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The Contemporary American Magical Landscape

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Abstract

The Contemporary American Magical Landscape

By Kenneth Paul Smith

The comparative category magic has a long and troubled history in Western cultures. As it has been deployed by scholarly as well as popular voices over at least the past two centuries, this term (or its cognates) has buttressed the marginalization and outright persecution of any number of social, religious, cultural, economic and ethnic minorities. For this and still other reasons, many contemporary scholars of religion do not consider it a viable interpretive framework. Nevertheless, this dissertation endeavors to reclaim the taxon for use in the contemporary American context. Drawing on the work of comparative theorists such as Ivan Strenski and Jose Cabezon, magic is re-imagined in broad comparative terms. A given cultural expression is deemed "magical" in so far as it suggests an expanded understanding of human nature, one in which human beings may, by means of some practice, tap into otherwise unacknowledged sources of power in shaping their circumstances in desired ways. A range of dominant cultural goods from the contemporary American context–e.g., popular novels and films, mind-body medicine, new age and prosperity spiritualities, and the inspirational writings of leading evangelical minister-authors–are read through this interpretive frame. Special attention is given to what so doing illuminates in contemporary American culture, and the ways in which the taxon magic must be modified in order to accommodate a diverse range of data. Towards such ends, the work of the twentieth-century anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, is creatively appropriated for its insights regarding the nature of magic. Ultimately, this dissertation suggests that, in so far as scholars think in terms of a contemporary American *religious* landscape, approximately similar grounds exist for positing (as a heuristic metaphor) a contemporary American *magical* landscape, one at least in part driven by the prevailing conditions of the post-1980 American economy.

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Table of Contents

Introduction

In Rick Warren's *The Purpose Driven Life* (2002)–currently the best-selling,

nonfiction, hardback book of all time–the megapastor of Saddleback Church in

Lakewood, California admonishes his readers concerning "other religions" and "New

Age philosophies" which teach that human beings may, as if by a kind of mental magic

which mimics acts of divine creation, manifest for themselves the lives they most desire

to live. Quite to the contrary, Warren explains:

> You will never become God, or even *a* god. That prideful lie is Satan's oldest temptation…. The desire to be a god shows up every time we try to control our circumstances, our future, and people around us. But as creatures, we will never be the creator…. Many Christian ministers [similarly] misinterpret Jesus' promise of the 'abundant life' to mean perfect health, a comfortable lifestyle, constant happiness, full realization of your dreams, and instant relief from problems through faith and prayer…. This self-absorbed perspective treats God like a genie in a bottle who simply exists to serve you in your selfish pursuit of personal fulfillment. But God is *not* your servant… Never forget that life is not about you! You exist for God's purposes, not vice versa![1]

Like many evangelicals, Warren rejects alternative spiritualties generally, and most

especially those which, like Rhonda Byrne's wildly popular book and film, *The Secret*

(2006), explicitly instruct readers in "the magical power of thought, visualization, and the

law of attraction."[2] Indeed, Byrne is as demonstrative in lauding the magical potency of

imagination and intention as Warren is in rejecting it: "There isn't a single thing," she

writes, "that you cannot do with this knowledge. It doesn't matter who you are or where

you are. [It] can give you whatever you want."[3] But Warren also rejects, as the passage

above makes abundantly clear, prosperity-oriented movements within Christianity itself.

Such movements go by names such as Word of Faith, Health and Wealth, Name It and

Claim It, Prosperity Gospel, and Prosperity Theology, and are frequently associated with

other quite popular Christian ministers, such as Joel Osteen, T.D. Jakes and Creflo

Dollar. In an interview for *TIME* magazine in 2006, for example, Warren dismisses as

"laughable" the notion that living a proper Christian life necessarily leads to financial prosperity.

> This idea that God wants everybody to be wealthy… There is a word for that: baloney. It's creating a false idol. You don't measure your self-worth by your net worth. I can show you millions of faithful followers of Christ who live in poverty. Why isn't everyone in the church a millionaire?[4]

Here again Warren's concerns are characteristic of conservative American evangelicals, who often draw rather strict theological lines separating the "orthodox" Christianity they see themselves as practicing and unwholesome variants such as the Prosperity Gospel.[5]

Yet, elsewhere in *The Purpose Driven Life,* Warren speaks in ways which problematize this very stance. He writes, for instance, of human obedience to God's will as "unlocking God's power" such that miraculous events become possible.[6] In still other works, he portrays the presumably humble actions said to constitute a devout Christian life (e.g., daily Bible reading and weekly church attendance) as "flipping a switch" which unleashes God's power and thereby enables those properly engaged in such practices to prosper both personally and professionally.[7] If in some places Warren *rejects* the notion that human actions are capable of tapping into divine energies, in others he plainly *relies upon* this very same idea.

Similar tensions may be discerned within the work of other leading evangelical minister-authors. Pat Robertson, founder of such influential institutions as the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN), CBN's flagship television program *The 700 Club*, and Regents University, at times speaks in ways strikingly consistent with "law of attraction" philosophies such as Byrne's. As host of *The 700 Club*, for instance, Robertson proposed that human beings are created by God with special mental abilities which continually attract those people and circumstances which mirror one's own motives and character.

Consequently, Robertson argues, success in life requires a change of attitude.[8] In other instances, however, indeed in alternate episodes of the same program, Robertson warns his viewers as to the grave spiritual dangers associated with elements of American popular culture, such as the New Age movement, the *Harry Potter* series of books and films, the use of Ouija boards, and the practice of witchcraft, all of which are said to present a magical worldview in deceptively positive ways and leave those who dabble in them open to demonic possession.[9]

Joel Osteen, whom for many represents a paradigm example of the Prosperity Gospel, has in fact sought to distance himself from such labels, insisting that he himself does not teach prosperity, but rather "helps his audiences to excel."[10] Still, in his books as well as his Sunday morning sermons before tens of thousands at Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, and several million viewers streaming online and tuning in by way of television from all over the world, Osteen teaches that God wants human beings to be successful and achieve their worldly dreams, that He is actively working to this end, and that the key is human acceptance of the good things God is trying to send: human beings must believe in order to receive, he says, even when God is doing the sending. Like Warren's notion of proper Christian practice tapping God's power, and Robertson's theory of God-given abilities of mental attraction, the causal power of *human beliefs* in Osteen's theology suggests important affinities with precisely those new age philosophies from which evangelicals frequently seek to distance themselves.

In recent years, some voices from within American evangelicalism have articulated this tension in a rather compelling manner. Reflecting upon her year of

experimentation with practices such a fasting, Bible reading, prayer, Sabbath keeping, and charitable work, Jana Reiss explains:

> Maybe it's just too many years spent in a conservative church, one that at least implicitly teaches that when we fast, we can count on loads of good stuff coming our way: physical healings, answers to spiritual questions, divine guidance on relationships, the works…. I've experienced enough of those happy results myself that I just can't blithely dismiss them as a false use of fasting. Once, in my congregation, all of us fasted and prayed for a little boy who had been in a serious car accident. He recovered completely…. I admit there's a part of me that wants my fasting to be precisely that effective and tangible…. that secret part of me wants to regard fasting as an efficacious form of magic.[11]

In this passage, Reiss deploys magic as a pejorative, one which articulates her sense of theological and perhaps even moral unease. She is concerned that proper Christian worship might degenerate into the manipulation of sacred power for human purposes. Given her concerns, this sort of highly normative deployment is effective.

For professional scholars of religion, however, the matter is considerably more complicated. Nineteenth and early twentieth century academics also tended to conceive of magic in pejorative terms, as inherently primitive, selfish, neurotic, childish, as that which lurks on the margins of society. In light of this history, many contemporary scholars do not consider it a viable interpretive frame.[12] But what if the category were re-imagined such that it actually helped scholars to think about their objects of study in new and interesting ways, rather than merely re-inscribing their own theological and moral preferences? What if, in addition to the writings of the evangelical minister-authors discussed above, other equally dominant forms of cultural production such as popular entertainment, mind-body medicine, and new age spiritualities such as Byrne's, were also read through the lens of magic re-imagined? So doing would provide a measure of the conceptual distance, or lack thereof, which is said to divide evangelical religious worlds from the larger American culture. It might also disclose important insights about that

larger culture, such as a deep and pervasive preoccupation with magical forms of thought and practice. Such an interpretive endeavor is precisely what this dissertation attempts, and in so doing, proceeds as follows.

