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Positioning Magic in Theory and in American Religion

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Abstract

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This thesis explores magic as a theoretical category within the field of religious studies. Anthropological scholarship of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has described magic as different than religion or science. This scholarship also often carries Protestant or evolutionist bias in its construction of magic. In my first chapter, I analyze the works of theorists like E.B. Tylor, Émile Durkheim, and Bronislaw Malinowski. By comparing the works of these theorists and others, I outline several key elements associated with magic: the relationship between sacred and technical elements, the role of magicians, and magic's ability to provide comfort in times of unknowing. This thesis also positions magic in American history by exploring the function of healing rituals within nineteenth century American Spiritualism. In my second chapter, I argue that Spiritualism provided a magical approach of healing, different from that of regular medicine, by focusing on comfort and optimism as well as human divinity and agency in the healing process. Medical mediums used their ability to communicate with spirits to diagnose and treat illnesses. The Spiritualists positioned themselves as an alternative to regular medicine and Protestantism. They rebelled against the Protestant constructions of death and salvation. By using Max Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism,* my third chapter argues that the Puritans actively eliminated and demonized magic because they believed it opposed the doctrine of predestination. I explore Weber's theories of rationalization and the elimination of magic, and argue that magic is not incompatible with rationalization. Instead, disenchantment represents the demonization of magical beliefs. Spiritualism suggests that magic was not eliminated from white, Protestant, American culture. Instead, Spiritualism reflects a need for magic; the Spiritualists responded to this need by re-opening a magical path to salvation and healing closed by Protestantism and regular medicine. This suggests that the dominance of religion and science, rather than suppressing magic, can fuel its development.

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Table of Contents

Chapter One: The Construction of Magic

This project arose as an attempt to better understand and reconsider the category of

magic. In religious studies and its sister disciplines like anthropology, sociology, and philosophy,

the attempt to classify beliefs and rituals into magic or religion has produced a wide variety of

theory. While the social pervasiveness of religion leaves academics searching for a

comprehensive definition, magic remains easy to ignore until one is immediately confronted with

its proximity to religion. Magic is also intimately tied to another social force equally powerful as

religion: science. Magical practices have long been considered pragmatic attempts to manipulate

natural forces, which has lead theorists to identify magic as a pseudo-science. The attempts to

differentiate magic from religion or science have often resulted in an evolutionary scheme of

human progress, with magic representing a primitive state of belief and action. The following

chapter will consider different theoretical models of magic and attempt to identify its key

elements, with a focus on historical lineage, function, and societal position.

Anthropologist Stanley Tambiah traces the intellectual history of the analytical categories

magic, *science*, and *religion*, in order to abandon the evolutionist scheme and highlight the true

value of these categories. He begins his lineage of thought with the Ancient Israelite's

conception of magic. Early biblical religion distinguished between monotheism and paganism,

largely on the lines of transcendence versus immanence. It contrasted the supreme nature of

YHWH with the pagan gods who were understood through idols and myths. Pagan gods were

bonded to nature, while YHWH created the natural world without remaining present within it.

The Bible "places a relentless ban on 'magic' (as a form of causal action to manipulate God)

under pain of death"[1] because it challenges the YHWH's authority as the creator of morality and punishment. Any attempt at defining a causal relationship between man and God represents magic, not religion. The Bible recognizes the efficacy of pagan magic, but still condemns it as false religion. Tambiah suggests that the early Biblical construction of magic has had lasting effects on Western thought. He summarizes:

> Magic is ritual action that is held to be automatically effective, and ritual action that dabbles with forces and objects that are outside the scope, or independent, of the gods. Magical acts in their ideal forms are thought to have an intrinsic and automatic efficacy.[2]

Due to its automatism, magic represents a rejection of monotheism. It challenges the authority of God by using rituals to achieve pragmatic ends. These rituals are powerful in their own right, not because they appropriate divine power. As Tambiah notes, the Bible seems to recognize the power, and perhaps even truth, of magic, while still declaring it morally wrong.

Tambiah locates the construction of magic found in the Bible as key in formulating the relationship between magic and religion in Western thought. He suggests that it was the Ancient Greeks who established the lasting connection between magic and science. Although the Greeks did not yet have a term or concept of science equivalent to our current one, they were familiar with magic. Furthermore, it appears that they questioned magical beliefs in favor of more rational ones. Tambiah highlights a Greek medical text that explicitly declared certain beliefs to be magical. The text, *On the Sacred Diseases,* was written about epilepsy around the beginning of the fourth century B.C.E. It rejects divine intervention as a magical understanding of disease,

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[1] Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah, <u>Magic, Science, Religion, and the Scope of Rationality</u>, *The Lewis Henry Morgan Lectures*, 1990, 7.
[2] Tambiah, 7.

and instead argues for a more naturalistic explanation. For the early Greeks, magic and science attempt to answer the same questions, but magic uses "supernatural" instead of "natural" explanations. Tambiah suggests that the Greeks designated magic as a "proto-science," but did not consider religion to be a challenge to science: "indeed among these Greeks the 'divinity of nature' was taken for granted and was not a matter for disputation."[3] They accepted a sense of pervasive divinity that existed in nature, but this did not constitute a challenge to science and empiricism.

For both the Ancient Israelites and Greeks, magic is defined as a practice similar to religion or science, but a weaker, more suspect form. These pre-modern conceptions of magic are an essential component in the genealogy of magic. However, for the remainder of this chapter I will examine constructions of magic following the Protestant Reformation, focusing primarily on nineteenth and twentieth century scholars. At the close of my study I will explore the relationship between Protestantism and magic more closely, but a brief survey of the historical trends and theories will be useful at this point. In *The Protestant Work Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber makes his seminal argument that Puritan values of personal asceticism and work in a vocational calling quelled anxieties about one's status among the elect, and ultimately gave rise to the economic system of capitalism. The Protestant Reformation also strengthened the Scientific Revolution. Protestant values of rationalism and empiricism were compatible with the new scientific paradigms developed in seventeenth-century Europe. As Protestantism aligned itself with science and capitalism, it distanced itself from magic. To push back against Catholic rites and indulgences, Protestant theologians condemned magic as an

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[3] Tambiah, 11

attempt to manipulate divine authority. Magic was not only defined as false religion, but also inefficacious action, since God's will cannot be controlled.[4]

The Protestant construction of magic influenced the work of early anthropologists of religion, such as Victorian theorists Sir Edward Tylor and Sir James Frazer. Tylor argues that magic is a barbarous practice, and that any magical arts practiced in modern Europe are survivals from a more primitive past that will ultimately disappear. He says that magic exists because of mistaken causal relations, suggesting that magic is always false and unsuccessful. Magicians trick their clients into believing that their pseudo-scientific rituals have been effective. Tambiah summarizes Tylor's argument:

> The magician is extraordinarily resourceful in the use of conjuring skills, sleight of hand, rhetoric and impudence (i.e. he has the communicative skills of an impresario). He deals in ambiguous phrases, vague diagnoses and predictions, such that most outcomes can be retrospectively interpreted as fulfillments.[5]

Tylor suggests that magic cannot stand the test of empirical studies, but that practitioners manipulate believers with a calculated vagueness so that all outcomes are rendered as successful magic. He constructs magicians as cheats who do not practice an art or ritual that has any legitimate cultural value or function.

