social media.

Magical prejudice is more fun when you can vividly imagine, however briefly, that you and your clan *deserve* from birth to sit on top of the magical heap.⁴

Problem is, many people just below you inside the heap think likewise. Here is the formula for endless social turmoil, until our vain and quarrelsome species has self-destructed.

⁴ <https://astronomy-links.net/Mystical.law.and.science.pdf>