Chapter one, "Theorizing Magic," examines some of the most influential ways in which the category magic has been conceptualized by scholars over the past two centuries. Key points in the academic history of the taxon are traced, from the speculative theorizing of nineteenth and early twentieth century philosophers (e.g., Hegel, Spencer), anthropologists (e.g., Tylor, Frazer, Marret), psychiatrists (Freud), sociologists (Mauss, Durkheim, Weber), and at least one theologian (e.g., Otto), up through the profound methodological shifts introduced by mid-twentieth century anthropologists (e.g., Evans-Pritchard, Malinowski), and the comparative and critical theory of contemporary religious studies scholars such as Ninian Smart and Randall Styers. No attempt whatsoever is made at a comprehensive history, as any such endeavor would vastly eclipse what is possible in a single chapter. Still, even this highly selective account is worth exploring for a variety of reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the many different ways in which magic has been conceptualized by scholars working in markedly different intellectual contexts, as well as the common assumptions under which they tended to labor. Secondly, it suggests that scholarly theories (like the social practices they seek to analyze) are themselves constructs of the human imagination. Thirdly, it renders intelligible the refusal of many contemporary scholars of religion to employ magic as an interpretive lens. Such rejections are typically premised upon two objections: that the term has no clearly discernible content; and that it is irrevocably entangled with the dehumanizing, colonial politics of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Despite

such difficulties, chapter one works to re-imagine the category such that it could prove useful for contemporary scholars. In so doing, the methodological insights of comparative theorists such as Ivan Strenski and Jose Cabezon are appropriated. With Strenski, this chapter contends that scholarly interpretive categories are no more than historical artefacts, the intellectual value of which is determined solely by their interpretive utility. With Cabezon, this chapter insists that any taxon be deployed in a flexible manner such that it remains open to modification as it is applied to new data. Taken together, such considerations privilege interpretive creativity and experimentation, imagining categories in novel ways, deploying them in ways that remain acutely sensitive to difference, and forbearing to judge their intellectual value until they have been thoroughly utilized in the study of a range primary data. Ultimately, this chapter posits the following as an initial construction of the category: *something is magical insofar as it suggests an expanded understanding of human nature, one in which human beings may, by some practice, access otherwise unacknowledged sources of power in transforming their circumstances in desired ways*. Thusly construed, the category is deployed in the study of popular novels, films, and television shows (chapter two), various expressions of mind-body medicine (chapter three), an assortment of new age, self-help, and prosperity spiritualities (chapter four), and the writings of evangelical minister-authors such as those discussed above (chapter five), from the contemporary American context.

Chapter two, "Magic and Popular Entertainment," looks to dominant cultural goods in which the magical dimension is most readily discernible, such as the *Harry Potter*, Middle Earth, *Star Wars*, and *Twilight* series of novels and films. In these cultural expressions, magic is shouted, if not from the rooftops, then from the bookstore, cinema,

and flat-screen television. Nonetheless, while each of these franchises offers a magical alterity, they by no means imagine the magical dimension in the same way. On the contrary, each offers a rather distinctive vision of the origins and nature of magical power, the work it does in the world, and the ways in which human beings may encounter and participate in it. They offer, in essence, many different magics. The magic of the *Harry Potter* universe, for instance, is highly mechanical and largely under human control, whereas the deepest magical potencies of Tolkien's Middle Earth, the realm of *faerie* enchantment, lie beyond the ken of even the most powerful wizard's incantations. The same diversity of magics is evident within the science fiction examples discussed in this chapter. If the Jedi Knights of George Lucas' *Star Wars* universe channel the Force in precise and controlled ways, the magical dimension of the *Battlestar Galactica* series is entirely unresponsive to attempts to harmonize with it, and it in fact makes rather brutal use of those who attempt to do so in realizing its own cosmic purposes. The vampire imaginaries of *Twilight* and *True Blood* also depict the magical dimension in varied ways, alternately as heritable occult powers, witches' spells, or the results of lycanthropic transformations. Amidst these many magics, however, a spectrum is to be found, with those firmly under human control at one end, and those which stubbornly elude it at the other.

Chapter three, "Magic and Mind-Body Medicine," examines a range of increasingly mainstream discourses which are re-defining human nature in expansive ways, and are thus highly suggestive of the magical. These include many peer-reviewed studies, often from top academic institutions, demonstrating that particular states of consciousness can produce profoundly healing effects within one's own physical body,

such as the "relaxation response" protocols developed by Herbert Benson and others at Harvard Medical School, and similar research compiled at the Institute of Heartmath in San Jose, California. They also include groundbreaking clinical studies indicating that prayer and/or focused positive intention may produce similarly healing effects within the physical bodies of others,' even when those others are unaware of such efforts on their behalf. Much of this research shades quickly into metaphysics, suggesting that human consciousness functions in ways which resemble the quantum fields of particle physics, imposing a subtle but measurable order upon physical phenomena. Unlike the primary data of the previous chapter, mind-body medicine does not display the same spectrum of agency and control. That said, a diversity of magics is evident. Key differences emerge with respect to the origins of consciousness' healing and ordering capacity: is it triggered by calming the mind, powering up the heart, theistic prayer, or focused intention? All such discourses are magical in that they link the ability to directly influence physical phenomena to alterations of consciousness, and like the popular entertainment franchises discussed in chapter one, they push the limits of human potential considerably.

Chapter four, "Magical Spiritualties," appropriates Wouter J. Hanegraaff's understanding of spiritualities as highly individualized metaphysical systems, and then reads a range of self-help and prosperity spiritualities which have emerged since the early 1990s through the lens of magic employed in the previous two chapters. These include James Redfield's novel, *The Celestine Prophecy: A Metaphysical Adventure* (1993), Rhonda Byrne's series of books, *The Secret* (2006), *The Power* (2006), and *The Magic* (2012), as well as the work of authors who, though their appeal is limited to smaller audiences, demonstrate the ability of this genre to assume a diversity of forms. These

include Tolly Burkan's *Extreme Spirituality: Radical Journeys for the Inward Bound* (2001), Wayne Dyer's *Wishes Fulfilled: Mastering the Art of Manifesting* (2012), and Russell Simmons' *Super Rich: A Guide to Having It All* (2011). Once again, a plurality of magics is discernible, with differences emerging regarding the origins of magical powers as well as agency and control. If Byrne's writings offer a paradigmatic approach reminiscent of *Harry Potter*, one in which focused human imagination manifests precisely what it intends, Redfield's spiritual alterity features a magical dimension with which human beings would do well to harmonize themselves, but which they have absolutely no hope of controlling or manipulating. In Burkan, Dyer, and Simmons, the source and scope of the magical is imagined in still other ways.

Chapter five, "Evangelical Magics," explores the writings of the three minister-authors discussed in the opening pages of this introduction–Rick Warren, Pat Robertson, Joel Osteen–as well as that of a fourth, Keith Craft, the founder and lead pastor of Elevate Life Church in Frisco, Texas, whose emerging status within the world of popular American evangelicalism may soon vie with that of more established figures. Like other forms of social production examined in previous chapters, each author's relevant works are located within their proper contexts (in this case, historical and theological), and then read through the lens of magic. Put somewhat differently, each is read with the understanding of magic employed in previous chapters squarely in mind, and special attention is given to those instances in which the teachings offered suggest in some way that human beings may, by way of some practice, tap into otherwise unacknowledged sources of power in transforming their circumstances in desired ways. As in previous chapters, so doing discloses considerable intra-genre diversity, that is, four quite different

evangelical magics. Indeed, in Warren's work alone we find two distinct magics. In his earlier writings, human beings tap God's power directly. In his later writings, it is human obedience to God's mysterious will that creates opportunities for the miraculous. In Robertson's evangelical alterity, God has built into human nature and the cosmos at large a system of immutable laws such that one's character and actions are mirrored back. For Osteen, God Himself is constrained by human willingness (or lack thereof) to hold firm to optimistic expectations. For Craft, God has given human beings an alchemical-like capacity to transmute even the worst events in their life into a miraculous moment, by holding firm to positive expectations no matter what. This analysis also suggests considerable affinities linking evangelical and popular cultural worlds. Ultimately, this chapter concludes, participation in the magical landscape represents one of many different ways American evangelicals eagerly participate in and appropriate resources from the larger society, all the while distancing themselves from it. Precisely this insight helps to render intelligible all sorts of evangelical appropriations, from sex toys to Donald Trump.

Chapter six, "The Further Interpretive Reaches of Magic," begins by tracing the term "magic" back to its etymological origins in the ancient Persian term *magi*. If the historical *magi* were priestly bureaucrats, the *magi* of European imagination were mysterious figures who could read as well as influence the fate of others written in the stars. Consequently, wherever a European cultural inheritance has gone, magic has carried with it connotations of supernatural power and moral ambivalence, and being associated with the magical has entailed a host of social dangers. Nevertheless, it is argued, a number of scholarly as well as popular efforts to re-imagine the term exist, and

thus magic is neither necessarily nor eternally wedded to its past connotations. This chapter also expands the understanding of magic deployed in chapters two through five by way of Bronislaw Malinowski's posthumously published collection of essays, *Magic, Science, and Religion* (1948). While later scholarly critiques of Malinowski's theory of magic place important limits upon its scope, they do not preclude employing his insights as hypotheses which may (or may not) prove useful in particular contexts. With respect to the magical forms of cultural production discussed in previous chapters, it is argued, a Malinowskian approach in fact directs the analytical attention in interesting ways, namely, to the prevailing economic conditions of post-1980s America, where the proliferation of fundamentally magical images, narratives, philosophies, and practices has emerged alongside a growing inability to secure those symbols traditionally associated with the "American Dream."