Frazer follows Tylor's construction of magic as a failed science. Furthering Tylor's theory that magic is an "association of ideas," Frazer creates the categories "sympathetic magic" and "contagious magic" to explain how magical beliefs function. He argues that magic is the precursor and the "bastard sister" of science.[6] As Tambiah suggests, his argument that magic and

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[4] Tambiah, 19.
[5] Tambiah, 46.
[6] Tambiah, 52.

science share the same goals and relation to the natural world ignores the religious and spiritual elements of magic. Frazer recognizes that magic often deals in the realm of spirits, but suggests that because magic has pragmatic ends it renders spirits as "'inanimistic agents.'"[7] Both Tylor and Frazer construct magic as lacking the legitimacy of science and the spiritual complexity of religion.

Other scholars at the turn of the twentieth century focused more on magic's relationship to religion than its failure as a science. Emile Durkheim presents magic as a problem one must consider when trying to define religion in his book *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. In this work, he proposes his theory that religions divide the world into sacred and profane things. Durkheim suggests that the core structure of religion and magic is roughly the same, since both systems have beliefs and rites concerning sacred things.[8] The forces invoked in these beliefs and rites are also roughly the same for both religion and magic.[9] Furthermore, like religion, magic "has its own myths and dogmas, but these are less well developed, probably because, given its pursuit of technical and utilitarian ends, magic does not waste times in pure speculation."[10] Durkheim suggests that magic lacks a fully formed belief system because of its technical focus. Despite magic's shallow nature, Durkheim maintains that it is almost inseparable from religion. However, he suggests that the two must be distinguished because of mutual repugnance.[11] According to Durkheim, religion despises magic just as magic does religion. Therefore, a difference must exist between the two systems, since they have made an internal effort to

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[7] James Frazer, cited by Tambiah, 52.
[8] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, ed. Karen E (Karen Elise) Fields, *Religious Life* (New York: New York : Free Press, 1995), 39.
[9] Durkheim, 40.
[10] Durkheim, 39.
[11] Durkheim, 40.

distinguish themselves. As a solution, Durkheim proposes that only religion has a moral community: "*There is no church of magic.*"[12] A sense of membership and unity to a group that shares beliefs and rites is an essential qualifier for religions in Durkheim's definition. He suggests that instead of having a church, magic has a magician-client relationship: "The magician has clientele, not a Church, and his clients may have no mutual relations, and may even be unknown to one another."[13] Durkheim circles back to his argument that magic is primarily utilitarian. Magicians serve individual needs. Although magicians may use collective beliefs in their work, magic as a system fails to establish a community of believers and practitioners.

Like Durkheim, Marcel Mauss grapples with the similarity of magic and religion. In his book *A General Theory of Magic*, Mauss suggests that at the core of all rituals is the idea of the sacred, or things set apart.[14] Therefore, magical rites must deal with the sacred in some manner, even though, as Mauss suggests, "magical rites are precisely those which, at first glance, seem to be imbued with the least magical power."[15] If magical rites deal with sacred things, then they must be rooted in social beliefs. This would suggest that magic and religion are both collective phenomenon: "We were forced to conclude, therefore, that magical practices which derive from this idea or a similar one, are social facts in the same sense that religious rites are social facts."[16] However, in the same breath Mauss rejects this possibility on the grounds that magic is an individually structured activity that happens on the fringes of society. He suggests that "either

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[12] Durkheim, 42.
[13] Durkheim, 42.
[14] Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic* (London, Boston: London, Boston : Routledge and K. Paul, 1972), 8.
[15] Mauss, 8.
[16] Mauss, 9.

magic is a collective idea or the notion of the sacred is an individual one."[18] Mauss argues that magic and religion cannot have the same relationship to a collective idea of the sacred. He seeks to show how magic mimics the social frameworks and beliefs of religion, but that it is ultimately a different entity.

Mauss identifies three unique elements of magic: officers, actions, and representations. He equates officers to magicians, actions to rites, and representations to beliefs.[19] These three elements work closely together, being almost inseparable at times: "the normal condition of magic is one involving an almost total confusion of powers and roles."[20] Religions have a systematic separation of roles, so their individual elements remain powerful out of ritual contexts.[21] The elements of magic however, are entirely interdependent. Magicians act as specialists who make magic for their believers or clients.[22] They work in isolation, without the institutional structures of religion.[23] Just as magicians make magic, rites must in themselves be productive. They are held to be creative and efficacious by definition.[24] The efficacy of magical acts must be believed by a community, otherwise they are merely individual superstitions.[25] Magical rites, like religious ones, are empowered by the collective beliefs of society: "Magic, by definition, is believed."[26] Although magicians operate individually and without institutional structure, magical rites operate within a collective framework.

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[18] Mauss, 9.
[19] Mauss, 18
[20] Mauss, 88.
[21] Mauss, 88.
[22] Mauss, 87.
[23] Mauss, 90.
[24] Mauss, 19.
[25] Mauss, 19.
[26] Mauss, 91

Mauss recognizes that there exists a vast array of magical rites, many of which closely resemble religious rites. However, he argues that "evil spells" are consistently magical, and that the prohibition of evil spells gives them their magical character.[27] Mauss associates all magic, not just dark magic, with a sense of illicitness. Magic is either done in secret, or efforts are made to maintain an esoteric power if the rite is carried out publically. This differentiates magic from religion, which Mauss considers to be inherently public. Mauss' provisional definition of magical acts goes as follows: "a magical rite is *any rite which does not play a part in organized cults*— it is private, secret, mysterious and approaches the limit of a prohibited rite."[28] Here Mauss highlights the circumstances of magic, not its structure or function. Although magical rites use sacred forces just as religious ones do, magic operates without the power of an organized community. His assertion that magical rites thrive in an environment of secrecy implies that they are worthy of suspicion.

Mauss concludes his definition of magic with the idea that magicians appropriate collective belief and give it an individual form.[30] As we have established, magicians rely on collective forces to imbue magic with its creative essence: "a magician does nothing, or almost nothing, but makes everyone believe that he is doing everything, and all the more so since he puts to work collective forces and ideas to help the individual imagination in its belief."[31] Magicians use collective belief in isolation and secrecy. Magical rites are so anti-social that they near prohibition. For this reason, Mauss concludes that magic is indeed a social phenomenon, but one that assumes an individual form.

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[27] Mauss, 22.
[28] Mauss, 24.
[30] Mauss, 142.
[31] Mauss, 142.

Bronislaw Malinowski provides a decisive exploration of magic's relationship to the sacred. Crucially, Malinowski engaged in participant observation during his fieldwork, which separates his work from the Victorian armchair anthropologists.[32] While Mauss finds magic to be an appropriation of religion's sacredness, Malinowski considers magic a fully sacred activity. In 1925, he published his book *Magic, Science and Religion*, which takes a functionalist, anti-evolutionist perspective on the three terms. Malinowski uses his field work with the Trobriand Islanders as the basis for his theory, but argues that his observations have universal application. As a functionalist, he believed that all humans are reasonable, and human behaviors are reasonable because they serve a basic need. This is the lens he uses to view magic and religion, which he considers to be in the realm of the sacred.[33] Malinowski argues that science is a profane activity, but it is not more reasonable than sacred rituals and beliefs. This construction is directly opposed to Frazer, who considered magic to be more closely related to science. While Frazer and Tylor argue that magic should disappear as more rational sciences take hold, Malinowski suggests that all societies contain magic, science, and religion.