Finally, a brief conclusion considers the scholarly utility of the magical landscape metaphor with respect to contemporary American culture. Assuming that such descriptive devices are intended as heuristics only, their scholarly value may be evaluated on three bases: do they identify a clearly recognizable and distinct body of cultural goods for analysis; do they help scholars to think about such data in new and interesting ways; do they help scholars to identify and contextualize new and emergent forms of social production? The magical landscape metaphor, it is argued, satisfies all three conditions. Firstly, in addition to the wealth of primary data examined in chapters two through five, there exists an anti-magical counter discourse which itself takes varied forms, and which seeks to debunk magical expressions of thought and practice wherever they may be discerned. Secondly, it is precisely by way of the magical hermeneutic offered here that

the widespread contemporary preoccupation with expanded understandings of human nature is brought into view. American religious historians have certainly studied magical beliefs and practices elsewhere in American religious history, but this dissertation identifies important ways in which the contemporary magical landscape is distinctive. Thirdly, and finally, a number of new and emergent magical forms of social production are briefly highlighted, such as Marie Kondo's recent (and best-selling) book, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, suggesting that magical forms of cultural production will continue to emerge well into the foreseeable future.

Chapter One: Theorizing Magic

Scholars engaged in the study of religion have long recognized that religions are, among other things, imaginary constructs: they represent attempts of the mythic and ritual imagination to clothe an assumed and unseen reality in concrete images, narratives and practices. Less frequently acknowledged, however, is the fact that scholarly theories of religion are themselves, among other things, imaginary constructs: they represent attempts of the analytical imagination to grasp complex social and psychological phenomena by means of historically particular theoretical starting points, interpretive categories, and methodologies. That scholarship itself displays profound *imaginal* dimensions suggests important limitations upon the kinds of interpretive claims scholars may advance, but it also opens up ample grounds for a robust methodological pluralism. If no one approach offers a complete, definitive understanding of a given social practice, a constellation of approaches may begin to sketch out the many different ways in which our objects of study might be plausibly construed.

Nowhere is this imaginal dimension of scholarship more apparent than in the many different ways in which the comparative category magic has been constructed and deployed in scholarly literature over the past two centuries. This chapter tells, in a much abridged and highly selective fashion, the story of some of this scholarship. It is by no means a comprehensive account, as several fine scholarly histories already exist.[1] Instead, a relatively small number of points along this much larger narrative arc are examined in order to illustrate the variety among scholarly constructs and what is at stake in their deployment. Special attention is given to nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars whose theories have exerted the greatest influence upon later generations. Arguments for

magic's abandonment, which emerge as a direct result of its complex and often troubled definitional history, are considered, and one strategy for its reclamation is advanced. While magic has surely been freighted with considerable baggage intellectual as well as ideological, this chapter hopes to show that, properly re-imagined and deployed, magic nonetheless represents a potentially useful hermeneutic.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF SCHOLARLY THEORIES OF MAGIC

Nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars of religion hailed from diverse European cultures (e.g., Germany, England, and France, etc.) and labored within different academic disciplines (e.g., philosophy, anthropology, sociology, psychiatry, etc.). Nevertheless, it is tempting to assume that they conceptualized magic in basically the same way. Their accounts do share important features. They tended to rely upon the ethnographic reports of others. They tended to conceptualize magic in relation to religion and science, and associated magic with that which is primitive and simplistic, whether among "savages" abroad or the "ignorant" lower social classes at home. They also tended to assume, as Graham Cunningham notes, that "societies from different places and periods… [can be] ranked in terms of temporal sequence based upon the complexity of their social structures," with the simplest appearing earlier in the sequence, and greater sophistication developing over time.[2] From such a perspective, it is perhaps understandable that peoples associated with magic came to be perceived as frozen at an earlier stage of human development relative to European elites. All of this said, nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars differed considerably not only in their definitions of magic, but in the larger webs of meaning in which they situated the term.

The German philosopher and metaphysician, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831), located magic as well as religion within a much larger theory of historical change. On Hegel's account, the earliest human societies were characterized by "religions of nature," in which the divine was understood as immanent and found everywhere in the natural world. In later Egyptian, Israelite, Greek, and Roman societies, "religions of transcendence" appeared, in which the divine was perceived as beyond the natural world. The clash of these two religious cultures brought about a synthesis in the emergence of Christianity, where the divine was imagined as both transcendent and to some extent immanent.[3] If Hegel thought of religion as an ever-expanding "consciousness of God," magic represented an aspect of religion's earliest and crudest beginnings, where a vague perception of the divine "takes the form of power over nature," essentially the attempt to manipulate the natural world according to human desires.[4]

Herbert Spencer's *A System of Synthetic Philosophy* (1862) appeared just thirty years after Hegel's death, though the conceptual distance separating their work is considerable. Hegel imagined history in terms of vast, dialectical stages, each of which represents a significant epistemic improvement upon earlier stages. Spencer, however, cast his theories of magic and religion in the language of Darwin's theory of natural selection.[5] Also contra Hegel, Spencer (1820-1896) saw *both* religion and magic as representing fundamentally flawed understandings of the world. Religion is said to have emerged as primitive people sought to understand the experience of dreams, particularly those in which images of the deceased were represented. In so doing, early human beings posited the existence of ghosts and ancestral spirits, which over time came to be regarded

as increasingly powerful and socially complex deities.[6] Here magic emerges *alongside* religion, as early human beings also imagined that "the virtue possessed by an aggregate… inhere[s] in all parts of it [and extends] to whatever is associated with it."[7] One might therefore exert influence over another by possessing something that had formerly belonged to that person. Magic is also thought to have adapted to the increasing complexity of religion, and thus came to include notions of supernatural beings, though for Spencer both magic and religion give way to empirical science as it developed in modern European culture.

Like Spencer, the English anthropologist, Edward Burnett Tylor (1832-1917), imagined magic and religion as emerging *concurrently* in the experiences of the earliest human beings. In explaining the death of others, the cause of illness, dreams, visions, and trances, Tylor reasoned, primitive people must have posited the notion of a soul or spirit. Over time, spirits were thought to dwell virtually everywhere.[8] Similarly, for Tylor magic emerged as a tendency to associate "an ideal connection for a real connection." Primitive human beings hypothesized actual, causal connections on the basis of analogies, contiguity, and symbolism. Like both Hegel and Spencer, Tylor considered magic to be "one of the most pernicious delusions" of humankind, which "belongs in principle to the lowest known stages of civilization, and to the lower races." Hence, he posited the concept of "survivals…fragments of a dead culture [that have] become embedded in a higher, living one," to account for the persistence of magical beliefs and practices among nineteenth century Europeans.[9]

Spencer and Tylor emphasized the role of *theoretical speculation* in the origins of magic and religion. For Sir James George Frazer (1854-1941), however,

the key questions were not about how the belief in spirits or souls inhabiting things functioned to make sense of the world for the 'primitives.' Something far more humble and basic must have been at play for our prehistoric ancestors, as it now was for the tribal peoples encountered in the colonial domain. It was the ability of human beings to control the environment in which we lived that mattered most.[10]

On Frazer's telling, the human quest for control begins in the Age of Magic, and was characterized by "homeopathic" as well as "contagious" expressions of thought and practice. Both are "sympathetic" in nature, "since both assume that things act upon each other at a distance through a secret sympathy, the impulse being transmitted from one to the other by means of what we may conceive as a kind of invisible ether." Homeopathic magic assumes that "like produces like," for instance, "the attempt… to injure or destroy an enemy by injuring or destroying an image of him." Contagious magic assumes that things that have been in contact remain so, even if physically separated.[11] Over time, Frazer held, primitive societies came to acknowledge that neither form of magic is effective, and it is at this point that the Age of Religion emerges. Religion is here imagined as the "propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life," and implies an "elasticity or variability of nature," as gods are capable of making things entirely otherwise if they so desire. A belief in the uniformity of nature is said to return with the Age of Science, as human beings gradually realized that propitiating divine beings, like the casting of spells, fails to produce control over the natural world, which is precisely what modern empirical science offers. [12]

The scholarly imaginaries of Hegel, Spencer, Tylor, and Frazer ground magic as well as religion in what human beings *think* and how they reason. The approaches of R. R. Marett (1866-1943) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), however, introduce new terms

into such debates, namely, powerful *emotions*, whether consciously experienced or unconsciously repressed. In *The Threshold of Religion* (1914), Marett disputes Tylor's account of the origins of religion.[13] Prior to the emergence of religious *ideas* (e.g., of ancestral or nature spirits), Marret insists, are basic religious *emotions* (such as awe, fear, and wonder) that arise in response to experiences profoundly outside of the ordinary, which Marett captures with the term "the supernatural."[14] Similarly, magic emerges not from a false 'associations of ideas,' but as an emotional desire to impose one's will upon the external world. Marett further distinguishes between "rudimentary magic," in which primitive peoples actually believe that their actions are capable of manipulating the natural world, and "developed magic," in which a kind of make-believe is undertaken and "expressed in the formula: As I do this symbolically, so may something else like it be done in reality."[15] Marett concedes that magic and religion may ultimately prove impossible to disentangle, and "magico-religious" best describes instances where clear boundaries between magic and religion could not be readily discerned.[16]

Sigmund Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913) understands magic and religion as emerging from repressed early childhood experiences. On Freudian theory, as male children mature, they experience sexual desire for their mothers, jealously toward their fathers, and the guilt that results drives, among other things, a belief in one or more deities and supplicatory practices directed toward them. Religion, from this point of view, Graham Cunningham wryly notes, represents "an oedipal complex magnified to cosmic proportions."[17] Magic emerges in a similar manner. As Daniel Pals observes, on Freud's view, "[i]n their use of magic [primitive peoples, as well as children and neurotics] imagine that the world is just an extension of their own selves. By thinking about the

sound of thunder, they suppose they can make it rain." For, again in Freudian theory, the development of individuals parallels that of societies: each begins in a childlike phase typified by magical thinking and behaviors, followed later by religion, and finally by modern empirical science, in which mature individuals and entire cultures accept empirical reality instead of fantasy.[18]

Rather than speculating as to the intellectual or emotional worlds of *individuals*, Emile Durkheim (1858-1917), Max Weber (1864-1920), and Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) emphasize the *social* dimension of religion and magic, exploring the "collective notions" that constitute the "common experience of mankind."[19] If some scholars assumed that locating the historical origins of magic required that they travel "backward in time to imagine what the ideas and emotions of the very first human beings would have been," Durkheim proposed "that we look firsthand at a real example of religion…in the simplest society we know of."[20] Thus, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1912) articulates what are said to be the rudimentary building blocks of social practices such as religion, totemism, and magic, as found among indigenous Australian societies.[21] Durkheim argues that magic and religion share something of the same basis: each represents a unified systems of ideas relative to sacred things, that is, things that are set apart, perceived as powerful, deserving of respect and special treatment, and that are forbidden from normal contact.[22] For Durkheim, however,

> religion does not come along to replace magic when it fails, because the two are not concerned with the same thing. Magic is an exclusively private matter… The magician, like a doctor, heals my sickness or puts a spell on your enemy; but this is a purely personal issue…. Religious rituals and beliefs come into play whenever group concerns are foremost in the mind… Accordingly, magic and religion can exist quite comfortably side by side; the one is the place for the personal, the other the sphere of the social.[23]

The key difference between religion and magic for Durkheim, then, is that religion unites human beings into a single community whereas magic does not.[24]

Like Durkheim, Max Weber also understood magic and religion as occupying quite different social locations, constituted by different logics, personnel, divine beings, ethics, social life, and degrees of intellectual efficacy. Magic is said to be the domain of solitary magicians who practice sorcery and traffic with demons under an ethos of achieving desired material ends. Religion, by contrast, is the province of priests, who direct the worship of one or more deities, around which emerges a robust social life, and which provides more satisfying answers to fundamental existential questions. Weber also discerns three distinct kinds of magic: naturalism, in which some objects and some human beings are perceived as possessing "charisma," or power and influence; animism, in which charisma is seen as residing in more abstract spiritual forces; and symbolism, in which charismatic objects represent, rather than instantiate, spiritual forces. At this third stage, the religious world in which human beings live is significantly transformed, as it is here that spiritual forces are engaged indirectly, or symbolically, rather than directly manipulated.[25] In an incremental and uneven fashion, Weber holds, early human societies gradually developed a less magical orientation toward the world, and religion emerged, though the boundary between magic and religion has always been fluid. Still, for Weber, who rejects unilateral theories of social development, an increasingly less magical orientation signals a shift away from the use of formulae in the coercion of spiritual forces in order to achieve desired ends, and towards the practice of prayer and sacrifice in an effort to supplicate spiritual forces.[26]

Other theorists also conceptualized the magic/religion relationship in ways that emphasize magic's social location. Marcel Mauss, in *A General Theory of Magic* (1902), for instance, argues that, while religion and magic are derived from the same sense of "an impersonal power" within the universe, there exists a fundamental difference between religious and magical "rites."[27] Religious rites are said to be inherently integrative: they function in ways that promote a coherent, societal whole. A magical rite, by contrast, is "any rite which does not play a part in organized cults," which is private, secret, mysterious, and "approaches the limit of a proscribed rite."[28] For Mauss, then, magic is not only the domain of the solitary practitioner, but the social outsider.[29]

The work of Rudolph Otto (1869-1937) points to yet another influential approach in theorizing religion and magic. Otto's *The Idea of the Holy* (1917) imagines religion phenomenologically, yielding an analysis of "religious consciousness."[30] For Otto, religion has two aspects, that which can be rationally understood, and that which is mysterious. If the rationally apprehensible aspects of religion are the province of the theologian, Otto's primary interest lies in describing the historical development of the human encounter with the "numinous" (i.e., the presence and power of the divine), from its earliest and dimmest expression to its full completion in modern day Christianity. A complete and unadulterated religious experience, the *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, is said to be one of attraction, awe, rapture, and love, in which one experiences the intense otherness of the divine.[31] Magic, by contrast, represents "a suppressed and dimmed form of the numinous," and comes in two forms. The earliest kind of magic, Otto holds, was likely that identified by Frazer, and sought to influence the natural world by means of sympathetic rites. Over time, magical understandings of the world

endeavored to influence not simply material processes, but also "demoniac" spiritual forces themselves capable of shaping worldly events. This second stage of magic is said to represent a kind of proto-religion, "the earliest stirrings of numinous consciousness," in which the experience of awe and otherness are evoked. Religion is said to have gradually evolved out of magic of this kind, as religious experience was deepened and refined, and as external religious forces (e.g., the figure of Christ) coaxed human beings out of its dark ages, until "the fullest expression of the numinous" is attained in Christianity.[32]

Ultimately, much that nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars took as methodological conventions–reliance upon the fieldwork of others, assumed frameworks of social and cultural evolution–appear from the perspective of later decades as obvious epistemic dead ends. But it is distinctly unhelpful, Eric Sharpe contends, to criticize earlier theorists on these grounds. "Given the conditions and presuppositions of the time," he writes,

> it is very difficult to imagine how it could have been otherwise. It is a barren and pointless exercise to criticize a scholar for having been born fifty or sixty years too soon. By the 1890s evolution, from being a theory, had become an atmosphere; and its value as a principle of classification was hardly questioned.[33]

Instead of "hurling bricks" at Tylor, Frazer, and others for their "armchair scholarship," Sharpe offers alternate criteria for their assessment, such as the painstaking manner in which these scholars worked to align their hypotheses with all of the data available to them, or the ways in which they pushed back against prevailing theories.[34] We might, for instance, read them in light of the ways in which their work *unsettled* Victorian assumptions as to the absolute difference separating "primitive" and modern European

societies. Frazer, one contemporary editor submits, implies that "magic might lie at the tap-root of much they [i.e., Victorians] held dear," and thus undermines notions of European cultural superiority in one way, even if subtly re-inscribing it in others.[35]

Whether or not we concur with Sharpe, a number of important methodological shifts came to characterize twentieth century academic constructions of the category magic: they tended to reject notions of cultural evolution; they were more frequently the result of their author's own ethnographic fieldwork; they began to emphasize the internal coherence of the symbolic and ritual worlds they studied; and they came to be increasingly suspicious of the category magic.

Lucien Levy-Bruhl (1857-1939), for example, in *How Natives Think* (1910), understands magic and religion as collective phenomena of markedly different orders, suggesting a fundamental gulf between "primitive" and Western mentalities. At the same time, he *rejects* the further conclusion that the former must therefore represent a degraded form of the latter. Instead, Levy-Bruhl argues that these different orders of thought are animated by entirely different cultural logics, one logical and rational, the other "prelogical" and irrational.[36] Primitive thought, he tells us, is steeped in the "mystic."