Malinowski separates magic from religion primarily by their different functions. He argues that magic serves as a means to an end, while religion is an end in itself.[34] Implicit in this argument is the sense that magic is always intended to be productive or efficacious. Magic has a practical aim; this is something that it shares with science. However, man calls upon magic when his technical knowledge is lacking. Magic quells anxiety and relieves the emotional stress caused by situations of unknowing.[35] Tambiah argues that this psychological aspect of Malinowski's

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[32] Tambiah, 67.

[33] Bronislaw Malinowski, *Magic, Science and Religion, and Other Essays*, ed. Robert Redfield (Boston, Glencoe, Ill.: Boston, Beacon Press, 1948), 17.

[34] Malinowski, 37.

[35] Malinowski, 79-81.

theory can be easily refuted, stating that the use of magic reflects a society's social valuations and imperatives more than its anxieties.[36] I agree with Tambiah that Malinowski's hypothesis trivializes the function of magic, and that magic is more connected to complex societal relationships than it is often credited for. Nonetheless, Malinowski emphasizes an important tension between magic and science that Tambiah perhaps too easily discredits. I do not propose that magic is supplemental to science, with its utility only defined by the failure of the former. However, its performative and productive nature provides a different type of comfort than science can provide on its own. Both science and magic have practical aims, but magic is based on human emotion rather than rational observation.[37] Magic's connection to the experience of emotions gives it a unique accessibility.

Malinowski provides a great deal of information on how magical rituals function. He suggests that the three essential elements of magic are the spell, rite, and condition of the performer, with the spell being the most important, core aspect of every magical performance.[38] While religious rituals have a communal, public nature, spells define magic as secretive and belonging to a select few: "The spell is that part of magic which is occult, handed over in magical filiation, known only to the practitioner".[39] Malinowski identifies three traits that make the language of the spell effective: phonetic effects, the use of words to state a desired aim, and mythological allusions. He places a great deal of influence on language, suggesting that man is disposed to a belief in the "'mystic and binding power of words.'"[40] He argues that magical

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[36] Tambiah, 72.
[37] Malinowski, 87.
[38] Malinowski, 88.
[39] Malinowski, 73.
[40] Tambiah, 80.

language, which is sacred and "weird," differs from ordinary language, particularly the language of science.

Despite the effectiveness and power of magical words, Malinowski argues that although magic is true to believers, it is objectively false. Tambiah suggests that questioning the validity of magic falls into the same framework used by Frazer and Tylor. Still, Tambiah finds Malinowski to be highly useful in beginning to understand the linguistic and social functions of magic. Malinowski unveiled the puzzling nature of magic, its simultaneous technical and performative aspects.[41] Tambiah argues that we will be able to further understand the complicated nature of magic when "we succeed in embedding magic in a more ample theory of human life in which the path of ritual action is seen as an indispensable mode for man anywhere and everywhere of relating to and participating in the life of the world."[42] I find Tambiah's statement to be an argument for removing theories of magic from evolutionist schemes of religious development. While Malinowski comes close to proposing a theory of magic beyond the judgement of Western gaze, he falls into the same traps as his predecessors. Magic must be viewed as a legitimate way of experiencing and engaging with life, not as a mistake.

Objectivity and rationality appear as the enemy of magic in the writing covered thus far. In writing about her advisor E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Mary Douglas explains the role of magic in early anthropology:

> Magic was the one word that focused the discussion in his day. Primitives
>
> believed in magic, and we did not. Magic contrasted with the style of thought in a

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[41] As described by J.L. Austin, a performative speech act is an utterance which makes use of conventional formulae and phrasing, a first-person grammatical subject, an active indicative verb, and the word hereby. See Austin, *How to do Things with Words.*
[42] Tambiah, 83.

modern, Western-type society, technologically superior, with its knowledge of the external world soundly based on scientific principles.[43]

Western scholars viewed magic through a lens of scientific rationality. They attempted to provide rational explanations for what they deemed irrational beliefs.[44] Anthropologists like Evans-Pritchard went into their fieldwork with the presumption of a universal reality proven by rational science.[45] This construction of reality fails to consider the power of social circumstances, experiences, and embodiment. Magic's technical nature has prevented it from receiving the same treatment as religious beliefs. Even when scholars accept the culturally relative legitimacy of magical experiences and beliefs, they hold ultimately hold them to Western standards of objectivity.

To conclude my theoretical overview, I would like to briefly turn to a more recent contribution in the studies of magic. Randall Styers, much like Tambiah, considers magic as a social construction that has been used primarily as a foil of religion.[46] He suggests that our modern notion of magic has not only been defined from a Protestant worldview, but has been used to regulate piety. Styers argues that Protestant piety relies upon an absolute submission to God. Magic has come to represent the opposite of this devotion, because it is viewed as self-seeking and utilitarian.[47] Practitioners of magic seek control over supernatural powers rather than deferring to divine volition. For this reason, we have come to see magic as arrogant and immoral.

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[43] Mary Douglas, *Edward Evans-Pritchard* (London: London : Routledge, 2003), 26.
[44] Stoller, P. (1998). Rationality. In M. C. Taylor (Ed.), *Critical terms for religious studies*. (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press), 240.
[45] Stoller, 243.
[46] Randall Styers, *Making Magic : Religion, Magic, and Science in the Modern World* (New York: New York : Oxford University Press, 2004), 71.
[47] Styers, 105.

Magic does not operate on a sense of humility and fear, for magical beliefs have no understanding of sin.[48] It operates on the edges of society, in the realm of women and sexually suspect men.[49]

Styers suggests that magic has been defined solely in opposition to religion and science, rather than as a social phenomenon in itself. The main challenge of my project is to re-visit the aspects of magical theory that seek to understand it simply as a primitive religion or science. I believe there is much to be gained from the work of Frazer, Tylor, Durkheim, Mauss, and Malinowski, despite their inevitable prejudices. Using Tambiah and Styers as my guides, I attempt to formulate a working understanding of magic removed from polemic. This has encouraged me to choose American Spiritualism as my case study, due to its relative modernity and proximity to white Protestantism. In my exploration of the magical elements of Spiritualism and their relation to religion and science, I will focus on the following aspects of magic: magic as a source of comfort, magic as a technical or productive ritual, magic as performance, and the role of the magician. I find that these elements, when situated in a historical context, begin to show the essence of magic and its societal function.

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[48] Styers, 114.
[49] Styers, 118.

Chapter Two: Healing the Body and Soul: Spiritualist Healing as a Source of Comfort

Nowhere is the duality of natural and supernatural causes divided by a line so thin and

intricate, yet, if carefully followed up, so well-marked, decisive, and instructive, as in the two

most fateful forces of human destiny: health and death— Bronislaw Malinowski[50]

Spiritualists concerned themselves primarily with death by reconstructing the feared event to eliminate its finality. They believed in the immortality of the soul, and séances provided an opportunity to reconnect with the dead and prove this belief. Séances and mediumship also served as sites of healing. Despite their focus on the afterlife, Spiritualists were greatly invested in healing individuals in this life. They viewed illness as a sign of trouble with the spirit, which could potentially manifest in the physical body. Health is achieved when humans are in harmony with nature, while disease manifests when people are disconnected from nature. For this reason, they opposed regular medicine because it considered nature an enemy of health. Spiritualists presented themselves as an alternative source of healing outside the harsh practices of regular medicine. In this chapter, I will explore how Spiritualists in the nineteenth century constructed and performed healing rituals, and how they contrasted their view of health to that of the medical establishment. I argue that Spiritualists provided a magical approach to healing that privileged sacredness and comfort, providing a more optimistic alternative to regular medicine.[51]

To begin, we must consider the relationship between health, healing and magic. In attempting to differentiate magic from religion, many scholars have focused on the pragmatic

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[50] Malinowski, 31.

[51] I formulated many of the ideas for this chapter in Gary Laderman's graduate seminar American Healing Politics, Fall 2017. See Laderman, "Cult of Doctors."

nature of magic. As Catherine Bell summarizes, "rites deemed to be truly nonutilitarian, a matter of 'pure worship' so to speak, were categorized as religious, while those nonrational acts that appeared to seek a very practical result, such as healing or rainfall, were deemed to be magic."[52] Magical rites are assumed to be productive and efficacious, and are therefore considered proto-scientific. Religious rites on the other hand are viewed as part of a wider devotional framework. This construction of course fails to consider the numerous traditions with elaborate healing rituals that are consistently defined as religious not magical. Despite this flaw, magic continues to be associated with practical ends. Malinowski departs from previous constructions of magic by suggesting that magical rites are more religious than scientific, since both deal in the realm of the sacred.[53] Still, magical rites interact with pragmatic activities, making them a combination of technical and performative aspects.[54] Using this framework, magical approaches to healing may invoke sacred forces and use them for practical means. This combination allows magic to serve as a source of comfort or anxiety reduction, since it calls on greater powers to solve technical issues.[55] Lastly, these comforting rites are produced by magicians, who serve as sacred doctors when engaging healing techniques. Magicians provide a service that other doctors cannot, since they engage with a sacred worldview.

Spiritualism developed in the context of a newly institutionalized Orthodox medical system in the United States. According to Robert Fuller, an organized medical system began to appear after the Revolutionary War: "as Americans set themselves to the task of building a republic, a medical profession slowly emerged that for the most part mirrored the intellectual and

[52] Catherine M Bell, *Ritual : Perspectives and Dimensions*, Rev. ed. . (Oxford: Oxford : Oxford University Press, USA, 2009), 46-47.
[53] Tambiah, 67.
[54] Tambiah, 68.
[55] Tambiah, 72.

cultural outlook of the pace-setting educated citizenry of the Northeast."[56] This intellectual

tradition was based on Enlightenment philosophy, which sought to develop a rational

understanding of the body and disease. For medical professionals in the nineteenth century,

health was understood as "a function of the interaction between a person's constitutional

endowment and the physical environment."[57] Before germ theory, which came at the end of the

century, health and disease were viewed holistically in terms of their effects on the entire body.

Fuller suggests that doctors could not diagnose specific causes, and treatments for specific

diseases did not exist.[58] These conceptions of health and disease had serious implications for the

treatment of the sick.

　　The rational medical system that came to be known as regular medicine operated by

aggressively fighting whatever was believed to be ailing the body. Since doctors could not know

specific causes of illness, they opted for methods which in theory purged the entire body of

disease: "bleedings, sweating, blistering, and the use of drugs aimed at inducing either vomiting

or diarrhea were the most common therapeutic techniques."[59] The intensity of this approach to

medicine earned it the title of "heroic medicine," because doctors were considered assailants

against the body. The violent practices of regular medicine slowly faded throughout the

nineteenth century as more advanced science developed, however, the underlying philosophy

remained. Regular medicine was distinctly allopathic, meaning it worked to "counteract or even

combat the forces of nature."[60] Fuller suggests that doctors viewed nature as the cause of illness,

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[56] Robert C Fuller, *Alternative Medicine and American Religious Life* (New York: New York : Oxford University Press, 1989), 13.
[57] Fuller, 13.
[58] Fuller, 13.
[59] Fuller, 14.
[60] Fuller, 14.

and therefore saw no potential for it as a method of healing: "What regular physicians stood for above all else was a vehement scorn for the healing powers of nature."[61] The anti-nature beliefs of regular medicine became the dominant medical theory as physicians institutionalized. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, "regular physicians began to form societies and publish journals."[62] Organizational and institutional power allowed regular physicians to standardize medicine, create a system of etiquette, and even attack other healing traditions in scientific journals.[63] Regular physicians worked rigorously to de-legitimize the competition from nature based and heterodox medical systems.

Despite attempts by regular medicine to assert itself as the only legitimate medical system, the American public often favored alternative medical traditions. Hans A. Baer suggests that the medical landscape in the nineteenth century was heavily pluralistic, witnessing a surge in popularity for traditions like Mesmerism, Swedenborgism, Christian Science, Homeopathy, and Spiritualism. Baer argues that "the popularity of heterodox medicine in early nineteenth-century America stemmed in large part from a pervasive dissatisfaction with regular medicine and from the anti-elitist sentiments of the Jacksonian era."[64] Most of the nineteenth-century heterodox healing traditions opposed not only the elitism of regular medicine, but also its construction of health and its perceived relationship between nature and the human body. These health movements gave Americans a more accessible form of healing that worked with the body rather than against it.

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[61] Fuller, 14.

[62] Hans A Baer, *Biomedicine and Alternative Healing Systems in America : Issues of Class, Race, Ethnicity, and Gender* (Madison, Wisconsin: Madison, Wisconsin : The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 9.

[63] Baer, 10.

[64] Baer, 11.

Spiritualists formulated health and disease as sacred issues instead of demonizing the body. They constructed disease as an issue of the spirit rather than the body. According to Ann Braude, they resisted the idea proposed by regular medicine that the human body is inherently prone to flawed and prone to illness.[65] Instead, Spiritualists operated off the belief that all nature, including humankind, is divine, so the natural human state is godliness and health. Disease then, is not a force to be expelled from the body, but a disconnection from the harmony of nature. Andrew Jackson Davis writes a great deal about healing in his book *The Harmonial Philosophy*. While regular doctors were attempting to purge and attack the body, Davis argued that healing was best attained by restoring man to nature's harmony. Spiritualists considered humans to be a cohesive unit in which the body and the spirit work together to maintain health. The immortal spirit animates the more temporary body, making it the chief source of health and illness. Disease is more often considered an issue of the spirit rather than the body, even though it may manifest physically: "disease is discord, and such discord or derangement must exist primarily in those spiritual forces by which the organism is actuated and governed."[66] Spiritualism opposed the methods of healing proposed by regular physicians, who violently manipulated the body to rid it of illness. Davis argues that disease is "not therefore a thing, not a matter to be removed, but simply a condition to be altered."[67] The Spiritualist construction of illness and health focused on the power of the human spirit over the fallibility of the physical body. They took a profane issue like the disease and made it sacred, thereby reformulating it in positive terms.

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[65] Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits : Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston, Mass.: Boston, Mass. : Beacon Press, 1989), 143.