> Not a single being or object or natural phenomenon in their collective representations is what it appears to be to our [Western] minds…. [T]o the primitive who belongs to a totemic community, every animal, every plant, indeed every object, such as the sun, moon, and stars, forms part of a totem… Consequently, each individual has his special affinities, and possesses powers over the members of his totem… he has obligations towards them, mystic relations with other totems, and so forth.[37]

The perceived ubiquity of the mystic is said to explain why some indigenous peoples draw no distinction between objective and subjective realities, for instance, between dreams and the waking world, or natural and supernatural realities.[38] Within such

mentalities, even space and time are immediately perceived as bound up in the "law of participation," that is, the notion that all things "give forth and they receive mystic powers, virtues, qualities, influences, which make themselves felt outside." For Levy-Bruhl, then, in "primitive" thought it is the mystic dimension, spread throughout existence, that really matters, and it is not at all clear that Western categories are adequate for articulating this lived experience, or that Western modes of thought represent demonstrably superior cultural expressions.[39]

E. E. Evans-Pritchard (1902-1973) went further still, theorizing upon the basis of his own fieldwork among the Azandi peoples of North Central Africa and later among the Nuer located in Southern Sudan and Eastern Ethiopia.[40] In *Witchcraft, Oracles, and Magic Among the Azande* (1937), he examines the ways in which these three categories cohere within Azande culture. As a result, magic emerges not as the crude workings of the unlearned but rather as a highly plausible symbolic construction, at least for those who reside within Azande social and linguistic worlds. Azande thought is said to be characterized by two primary modes, the empirical and the mystical: the empirical deals with readily observable phenomena, the mystical with "patterns of thought that attribute to phenomena supra-sensible qualities which are not derived from observation."[41] As an example of how these modes play out in daily life, Evans-Pritchard discusses an instance in which a grainary has collapsed due to termites, killing the people within. The Azande know quite well that the termites represent the physical cause of the grainery's collapse. But they also believe that witchcraft can determine which people are underneath it when it collapses, that magic can be deployed to protect against witchcraft, and that oracles are necessary in order to determine who is responsible for witchcraft.[42]

In *Magic, Science, Religion, and Other Essays* (1948), Bronislaw Malinowski likewise draws conclusions about religion, magic, and human nature generally, on the basis of his own fieldwork in the Trobriand Islands. Religion here is said to involve expressive rites which emerge in life's most stressful situations, such as birth, marriage, and death. Religious rites are "ends in themselves" in that they give voice to the emotions which stressful events produce, as in the case of funeral ceremonies and celebrations of births. Magic, by contrast, "is a practical art, consisting of acts which are only a means to a definite end expected to follow later on." Magic emerges "at the gaps," when ordinary methods prove insufficient to achieve an important task. Magical practices release the stress that results when "gaps" are encountered and also imitate desired ends. Trobriand Islanders, for example, are said to be expert gardeners, possessing extensive knowledge of "weather and seasons, plants and pests, soil and tubers," and are generally convinced of the reliability of their gardening knowledge and skill. At the same time, "mixed with all their activities there is to be found magic, a series of rites performed every year over the garden in rigorous and sequential order... [and] which is regarded by the natives as absolutely indispensable." That said, Malinowski cautions:

> If you were to suggest to a [Trobriander] that he should make his garden by magic alone, he would simply smile on your simplicity. He knows as well as you do that there are natural conditions and causes, and by his observations he knows also that he is able to control these natural forces by mental and physical effort…. If the fences are broken down, if the seed is destroyed or has been dried or washed away, he will have recourse not to magic, but to work, guided by knowledge and reason.[43]

Trobrianders draw a vital distinction between the ordinary and the extraordinary. The ordinary (e.g., a broken fence) is understood as emerging from physical causes only, causes that can be effectively dealt with on the physical plane by mundane human efforts. The extraordinary (e.g., drought, blight, unexpected dying off of garden plants) represents

far more "unaccountable and adverse" phenomena for which there exists no reliable ordinary intervention, and which may only be met by magic.[44] The same distinctions are said to obtain in virtually all Trobriand social practices, from fishing, pregnancy and childbirth, to warfare, the treating of illnesses and injuries and staving off death, essentially any endeavor deemed significant and in which frustrating "gaps" are likely to be encountered.

Importantly, for Malinowski magic is *not* the sole province of the so-called "primitive." To the contrary, he insists, "there are no peoples without magic" (as well as religion and science) in some form, since all peoples experience limitations in their ability to meet their perceived needs by ordinary means and the emotional stresses that result therefrom.[45] Magic not only expresses these pent up emotions which arise under such circumstances, it also serves to "ritualize man's optimism," such that "the desired end seems nearer satisfaction," thereby allowing human subjects to "regain [their] balance, once more at harmony with life." For Malinowski, magic reflects a natural and understandable reaction to universal biological and psychological needs: namely, the relieving of emotional pressures and the maintaining of optimistic expectations for the future in an uncertain world.[46]

The structural/functionalist approach of Claude Levi-Strauss (1908-2009) develops further Levy-Bruhl's distinction between Western and "primitive" thought.[47] Like Levy-Bruhl, Levy-Strauss holds that religion and magic indicate different experiential categories. However, whereas Levy-Bruhl saw these as mutually exclusive, for Levy-Strauss they are intimately related. "Religion," he says, "consists in a *humanization of natural laws* and magic in a *naturalization of human actions*." In

religion the elements of nature are anthropomorphized, and human beings project their own qualities onto the natural world. In magic human actions are treated "as if they were an integral part of physical determinism," and human beings project the powers of the natural world onto themselves.[48] In Levy-Strauss's imaginary, religion and magic "constitute two components which are always given, and vary only in proportion…. each implies the other." Therefore, he concludes, "[t]here is no religion without magic any more than there is magic without at least a trace of religion."[49] If magic and religion are for Levy-Bruhl dichotomies, for Levy-Strauss they are binaries.

More so than any other scholars discussed thus far, the work of Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah (1929-present) develops the notion that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholarly attempts to delineate the boundaries of magic and religion in "primitive" societies reveals far more about the scholars who engaged in such work, and what they were concerned about, than the societies they studied. In *Magic, Science, and the Scope of Rationality* (1990), Tambiah argues that attempts to distinguish magic from religion reflect longstanding concerns of European religious cultures, namely, identifying true religion from false, and cordoning off proper religious actions and motivations from improper magical ones.[50] Like Tambiah, Ninian Smart (1927-2001) is suspicious of scholarly attempts to distinguish magic from religion. Victorian scholars, he writes in *Dimensions of the Sacred* (1996), buttressed notions of their own cultural superiority by constructing magic as a primitive expression of proto-religion. Consequently, comparative analysis on such a basis points to what *Victorian scholars valued*, which may have little to do with what those cultures they purported to study themselves value.[51] Hoping to correct such distorting ethnocentrism, Smart re-imagines a phenomenological

approach to the study of religion while at the same time finding a replacement for magic. A phenomenological approach to the study of religion, he argues, is *not* one in which religious experience from various cultures is measured against some presupposed norm (which was precisely what Rudolph Otto tried to do in his comparative study of "religious consciousness"). To the contrary, a phenomenological approach requires *epoche*, the firm "bracketing out" of one's own theological preferences, as well as "informed empathy," in gaining access to the self-understanding of others'. But Smart seeks to accomplish more than merely transcribing religious worlds. He wants to do comparative analyses of the various "dimensions" which, he argues, comprise religious worlds of all kinds. This requires broad, generic categories that can be applied to many different cultural contexts (e.g., religion, myth, ritual, experience, etc.) without distorting the social practices under analysis.[52] As part of this comparative project, and in lieu of magic's troubled history, Smart opts for the category "mantric causation" which he defines as "the use of sacred formulas to achieve some desired end." In so doing, Smart makes recourse to linguistic and performance theory, and mantric causation is framed as "performative utterances," actions which are instantiated by virtue of their being spoken. In Smart's view, magic thusly understood is *analogous* to religion. Whereas religious ritual focuses upon divine beings (e.g., by means of worship and sacrifice), mantric causation employs sacred formula in the attempt to shape worldly outcomes in desired ways.[53]

There are, of course, a great many scholarly theories of magic that this brief and selective history has not discussed. Still, what has emerged in the foregoing discussion are dominant (and sometimes conflicting) themes which have shaped scholarly thought,

such as: magic as crude and primitive; magic as neurotic and infantile; magic as socially marginal and individualistic; magic as a pre-modern, irrational, and non-Western mode of thought; magic as a coherent expression of particular cultural worlds; magic as a classificatory strategy which tells us more about those who deploy it than those studied by means of it. Given such varied associations, it is not difficult to see why contemporary scholars of religion are often skeptical as to its continued interpretive utility. Presently, two arguments for magic's abandonment are considered, and one strategy for its potential reclamation is advanced.

RECLAIMING MAGIC AS AN INTERPRETIVE CATEGORY

The category magic has been deemed unusable for two primary reasons: it's analytical imprecision, and its ideological baggage. Edmund Leach's *Social Anthropology* (1982) articulates the first critique. Many of the terms deployed by anthropologists, he suggests, including "law," "religion," "myth," "ritual," and "politics," are in need of serious re-thinking, due to the wide range of meanings which have come to be associated with them, rendering such terms imprecise. As for magic, however, the situation is far worse: "after a lifetime's career as a professional anthropologist," Leach confesses, "I have almost reached the conclusion that the word has no meaning whatsoever."[54] The problem, as Leach sees it, is that academic writing on the topic creates the impression that magic is rather easy to identify, while in fact isolating no clear and distinct analytical content whatsoever. For many nineteenth and twentieth century scholars, he explains, magic had to do with "non-rational purposive behavior," behavior which is, strictly speaking, mechanically unnecessary in order to accomplish a given task,

but which is symbolically quite rich. "Few contemporary social anthropologists," however,

> would confidently assert that they can distinguish a magical from a non-magical act. Virtually all kinds of purposive actions contain elements which are not strictly 'necessary' from mechanistic point of view but which have 'symbolic' value for the actor. The performances which are described as 'magic' in ethnographic literature are ones in which this symbolic component is very pronounced but they do not form a distinct class of actions.[55]

Leach's insight offers an intriguing way of thinking about the long parade of scholarly theories of magic over the past two centuries: scholars have brought very different questions, interests, ideologies, concerns, and methodological preferences to their attempts to identify and analyze magic, and have in turn imagined the symbolic aspects of certain behaviors in light of these. That is, what each takes to represent 'the nature of magic' in fact represents *a projection of their own preoccupations* onto the rich symbolic dimension of those social practices they examined. Thus, for Hegel and Otto magic represents 'a dim apprehension of the divine'; for Spencer and Tylor, it represents erroneous modes of associative thought; for Frazer, a stubbornly pre-scientific belief in sympathetic forces; for Marett, the naïve projecting outward of one's imperative will; for Freud, the oedipal complexes writ large; for Weber, Durkheim, and Mauss, the workings of the solitary practitioner on the margins of society; and so on. On this analysis, then, not only do these theories of magic reveal more about the scholars who crafted and deployed them than about those they purport to study, it would seem that the term itself cannot be linked to any kind of stable content whatsoever.

Randal Styers interrogates not only magic's definitional complexities, but also, and most especially, its ideological baggage. If scholars have tended to "assume a posture of detachment, transparency, and cool reason" in setting magic firmly apart from religion,

Styers discerns "many interests at play" in their so doing, chief among these is "the scholarly effort to conjure–or conjure away... what it means to be modern.[56] "The dominant scholarly theories of magic," he says,

> have had as a central theme the prescription of idealized norms for modern subjectivity…. [which] conforms to distinctive norms of individual agency and autonomy (seeing oneself as fundamentally independent from other individuals and the natural world), while tempering that autonomy with a suitably submissive attitude toward the social order.[57]

In other words, if the properly modern human being rejects notions of mystical connection with others, the natural world, material objects, and desires which engender disobedience, scholarly discourse has consistently constructed the category magic as a stubbornly pre-modern attitude, one "preoccupied with [mystically derived sources of] social power, entangled in a web of improper and disruptive desires, murky relations with materiality, [and] arrogant self-seeking."[58] Of course, and as Styers points out, the term magic aided in the policing of subjectivities long before the advent of modernity, for example, as it was deployed against those accused of witchcraft in medieval Europe, in Protestant anti-Catholic polemics, and by post-Reformation Catholics "seeking to explain that Catholic sacramental practices fall properly within the bounds of religion rather than magic."[59] That said, Styers views modern academic discourse as making distinctive contributions to this cultural practice: in setting up magic as a foil for proper expressions of religion, rationality, emotion, desire, and identity, scholarly production helped to *naturalize* the subjectivities thought to be necessary for life in large, complex, Western societies. If magical subjectivities suggest a cosmos which responds to human will, imagination, and wishes, the properly modern person is said to be firmly ensconced within an "emphatic disenchantment," and accepts such disenchantment as no more than

an obvious empirical truth.[60] On Styers' analysis, to continue to deploy the category magic is therefore to continue such policing of subjectivities.[61]

Either of these arguments represent compelling grounds for any category's abandonment. If a given taxon has no clear conceptual content, reveals more about the scholars who wield it than those they study, and/or functions as an ideological weapon by virtue of its deployment, then it is obviously and deeply problematic. More than a few scholars of religion have come to believe that the category magic is irretrievably caught in the gravity of such critiques. In her study of *mantra* in Vedic India, for example, Laurie Patton draws upon James George Frazier's insights regarding sympathetic magic (i.e., as a mode of thought predicated upon contiguity), though she does so in the service of another interpretive frame altogether (i.e., metonymy). In explaining her reluctance to more substantively deploy the taxon magic, she writes,

> [s]ome might argue that one could continue to use the term magic but simply reinvigorate it with new meanings and possibly without its derogatory implications… [But] I am dubious that this semantic rejuvenation is possible at this stage of the intellectual game, especially when magic remains a popular way of speaking and writing about 'bad religion.'[62]

For Patton, then, the pejorative meanings with which the category magic has long been freighted have become so thoroughly associated with the term as to render it beyond reclamation. Terms such as magic, she concludes, "are best understood functionally, as a means of social distancing by one group of practitioners from another, or as a way of talking about what 'proper' religious behavior is, and what it is not."[63] But Patton, a scholar of Indian religious texts, is engaged in weighing the interpretive benefits and liabilities of two potential hermeneutical frames–magic and metonymy–for the particular historical study she has in mind. In such a competition magic does not fare especially

well. Not only does it invoke the mistaken assumptions of past generations of Indologists, it reduces "what was once grand, public, and authentically religious" to mere "instrumental manipulations" and "magical operations."[64] Thus, for the purpose of her particular analysis, metonymy represents the better choice.

Fair enough. But it is also conceivable that other scholars, working in other interpretive contexts, might make different hermeneutical decisions. For example, the tensions engendered by reading through the lens of magic forms of social production largely consumed by contemporary, middle-class, white Americans suggests an ironical juxtaposition capable of *unsettling* (rather than merely re-instantiating) longstanding assumptions, and thus helping scholars to think in new and interesting ways about such objects of study. More, all of the liabilities to which Patton refers (i.e., the pejorative meanings associated with the term) are in principle revisable. Troubled categories may be imagined anew. For, as Ivan Strenski reminds us, scholarly categories are not ahistorical givens. Rather, they are "historical artefacts," reflecting the interests and questions of the theorists who construct and/or deploy them. As such, scholarly theories, categories, definitions, and methodologies inevitably come and go with larger cultural trends, "like styles of clothing or modes of speech," and whether contemporary scholars continue to gain anything from deploying them "will depend on just what *our* interests are."[65] As the distance between historical contexts becomes too great, the interpretive utility of older analytical tools may diminish. This seems to be precisely what has happened with magic. Contemporary scholars are simply not interested in the kinds of questions which animated nineteenth and early twentieth century scholars (e.g., accounting for "primitive" societies and "savage" modes of thought).

While abandonment is at times required (as with the categories "primitive" and "savage"), theoretical models also exist for re-imagining problematic categories. Jose Ignacio Cabezon's edited volume, *Scholasticism: Cross-Cultural and Comparative Perspectives* (1998), re-conceptualizes the category "scholasticism" which, he tells us, had come to be associated rather exclusively with late medieval Christian Europe, such that in its more generic form it becomes useful for thinking about a range of diverse data sets in new and interesting ways, including Islamic, Jewish, Taoist, Buddhist, Hindu, and Neo-Confucian, religious worlds. Put simply, Cabezon argues for incremental adjustments to a given category as it is applied to new data, a hermeneutical strategy which allows a category to accommodate any number of unexpected differences. Such reflexivity is possible, he explains, because the categories with which scholars attend to the religious worlds they study are fundamentally "byproducts of the human imagination." As such, they represent "*nothing more than* a heuristic point of departure." While they may be initially grounded in longstanding theories and definitions, they must remain perpetually "subject to change in the encounter with the culturally other," and thus capable of accommodating, instead of merely overriding, differences. When scholars apply their categories in this way, as heuristic and malleable "conversation starters" and with an explicit "invitation to modification," comparison and interpretation become acts of discovery rather than imposition and colonization.[66]

But Cabezon's theorizing might be extended further still. If scholarly categories are in fact byproducts of the imagination, then the studies produced by means of them cannot be adequately understood as a simple mapping of territory. Or, as David Gordon White (referencing the work of Jonathan Z. Smith) has argued, the interpretive work that

scholars do, "does not necessarily tell us how things are, it tells us how they might be conceived." The scholar herself is a kind of "mythographer," whose work trades in *both* primary data as well as her own imaginative constructs, though even that which counts as "primary data" is intimately bound up with (and created by) these imaginative constructs![67] The intellectual challenge of scholarship, then, is *not* one of simply identifying and labeling social practices *as* magic (or religion, or ritual, or myth, or what have you). Rather, the challenge of scholarly study involves reading complex modes of social production *as if* they are magic (or religion, or ritual, or myth, or what have you) under one stipulative, heuristic, and malleable definition or another. What matters most is whether the act of reading them *as if* helps scholars to see things they did not see previously, whether so doing opens up new and interesting ways of thinking about their objects of study, and what so doing potentially obscures and distorts.

Such a methodological shift portends considerable analytical freedom. Starting definitions no longer matter all that much beyond a basic capacity to direct scholarly attention in fruitful ways. More, an initial sense as to how magic (or any category) might be construed may be derived *from any cultural resources whatsoever*–popular novels, comic books, films, sixteenth century European esotericism, emic religious voices, self-help literature, fantasy role-playing games, television shows and advertisements, scholarly theorizing from other disciplines or earlier decades, even a hunch or intuition–anything that might potentially yield interesting interpretive results. Indeed, a category's provenance is irrelevant. For, on this approach, the goal of scholarship lies in seeing what certain cultural practices look like when read through a given lens, and what happens to the lens on the basis of reading different sets of data through it. This approach is

postmodern in that it explicitly acknowledges the imaginal dimension of scholarship (which apparently so troubled Edmund Leach). If the presence of a robust imaginal dimension undermines hopes for definitive and static categories, it at the same time opens up ample grounds for the innovative and dynamic deployment of those same categories.