[66] Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Harmonial Philosophy: A Compendium and Digest of the Works of Andrew Jackson Davis* (Chicago: Advanced Thought Pub. Co, 1917), 357.

[67] Davis, *Harmonial Philosophy,* 357.

Spiritualists not only re-conceptualized disease, but also radically re-envisioned healing techniques. Their desire to heal the immortal spirit by connecting it to the truth of nature and restoring its harmony to the body resulted in the need for new methods of healing. They rebelled against the toxic medicines supplied by regular physicians, and instead opted for more benign techniques: "the only true medicines in Nature, operating upon the body through the spiritual principle, are clothing, food, water, air, light, electricity and magnetism"[68] Physical means may bring about healing, but only if they are directed at healing the spirit as well as the body. Davis considers the practices of regular physicians ignorant because they focus solely on the body rather than the spirit. He suggests that most people suffering from disease lack proper knowledge about the human spirit:

> But he is reckless and faithless regarding the principles of his inner life, being ignorant of the riches within his spiritual constitution, and the penalty of this is disease, with its innumerable offspring. The kindest and most skillful physicians can bring no perfect health to those who are sick and suffering, because— in too many cases— doctor and patient know nothing of the psychological energies in the human organization, or that crude and bitter drugs can do nothing compared with the kindly offices of our own spiritual forces.[69]

Davis presents the healing possibilities of Spiritualism as an esoteric truth not understood by the average individual. He calls for a paradigm shift, in which people turn from the failures of regular medicine to the powerful truth of Spiritualist science. In Davis' model of healing, doctors

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[68] Davis, *Harmonial Philosophy,* 368.
[69] Davis, *Harmonial Philosophy*, 380.

also serve as spiritual leaders. Mediums took a magical approach to healing by providing those in need with both spiritual guidance and physical relief.

For Davis, individuals can best obtain pragmatic goals like healing by complete dedication to the Spiritualist worldview. Although individuals exist who possess the power to heal the body or mind of others, attainment of true health and harmony is not something that can be reached by visiting a medium once. Unlike many forms of magic, Spiritualist healing is not believed to be immediately efficacious. Instead, those seeking health must follow dozens of maxims that Davis finds essential to achieving harmony. One of these rules states that an individual must "become his own physician,"[70] furthering Davis' argument that healing must come from within. Most of the suggestions provided by Davis reflect a commitment to self-help or betterment. He recommends maintaining a healthy diet and sleep patterns, acting out of kindness, and advocates against pursuing fame and material riches. Those seeking health should accept death whole-heartedly, and remain joyful despite its inevitability. Belief in the immortality of the soul underscores all Davis' recommendations, since experiences of present embodiment are merely a stage in the existence of the human soul. Thus, he argues that "eternal progression and development are the only objects for which we should pray and labour."[71] Davis views all efforts to achieve health in the context of eternal existence. He makes healing a central aspect of the Spiritualist worldview, so that both are thoroughly imbued with technical and sacred elements.

The philosophical writings of Andrew Jackson Davis provide an insight into the core tenets behind the Spiritualism. However, the movement was not centralized, and was therefore

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[70] Davis, *Harmonial Philosophy*, 376.
[71] Davis, *Harmonial Philosophy*, 376.

subject to great variation in how healing techniques were approached. The first Spiritualist to practice healing was Davis himself. His extraordinary powers were believed to be awakened by human magnetism.[72] As a young, working-class man in the mid-nineteenth century, Davis became interested in the popular phenomenon of Mesmerism. Although he knew very little about the practice other than its popularity, he desired to be put under a "magician's power".[73] In the winter of 1843, he pursued his interest in magnetic operations. The first practitioner he found failed to successfully induce a trance, but recognized a "'clairvoyant propensity'" in Davis.[74] Only a few days later, Davis found another Mesmerist, Mr. Levingston, who was successful at putting him in a trance. After he awoke, he learned that while in the trance he could see and read with his eyes closed, as well as diagnose illnesses for people in the room—a power Mr. Levingston called clairvoyance.[75] Davis was initially troubled by his new powers, wondering what kind of "magic" or "witchcraft" they were.[76] Nonetheless, he continued experiments with Mesmerism, gradually developing his clairvoyant abilities. He became a local celebrity in Poughkeepsie, New York, and his followers claim that even regular physicians admitted that he possessed extraordinary skills.[77] Davis' experiments with Mesmerism lead to the development of his clairvoyant abilities which he often used to heal and diagnose others. Over the next few decades, his experiences would inspire him to formulate a comprehensive Spiritualist philosophy.

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[72] Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Magic Staff an Autobiography of Andrew Jackson Davis.*, 13th edition.. (Boston: Boston : Colby & Rich, 1885), 11.

[73] Davis, *Magic Staff,* 201.

[74] Davis, *Magic Staff,* 202.

[75] Davis, *Magic Staff,* 210.

[76] Davis, *Magic Staff,* 210.

[77] Davis, *Magic Staff,* 13.

Within ten years of Davis' first experience with Mesmerism, mediums practicing under the name of Spiritualism set up shop around the country. As with all elements of Spiritualism, the type of healing performed by mediums and requested by clients varied a great deal. At the most basic level, individuals could visit a medium for emotional healing. Séances allowed people to communicate with lost loved ones, and to see first-hand that the dead are still accessible and not suffering. A group in Philadelphia dedicated to examining Spiritualism claimed that they witnessed improvements in their health just from participating in séances and interacting with spirits.[78] In this sense, all Spiritualists practices had an aim of healing the anxiety and pain caused by fears and misconceptions about death. Still, many mediums specialized in more concrete methods of healing and identified themselves specifically as providers of medical care, or medical mediums.

Like Andrew Jackson Davis, many medical mediums practiced trance healing. They claimed to possess the ability to diagnose diseases while in a clairvoyant state, using the guidance of spirit doctors with enhanced powers to find and cure illness.[79] After locating the disease, these trance healers would either heal by the laying on of hands or by prescribing medicines. They avoided medicines used by regular physicians, such as "purgatives, stimulants, and narcotics," and instead opted for homeopathic or magnetic remedies.[80] Spiritualists connected themselves to other metaphysical, sectarian health movements by incorporating

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[78] First Association of Spiritualists of Philadelphia, *Spiritual Instructions Received at the Meetings of One of the Circles Formed in Philadelphia for the Purpose of Investigating the Philosophy of Spiritual Intercourse.* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia : For sale by A. Comfort, 1852), 9.
[79] "ART. I.--1. Experimental Investigation of the Spirit Manifestations, Demonstrating the Existence of Spirits and Their Communion with Mortals.," *The Quarterly Review* (London: J. Murray [etc.], 1871), 6.
[80] Braude, 146.

different medicines into their framework. Mediums also maintained a relationship with Native American traditions. Just as some medical mediums claimed to be guided by the spirits of doctors, others believed they were visited by the spirit of an American Indian. These spirits could use their indigenous knowledge of plants and herbs to suggest remedies to mediums.[81] The healing practices of Spiritualism incorporated concurrent metaphysical, magical, and indigenous techniques into pseudo-professionalized medical services.

Medical mediums considered themselves legitimate doctors. According to Braude, they provided individual services and even larger scale medical institutions: "Dr. Main's institute 'for healing under the guidance of spirits' announced that it treated ninety-eight inpatients as well as handling seven thousand office visits during its first year of operation in 1857."[82] These ventures were interested in profit, and purely fraudulent, exploitative practices surely existed. Nonetheless, many mediums genuinely concerned themselves with providing alternative healing options, even if they charged a fee for their services. Medical mediums publically attacked the failures of regular medicine and presented themselves as the solution to the harms caused by these doctors.[83] Spiritualists resented the violent methods of regular medicine, as well as the predominately male demographics of the medical establishment. Not only did Spiritualists think women were uniquely gifted as healers, they also believed that having more female doctors represented "a step in progress toward living by the laws of nature."[84] Spiritualists positioned themselves as the solution to both the medical and social wrongs created by regular medicine.

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[81] Catherine L Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit : A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: New Haven : Yale University Press, 2007), 249.
[82] Braude, 146 .
[83] Braude, 148.
[84] Braude, 149.

The perceptions of Spiritualist healing varied from total support to outright disgust. The relatively gentle, female-centric healing performed by medical mediums came as a relief to people dissatisfied with the aggressive practices of regular medicine. Often regular medicine simply failed, leaving individuals in search of another solution: "For those whose diseases proved no more susceptible to the sugar pills of the homoeopathist than to the dangerous prescriptions of the regulars, physically benign religious or mental healing offered a rational alternative."[85] Spiritualism provided more than a "rational alternative" for individuals seeking healing. The movement conceptualized health and death optimistically, as elements of life to be worked with not against. Their rebellion against the elitist establishment and their focus on the divine powers of nature allowed for a more empowered, comforting approach to healing.

Spiritualism attracted enemies as well as dedicated followers. In addition to the attempts from regular physicians to assert themselves as the sole medical authority, many ordinary citizens expressed concern about medical mediums. A slew of empirical studies on the truth of Spiritualism were published in the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Exposés accused mediums of corruption and even abuse. One such exposé was written by Julia E. Garrett, who briefly practiced as a medium after a marrying a Spiritualist. However, after witnessing what she considered the dark truth behind the tradition she quit and attempted to expose mediums. Garrett finds medical mediums to be "the lowest and vilest of all," because these fake doctors do not "know the difference between a shoulder-blade and a ham-bone."[86] She suggests that medical mediums have no legitimate medical knowledge, and rather use the title of healer or doctor to make money. She also describes these mediums as sexual predators: "He usually assumes the

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[85] Braude, 145.
[86] Julia E Garrett, *Mediums Unmasked an Exposé of Modern Spiritualism* (Los Angeles, Calif.: Los Angeles, Calif. : H.M. Lee & Bro., 1892), 16.

trance, and then commands his subject to undress entirely, as 'magnetism' will do no good unless he applies it to the naked body. He is, usually, big, coarse and licentious, and in this manner can gratify his low animal nature."[87] Garrett's accusations likely reflect both reality and moral panic. It is undisputable that many mediums were fakes who may have used their position to abuse clients. However, the claim that medical mediums have an insatiable "animal nature" resembles long-standing cultural associations of magicians with sexual deviancy.[88]

Medical mediums operated outside the norms of regular medicine, which brought them both positive and negative attention. They rejected dominant medical understandings of disease as a fault of the body. Instead, Spiritualists believed that the human body and spirit are divine and operate in harmony with nature. Simply put, disease results from spiritual discord with the divine union of the universe. Mediums cured individuals by communicating with spirits and restoring harmony instead of prescribing toxic medicines. They encouraged patients not to fear death or their own bodies, and to instead trust the power of nature and spirits. In doing so, they provided a congenial alternative to those suffering under regular medicine. The strategies of regular medicine were failing many Americans, and Spiritualism let them put their faith in a higher power while still providing physical and emotional relief. Not only did the techniques of medical mediums not produce more pain, they also created a sense of emotional comfort. Spiritualists made healing a magical endeavor by combining the practical with the sacred. For believers in Spiritualism, this magical approach provided more optimism and comfort than regular medicine could provide.

A World without Hell: The Spiritualist Response to Protestantism

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[87] Garrett, 16.
[88] Styers, 118.

In addition to rejecting biomedical constructions of the human body, Spiritualists rebelled against Christian formulations of illness and death. In particular, they rejected the Calvinist belief in predestination and salvation for a select few. Although Calvinism and other mainline Protestant sects had begun liberalizing in the second half of the nineteenth century, Spiritualists maintained a strong distaste for early American Protestantism: "ignoring the watered-down forms of Calvinism that came to characterize many popular denominations, Spiritualists recalled with horror the religious education of their youth."[89] Spiritualists considered the Protestant doctrines cruel, inaccurate, and even superstitious.[90] They took special offense at teachings that caused emotional stress to believers, such as the belief that an unbaptized infant would be destined to hell.

In response to the severe doctrines of Protestantism, Spiritualists promoted a benevolent religious worldview. They suggested that both humans and nature are fundamentally good, and they centered their conception of reality in nature rather than in an omnipotent, judgmental god. Since humans are born good and do not need to be saved, Spiritualists eliminated the concepts of sin, salvation, and hell. Salvation became a matter of healing and self-improvement rather than a requirement for a peaceful afterlife. Furthermore, and most significantly, they rejected death as the final separation between humans.[91] Spiritualism alleviated the pain of death by providing opportunities to communicate with spirits and by offering "concrete descriptions of the fate of lost loved ones after death."[92] They suggested that souls continued to grow after death, an idea

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[89] Braude, 37.
[90] Braude, 37.
[91] Braude, 51.
[92] Braude, 40.

known as the doctrine of progression.[93] This doctrine resolves concerns over the fate of an infant

or child after death, since all souls have an equal opportunity to advance and experience a

harmonious afterlife. Spiritualism did not just offer a more benign understanding of death; it

offered proof of this reality. In doing so, Spiritualism thoroughly rejected the Puritan idea that

one should seek evidence or reassurance of God's grace. The following chapter will explore how

the Puritan construction of salvation relies upon the elimination of magic.

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[93] Braude, 40.

Chapter Three: Rationalization and the Elimination of Magic in This-Worldly Asceticism

In *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Max Weber uses historical analysis to show the relationship between the religion of Protestantism and the economics of capitalism. In doing so, he details the development of this-worldly asceticism within the Puritan sects. Weber describes the religious foundations that helped create this-worldly asceticism. However, he also points to the co-existing processes of rationalization and the elimination of magic. In this chapter, I argue that the elimination of magic produced the need for rationalization. Together, these two processes had significant influence on the development of Puritan this-worldly asceticism. Further, I propose that rationalization occurred as a natural function of religious development, while the elimination of magic represented an active rejection of magical practices.