In the chapters that follow, the approach outlined above is applied to the understanding of magic suggested in the introduction, namely, that magical forms of cultural production are those which posit an expanded understanding of human nature, one in which human beings may, by some practice, tap into formerly unrecognized sources of power in shaping their circumstances in preferred ways. Due to the diversity of magics which obtain within as well as between genres, this initial construct is very much 'an invitation to modification,' and what matters most in the forthcoming interpretive endeavor is *not* a definitive labelling of this or that social practice as magical or otherwise, but what the act of reading a variety of data through this lens illuminates and reveals.

Chapter Two: Magic and Popular Entertainment

In recent years, scholars of religion have invested considerable time and energy in examining the religious dimensions of popular culture. Television, film, music, food, sports, celebrities, violence, video games, the world-wide web, all such domains, it seems, often come freighted with religious themes, and in some cases may themselves function religiously, serving as carriers of myth, ritual, and a collective identity and ethos.[1] As chapter one's brief history of scholarly theories of magic demonstrates, religion and magic are never that far apart. Both, after all, assume that human flourishing depends upon a proper relationship between the human world and a transcendent realm of power and authority. Precisely because religion and magic are analytically and phenomenologically related, then if popular culture can serve as a carrier for one, it likely can do the same for the other.

This is what precisely Jeffrey J. Kripal observes in *Mutants and Mystics: Science Fiction, Superhero Comics, and the Paranormal* (2011). Within contemporary American popular culture, Kripal argues, a preoccupation with "the magical, mystical, and paranormal…lies hidden in plain sight…and gives rise to innumerable works of pulp fiction, science fiction, superhero comics, and metaphysical film."[2] Within the earliest instantiations of *Superman* (which tell of a young man from a distant planet who, as he grows up on Earth, discovers that Earth's particular properties have provided him with super-powers), the futuristic novels of Phillip K. Dick (which tell of a "divine invasion" and the rather forced upgrading of human consciousness thereby), Whitley Strieber's surreal account of "communion" with extraterrestrial visitors, and films such as *X-Men, Phenomenon,* and *Powder*, to site but a handful of possible examples, Kripal discerns a

ubiquitous "super story" at once esoteric and exoteric that goes something like this: there exists a distant source of transformational power and energy which, when directly encountered, unleashes unguessed at paranormal abilities to marvelous, if also unpredictable and even frightening, effect. This super story is said to be esoteric in that its basic premise (which always has to do with the attainment of trans-mundane abilities) has been traditionally associated with mystical, theurgic, and magical sub-traditions across the history of religions. It is exoteric in that it is played out publicly, "right in front of our eyes," by means of mass media that resonate with contemporary audiences. The magical dimension is *simultaneously* visible as well as hidden, Kripal contends, because it envisions humanity's actual evolutionary future, a future which contemporary society is unable to consider save in the guise of popular entertainment.[3]

One might concur with Kripal's *initial* observation–that contemporary American popular culture is awash in the magical–and yet extend its scope considerably further, looking not only to the superhero comics which comprise the bulk of his data, but to other imaginative worlds, likewise cast in the form of best-selling books and blockbuster Hollywood films, such as *Harry Potter*, Middle Earth, *Star Wars*, and *Twilight* alterities.[4] In what follows, some of the ways in which a distinctly magical dimension manifests within such expressions of popular entertainment, and how these cultural goods fund a broader magical landscape, are explored.

HARRY POTTER

"We must ask," Iver B. Neumann insists, writing for the *European Journal of Cultural Studies* in 2006, "what it is about the world of *Harry Potter* that fascinates our age." Since the publication of the first installment of the Potter series in 1997, *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*,

> 300 million copies have been sold worldwide, with 63 different translations. The films based on the books consistently generate turnover that places them in or near the all-time top ten. Merchandise turnover is measured in hundreds of millions of euros. Harry is a much-used teaching tool in schools, and fandom seems ever-present wherever teenagers and young adults gather, both on and off the internet. Measured in terms of the resources it has set into play, *Harry Potter* is the cultural mass phenomenon of the age.[5]

According to Neumann, success of this magnitude requires an explanation because at first glance the *Harry Potter* narrative offers little by way of originality. Harry is a likeable English boy who grows up in terrible circumstances, losing his parents and becoming the ward of selfish and hateful relatives. At age eleven he discovers that his parents were in fact wizards and, as he himself displays an aptitude for magic, is invited to attend the same school as did they, and as do all similarly endowed youngsters, Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry. At Hogwarts Harry's magical talents are cultivated in ways consistent with an enlightened wizarding ethos. He also finds companionship and something resembling a surrogate family. More gravely, Harry learns that his parents were murdered by the evil wizard Voldemort in an act of forbidden, necromantic sorcery which mysteriously backfired, destroying Voldemort, sparing Harry, but not Harry's parents. Harry soon becomes convinced (quite rightly) that Voldemort has returned to the material realm and plans not only revenge against Harry himself, but the implementation of a new social order in which Voldemort and his "death eaters" (i.e., evil wizards devoted to him) shall reign as absolute oligarch-sorcerers, free to run roughshod over

"muggles" (i.e., ordinary human beings). Ultimately it is Harry and his friends who must thwart Voldemort's scheme. Over the course of seven novels and eight films, Harry encounters a plethora of mythological creatures (e.g., unicorns, griffons, centaurs, dragons), magical items (e.g., Harry's invisibility cloak, Snape's many potions), enchanted places (e.g., Hogwarts itself, the Enchanted Forest, Gringotts Bank) and innumerable spells and counter-spells. Despite its vivid rendering of all this, Neumann contends, *Harry Potter* does little more than instantiate longstanding genres in children's literature, such as the fantasy of J. R. R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis and the English boarding school novel, both of which have been staples of English literature for some time, and neither of which seem capable of accounting for the phenomenal and global success of *Harry Potter*.[6]

In order to do so, Neumann himself turns to Clifford Geertz's theory of religious experience as "cognitive slippage." This theory holds that effective forms of myth and ritual induce in participants an imaginative shift from mundane to sacred realities and back again. Not only does the *character* Harry Potter move repeatedly between mundane and magical realms, Neumann argues that the *Harry Potter* books and films function as "fictional evocations," inducing in *audiences* a cognitive slippage from their own ordinary realities to a thoroughly enchanted and quite meaningful alterity, not unlike the effect that the *Left Behind* series of apocalyptic novels and films is said to exert upon some conservative Christian audiences. The *Harry Potter* books and films, on this view, represent an especially potent manifestation of "the return of religion" in our postmodern age.[7]

Other interpreters have offered quite different accounts, each of which claims to isolate some particular meaning or function within the *Harry Potter* imaginary which explains its profound resonance with contemporary audiences. Among these, *Harry Potter* is said to be a story of: the importance of classical virtues; the stimulation of our moral imaginations; the potential abuse of technology; the mysterious aspects of everyday experience such as time; recovery from abuse and trauma; developing adaptive social skills; stimulating one's intellectual curiosity; working cooperatively with others; following one's conscience even when the social costs of so doing run high; learning to navigate the cognitive realities of others' with empathy; and the ways in which all human beings are said to think (i.e., along the lines of sympathetic magic as identified by Frazer).[8]

Scholars of childhood studies have made especially helpful contributions to this hermeneutical endeavor. "In most popular children's fantasy," Roni Natov observes, "the magical universe is entirely separate from daily life," as in the works of Tolkien, Lewis, and Madeleine L'Engle, each of which locates the magical at some distance (in space, time, or both) from the ordinary. In *Harry Potter*, however, the magical *interpenetrates* the ordinary. "[A]t Hogwarts," she explains,

> the walls are 'covered with portraits of old headmasters and headmistresses, all of whom were snoozing gently in their frames'… Books bite and argue, 'locked together in furious wrestling matches and snapping aggressively'… Along with magical wands, cloaks of invisibility, maps that reproduce and mirror actual journeys as they are taking place, the things of children's culture—treats such as candy, and kids' own particular kind of humor, such as jokes about bodily fluids—are featured. Some of children readers' favorite aspects of life at Hogwarts include Bertie Bott's Every Flavor Beans, consisting of such flavors as spinach, liver, tripe, grass, sardine, vomit, ear wax, and 'even a booger-flavored one.'[9]

For Natov, this enchantment of daily life performs several functions. Firstly, it draws attention to the dual nature of children's lives. If Hogwarts students navigate a world of

eccentric ghosts, biting books, and animated portraits with unpredictable personalities, ordinary children learn to harmonize their vivid imaginations with a markedly disenchanted external reality. Secondly, it "enhances and amplifies the vitality of the ordinary," suggesting that what may seem disenchanted in everyday life might in fact prove to be otherwise. Thirdly, Natov keenly observes, Harry's supernatural powers,

> invite children to imagine beyond the boundaries of their limitations: what if I could see and hear without being seen or heard; what if I could fly; what if I could read another's mind. With his magic cloak, Harry is invisible; with his Nimbus 2000 racing broomstick, he can fly; he can even, in the fourth book, project himself into Dumbledore's siphoned-off thoughts.[10]