An overview of Weber's terminology will help to better unpack the influence of rationalization and magic of this-worldly asceticism. To begin, Weber uses "Puritan" as a conglomerate term of different ascetic Protestant sects. For the purposes of this chapter, the most of important of these sects is Calvinism. "This-worldly asceticism," also known as inner-worldly asceticism, implies highly disciplined work within this world oriented towards one's salvation. "Rationalization," put simply, involves the systematic organization of one's actions. However, rationalization also describes a cultural process. Weber refers to the rationalization of Western civilization, which describes the development of systematic work, modern economics, cities, modern law and other aspects of Western culture.[94] Thus, rationalization refers to both a deliberate organization of action, but also to a gradual historical evolution. Similarly, Weber identifies "*the elimination of magic* from the world's occurrences."[95] While this may be

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[94] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, ed. Stephen Kalberg (New York: New York : Oxford University Press, 2011), 245.
[95] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 120.

understood as "an overarching process in the history of religion," it also refers to specific rejection or transformation of magical practices.[96] Weber defines "magic" itself as any ritual intended to be immediately efficacious.[97]

According to Weber, the doctrine of predestination represents a total elimination of magic. It is also served as a key catalyst in the development of this-worldly asceticism. While the significance of this doctrine changed over time and within various sects, its origins can be found in Calvinist theology. The doctrine states that God has predetermined one's destiny of whether he/she will be saved in the afterlife. Predestination implies that "the salvation destiny of every person must be exclusively attributed to the hand of an objective power [God]– and one's own influence has not the slightest effect."[98] Nothing can change one's salvation status, even devout faith. Most importantly, salvation status cannot be known; no external factors indicate one's status. Despite the doctrine's fatalistic nature, devotion amongst Calvinist continued. John Calvin justified service and faith to this unforgiving God with the principle that "God does not exist for people; rather, people exist to serve the Will of God."[99] One's entire life, including afterlife, became insignificant in comparison to God's glory. The purpose of human existence is to serve God, regardless of one's salvation status. For this reason, Calvinists and other Puritans were still compelled to live devout Christian lives: "Membership [in the church] was necessary for them not in order to acquire salvation (for this is impossible), but because they also, to serve God's glory, must be coerced to uphold his commandments."[100] Although membership in the church did not directly provide salvation, it is considered impossible to be among the saved and *not*

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[96] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 120.
[97] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 120.
[98] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 117.
[99] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 118.
[100] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 119.

attend church. One could be a good Christian and still be damned, but one could not be a bad Christian and be saved.

The Calvinist doctrine of predestination did not permit the same comforts provided by the sacraments in Catholicism. Through the sacrament of confession, Catholic priests provided believers "the means of atonement and bestowed hope for salvation and certainty for forgiveness."[101] In contrast, Calvinists believed that nothing could change one's God-given salvation status. Therefore, priests were not needed to guide people to salvation, "because only the 'elect' can understand the divine word spiritually, no priests could assist believers."[102] It became sacrilege to use confession to relieve guilt, let alone to gain grace. Calvinism firmly rejected all sacraments as a means to advance one's salvation status, for this implied that human actions held influence over God. Instead, sacraments were considered "[external supplements] to one's faith."[103] Calvinists became suspicious of all practices that could be interpreted as questioning God's ultimate power. They believed that feelings were "useless for salvation and they promoted sentimental illusions and idolatrous superstition."[104] For Calvinists, efficacious sacraments and all sensuous aspects of culture became associated with superstition and magic. In order to properly serve the Calvinist God, the rejection of sacraments and feeling was imperative.

The belief in human existence purely to serve God, along with the doctrine of predestination, transformed the question of theodicy. No longer did Calvinists worry about why some suffer while others don't: "the problem of theodicy, as well as all those questions concerning the 'meaning' of the world and of life which have caused so much anguish to other

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[101] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 129.
[102] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 119.
[103] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 119.
[104] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 120.

believers, was comprehended by Puritans in a completely unproblematic way."[105] Instead of asking why suffering existed (the fundamental religious question), Calvinists began to ask whether they were among the saved. Although the doctrine of predestination eliminated the problem of theodicy, it also caused deep suffering amongst believers. The move away from confession prevented "a regular 'release' of an emotion-laden consciousness of guilt."[106] One's relationship with the Calvinist God took place in isolation, and could not be shared with the others. Calvinists were made to beat their fear and guilt in total isolation. Additionally, uncertainty about one's salvation status generated deep feelings of anxiety. The lack of magical sacraments to provide assurance created unbearable feelings of uncertainty.

Weber identifies two forms of pastoral care used to quell the anxieties caused by the doctrine of predestination. Although the doctrine inherently suggests that salvation is not a universal fact, Weber suggests as opposed to the sect, "the church stands for a universalism of grace."[107] Therefore, the church had to use pastoral care to supplement the unforgiving doctrine. Believers were advised that if they doubted their state of grace, it was certain that they were not among the elect: "it became a matter of duty pure and simple for believers to *consider* themselves among the elect few and to repel every doubt about their state of grace as nothing more than the temptations of the devil."[108] Puritans had to convince themselves of their salvation by means of subjective emotional manipulation. In addition to reaffirming one's belief, pastoral care also recommended more action-oriented advice: "*work without rest in a vocational calling* was recommended as the best possible means to *acquire* the self-confidence that one belonged

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[105] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 123.
[106] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 121.
[107] Weber, Max, Hans Gerth, and C. Wright Mills, "The Social Psychology of World Religions." In *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology.* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1946), 288.
[108] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 125.

among the elect."[109] Working constantly, for God, served as a distraction from anxiety, and as an assurance of one's grace.

While the doctrine of predestination presumes that only a small percent constitutes the elect, the work of Calvinist pastoral care led to the democratization of grace. By allowing for all Puritans to feel certain of their salvation by work in a vocational calling, all believers could potentially achieve religious virtuoso status. Although not everyone attained God's grace, everyone believed they were among the elect and therefore, *"differently qualified."[110]* According to Weber, Puritan virtuosos convinced themselves of their state of grace by acting as "a tool of divine power."[111] Instead of turning to inward contemplation to gain the psychological assurance that one was among the saved, Calvinists gained confidence through action in the service of God. Calvinists testified to their belief by working in a vocational calling. Testifying through action provided inner, psychological assurance as well as public demonstration of one's state of grace. This method of work, not contemplation, to prove one's state of grace represents the "this-worldly" aspect of inner worldly asceticism.

Protestant dedication to this-worldly work gained its ascetic value through the process of rationalization. Work in a vocational calling, as well as the elimination of magic, inspired rationalization of the Puritan life. Both Calvinism and Catholicism emphasize "'salvation through good works,' (Werkheiligkeit)" but the motivations behind the respective works differ greatly.[112] The actions performed in Catholicism were not part of a system, and rather functioned as "a series of *isolated* actions that the faithful could carry out as the situation required."[113] These

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109 Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 125.
110 Weber, "Social Psychology," 287.
111 Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 126.
112 Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 128.
113 Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 128.

isolated actions served to attain salvation. For example, the sacrament of confession allowed for

believers to atone for specific sins. This method of sacramental salvation is magical in nature

because it serves as an automatically efficacious ritual. As previously stated, Puritans rejected

magical forms of salvation, because they implied that God's grace could be won. The doctrine of

predestination prevented Puritans from repenting for sins through isolated good works: "they

could not hope that hours of weakness and frivolity could be compensated for with intensified

good will during other hours."[114] Instead, Puritanism required a total systematization of good

works. Even further, it required rationalization of one's entire life, because "only through a

fundamental transformation of the meaning of one's entire life– in every hour and every action–

could the effect of grace… be testified to through action."[115] In other words, for Puritans to truly

reap the psychological benefits of work in a vocational calling, they had to methodically

organize their entire lives. The rationalization of Puritan lives required an ascetic taming of

desires, so that all actions could be in service to God. Once this-worldly asceticism took hold, an

entire Puritan identity associated with austerity and calculated action developed.

This-worldly asceticism, in its most complete form, relied upon both rationalization and

the elimination of magic. Puritanism developed a paradoxical relationship with the physical

world. Even though this-worldly asceticism requires work within the world, it also requires a

rejection of the same world:

> For this inner-worldly asceticism rejects the world in the sense that it despises and
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> taboos the values of dignity and beauty, of the beautiful frenzy and the dream,

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[114] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 129.
[115] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 129.

purely secular power, and the purely worldly pride of the hero. Asceticism

outlawed these values as competitors of the kingdom of God.[116]

All enchanted aspects of life became suspect of idolatry and illusions of magical power greater

than God's. Since this-worldly asceticism required work in this world, a systematic organization

of work and life helped avoid magical enjoyments. Puritans proved their state of grace "not in

the everyday life as it is given, but in the methodical and rationalized routine activities of

workaday life in service to the Lord."[117] Rationalization allowed for Puritans to reject magic and

instead dedicate their entire lives to God's grace.

Puritanism rationalized salvation as an organic process starting with the doctrine of

predestination. Suddenly, salvation could not be achieved as it could in Catholicism. Instead,

salvation status was granted before birth, and one had no way of knowing or changing their

status. The elect and the damned worked and worshipped together, with no one knowing who

belonged among the saved. The feelings of anxiety produced by this unknowing required a

solution, which took form in the practice of work in a vocational calling. To feel assured of one's

salvation, Puritans dedicated themselves to the service of God's grace. Their lives became a

system of good works dedicated to increasing God's glory. While the rationalization of works

was certainly intentional, it did not serve as a conscious rejection of tabooed religious traditions.

Rather, rationalization helped heal the suffering caused by the doctrine of predestination and

produce Protestant asceticism.

The elimination of magic from Protestant religiosity, however, took a much more active

path. Weber's theory that "*elimination of magic*" was an "overarching process in the history of

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[116] Weber, "Social Psychology," 291.
[117] Weber, "Social Psychology," 291.

religion" implies that the shift from magic to religion occurred as an unintended function of objective religious development.[118] While this is true to a degree, the Puritans also deliberately rejected magical practices:

> Even at funerals the genuine Puritan scorned every trace of magical ceremony and buried his loved ones without song and ceremony. He did so to prevent the appearance of 'superstition' in any form; that is, any trust in the efficacy for salvation of forces of a magical-sacramental type.[119]

The Puritans feared performing rites that appeared magical, because sacramental dispensation of grace associated with magic implies that God's grace can be attained. They felt contempt for such practices, and viewed them with deep suspicion. In addition to funeral practices, the Puritans vehemently rejected magical Christmas and maypole celebrations, as well as art, theater, and literature.[120] To the Puritans, these practices "smacked of 'superstition' and all residuals of the dispensation of grace through magic or sacraments."[121] However, they did not simply avoid magical practices, rather they persecuted them with "angry hatred."[122] Throughout Puritan history, they worked to actively erase all magical practices and traditions. The elimination of magic was not a mere function of the passage of time, but rather an overt attack against forms of worship that threatened the omnipotent Puritan God.

As soon as the doctrine of predestination took hold in Calvinist theology, so too did the elimination of magic. The incompatibility of a predestined life with the supposed efficacy of the sacraments inspired a total rejection of magical practices. Without the emotional comforts of the

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[118] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 120.
[119] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 120
[120] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 168.
[121] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 168
[122] Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 168.

sacraments, Puritans had to find a new way to democratize God's grace. Hence, work in a vocational calling was recommended as the best way to assure oneself that he/she was among the elect. Again, Puritan work in a vocational calling had to distinguish itself from the magical, Catholic understanding of good works. Puritan good works could not appear to be attempts to gain God's grace, so they had to be rationalized. The entire Puritan lifestyle became systematized as a dedication to God's glory, and as an avoidance of magic. The elimination of magic set the stage for rationalization, which in turn led to the development of inner-worldly asceticism. I do not argue that the birth of this-worldly Puritan asceticism is entirely due to the rejection of magic. However, the deliberate, even hateful avoidance of magical practices had undeniable effects on its continued development.

The Persistence of Magic

Despite the Puritans best efforts to eliminate magic, it would be naïve to suggest that the American religious landscape became thoroughly disenchanted. The success of Spiritualism alone reflects not only an interest in magic, but a need for it. Weber himself was aware of the powerful resurgence of magical practices in both Europe and the United States. In 1913 and 1914, Weber, struggling with his health, spent considerable time at Monte Verità in Ascona, Switzerland. Monte Verità, or the mountain of truth, was a radical community dedicated to attaining natural health by embracing lifestyles such as "nudity, free love, and vegetarianism."[123] The group also experimented with Eastern and metaphysical religious traditions, and frequently practiced rituals like séances.[124] According to Jason Josephson, rather than dismissing these

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[123] Jason Ānanda Josephson, *The Myth of Disenchantment : Magic, Modernity, and the Birth of the Human Sciences* (Chicago : Chicago , 2017), 275.
[124] Josephson, 275.

practices, Weber felt fondly about Monte Verità: "Perhaps having been confronted with a community that had turned its back on the iron cage of modernity to take refuge in enchantment and mysticism, Weber was struck by it as in some ways a viable alternative."[125] Without reading too far into Weber's personal relationship to magic, his time in Ascona suggests an awareness and openness to the popularity of magical practices in the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Weber's experiences with magic call for a closer look at his theories of disenchantment. Although the elimination of magic is required for the process of rationalization, Josephson suggests that Weber did not consider magic to be irrational, nor did he believe that it was completely eradicated. Magic, especially early forms of magic, is "subjectively *instrumentally rational*."[126] Weber recognized the technical and pragmatic elements of magical rites. He argued that magic stems from belief that "some objects and people possesses 'extraordinary powers,'" making it essentially the same as charisma.[127] People use the special power of magical things for practical ends. Disenchantment then, is not the "rise of instrumental reason, because magic is itself instrumental."[128] Disenchantment is not the end of magic beliefs, it is the demonization of them. As I show in the section above, the doctrine of predestination required the elimination of what the Puritans deemed magical rituals, like sacraments: "what ultimately disenchanted the world was the Protestant conception of grace—that salvation is solely due to the sovereign grace of God (*sola gratia*)."[129] According to Weber, magic was a threat to the doctrine of

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[125] Josephson, 277.
[126] Josephson, 278.
[127] Josephson, 279.
[128] Josephson, 280.
[129] Josephson, 281.

predestination because magical belief is rooted in the idea that some people and things have special powers. Calling upon these magical powers threatens the authority of the Protestant god.

Again, Weber's theory of disenchantment does not suggest that magic has fled the Western world. The concept of disenchantment relies upon the existence of magical beliefs to be isolated. Disenchantment is, most importantly, a process of demonizing magic. The Puritans disparaged and avoided magical practices, as a way to make sure that salvation could not be obtained by magical means. As we have seen, Spiritualists actively rejected Protestant doctrines about sin and the afterlife. The metaphysical traditions of the mid-nineteenth century, like Spiritualism, re-opened a magical path to salvation. Perhaps then, disenchantment produces magical beliefs just as it eliminates them.

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