In this sense, magic in *Harry Potter* "stands in for what is beyond the power of children, perhaps anyone, to actualize" or influence or change.[11]

Not all interpreters have been as sanguine. Michael Ostling, a scholar of religion specializing in the history of magic in European cultural history, believes that *Harry Potter* further disenchants, rather than re-enchants, the world. Instead of showing us a universe in which the supernatural is once again mysterious, opaque to human reason, yet powerful and dangerous, in the *Harry Potter* alterity magic is lawful, predictable, readily summonable "by anyone with a bit of talent, proper training, and the correct ingredients."[12] Harold Bloom finds the *Harry Potter* materials to be poorly written, unoriginal, unimaginative, filled with clichés, making no demands upon audiences, and in a word "tiresome," something which ought to be read (or viewed) as quickly as possible "so as to make an end [of it]." He also, and more helpfully, notes that the *Harry Potter* imaginary is "epiphenomenal," meaning that, despite its cultural ubiquity, it itself is a manifestation of a yet more fundamental social psychology. Rowling's tens of millions of fans, he claims, "want to join her world, imaginary or not," because *Harry Potter* "feeds

a vast hunger for unreality." "Liberation from the constraints of reality-testing," Bloom

insists, "is exactly what millions of children and their parents desire and welcome at this

time."[13] If for Ostling the success of the *Harry Potter* franchise is driven by the desire to

see magic rendered as purely mechanical and subject to human control, for Bloom it

represents a longing for the fantasies of childhood.

It would not be difficult to argue that each of the readings discussed above

illuminate some aspect of the *Harry Potter* story itself, or the ways in which it has been

received by contemporary audiences. Its characters and narratives, as well as the intensity

of *Harry Potter* fandom, invite theorizing of all kinds: moral, metaphysical, social,

political, theological, and psychological. More, successful story-telling of any kind surely

relies upon something akin to the cognitive slippage Geertz associates with religious

experience: human beings tend to enjoy stories which transport them, metaphorically

speaking, somewhere else. For contemporary audiences, cognitive transport to a place

where what seems impossible is in fact learnable by anyone 'with a bit of talent and the

proper training and ingredients' may well represent a particularly desirable destination.

Indeed, as the psychologists Charles W. Kalish and Emma C. Kalish argue, the

vocational training featured at Hogwarts is as "hands-on and applied" as it is magical.

Students do not learn magical theory. They learn how to do things in a magical world-

space: "feed hippogriffs, transplant mandrakes, levitate cups, and brew all sorts of

potions."[14] In such ways, then, the *Harry Potter* universe primes audiences with a

storehouse of magical images, notions, and possibilities which, when set alongside

myriad other such resources, may well begin to re-shape what they take (or at least wish)

were possible.

MIDDLE EARTH

Withstanding even *Harry Potter*, J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* remains the single most successful children's book to date, "selling tens of millions of copies and being translated into more than forty languages." *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy which followed, "despite its three volume bulk, has been even more popular, with a reading public that is not constrained by considerations of gender, class, or ethnic background." The Tolkien books have of course also been recast as Hollywood films vying with the Potter franchise in terms of box office receipts. [15]

Set in the alternate universe of Middle Earth, the Tolkien materials tell of the Dark Lord, Sauron, who seeks to regain a magical Ring of unmatched potency he forged long ago, and into which he poured so much of his power and desire for domination that anyone who might come to possess this Ring would themselves be possessed (and ruined) by it, as was the creature Gollum. Eventually the Ring comes, seemingly by accident, to the Hobbit Bilbo Baggins, and then to Frodo his heir, both of whom display a remarkable capacity for resisting its corrupting influence. In the end it is Frodo who must bear the Ring through perils innumerable, to the Land of Mordor, the abode of Sauron, and cast the Ring into the fires whence it was forged, the only fires in Middle Earth capable of its destruction. This epic narrative, which stretches across four books and six lengthy films, "features a lot of magic, some whimsical and some practical," and some quite grave. Examples range from entertaining novelties like Gandalf's fireworks, to major plot elements such as the moon letters on Thorin's map and the magical door to which they point, as well as the Elven Queen Galadriel and wizards such as Saruman and

Gandalf, each of whom "exhibit[s] a kind of super-human consciousness," and of course the Dark Lord Sauron and his Ring. [16]

Although the Tolkien saga abounds in magic, some have argued that, nevertheless, at its core lies an essentially Christian teaching: that the weak shall overcome the strong. This axiom represents "a familiar biblical principle," Raymond J. Laird attests, one which is echoed repeatedly throughout the Hebrew Bible and culminates in the New Testament in the person of Jesus of Nazareth. In all of his dealings with humanity, Laird reminds us, God repeatedly "bypasse[s] the great and the mighty, and those considered wise in the world… [and it] seems evident that Tolkien had absorbed this critical aspect of the Christian world-view, and that he had incorporated it into the heart of his epic fantasy."[17] That Frodo, lacking utterly in strength of arms, magical power, and by his own admission any sort of special wisdom or courage, should be chosen for such a quest, Laird explains,

> is basic to the story. Here is a choice that cannot be plumbed, certainly not by the wisdom of this world, whether based upon history or lore as in the story, or upon supernatural powers such as belonging to wizards and elves as in this epic tale. Tolkien makes it clear that the possession of exceptional wisdom, supernatural insight, and special powers are insufficient to overcome the power of the Ring and its evil maker, the Dark Lord.[18]

Other interpreters have come to similar conclusions. Jeffery L. Morrow's essay, "J. R. R. Tolkien as a Christian for Our Times," sees not one but numerous Christ-figures in the Tolkien materials: in addition to Frodo, these include the wizard Gandalf (who dies and is resurrected), Aragorn the ranger (the rightful king of Middle Earth who "returns" and takes up his reign), and even Sam Gamgee (Frodo's faithful and suffering servant).[19] For such readers, Tolkien's works, like C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, are best understood as Christian allegory cast only superficially in the form of a supernatural fairy

tale. Here, magic serves merely to entertain, or at most to amplify and highlight key Christian themes.

In a beautifully argued essay which pays close attention to Tolkien's essays and letters as well as his fiction, John J. Davenport draws precisely the opposite conclusion. The tales of Tolkien's Middle Earth, he tells us, are best understood not as Christian allegory, or even as explicitly religious works, but as traditional faerie-stories structured along the lines of pre-Christian, Northern European mythology such as the Norse *Eddas* or the Old English *Beowulf*.[20] Tolkien himself saw magic as essential to such faerie narratives in at least three ways. Firstly, the faerie realm is inherently magical, a place of ageless beauty, where the stuff of dreams (or nightmares) may be readily encountered, and thus a realm which is fair as well as perilous. Secondly, the magic of the faerie realm is not to be equated with that of human sorcerers. By Tolkien's way of thinking, Davenport explains,

> faerie magic is a certain kind of magic, one that has nothing to do with the alchemist's transmutations, or sorcerer's apprentice tricks, or spells in a Dungeons and Dragons game. The sort of perilous magic native to the world of Faerie, represented in Tolkien's world by High Elves, wizards, dragons, and ents, reveals a face of Nature that is hidden in our ordinary reality. It expresses a living force or spirit in all things, which it is our heart's desire to encounter, and also to employ in creating new reality.[21]

Unlike the spell-craft of sorcerers, which is animated by the desire to control and manipulate, faerie magic seeks partners in acts of mutual enrichment and co-creation, not subjects to beguile or dominate. It represents "the good will to power," a perfectly natural and spontaneous life-affirming energy which flows through the world, but which is most readily encountered in places of great natural beauty, and of course the faerie realm itself. Thus Tolkien himself insisted that,

magic is not quite the right world for the special craft of [Faerie]. 'Enchantment' is a better word, because… [t]he aim of [faerie] 'magic' is not so much to produce a change in the physical world as to create a secondary world in our minds to delight, inspire, or instruct. [Human m]agic, by contrast, seeks to actualize our desire for things that do not present themselves to us naturally.[22]

Thirdly, the enchantment of the faery realm (into which the human characters in a faerie-tale inevitably wander) responds quite positively to the sincere human desire for "consolation" and healing, most especially when expressed with humility. This entails much more than a mere assurance or feeling that all will be well in the end, but rather a denouement in which, by a sudden, unexpected, and at times supernatural turn of events, the hero is delivered from what would surely be utter ruin. The *eucatastrophe*, as Tolkien called it (i.e., the surprising and miraculous "happy ending" with which all authentic faerie-stories are said to conclude), requires not only immersion in the enchantment of the faerie realm, but also that the protagonist have exhausted all ordinary means at her/his disposal in trying to avert the disaster at hand, that they found such means lacking, and that they have humbly resigned themselves to the catastrophe sure to follow. It is at precisely this point that the unexpected turn of events and ensuing "happy ending" of faerie-stories emerges, provoking intense surprise and joy in the characters and ideally in readers and audiences as well.[23]

If a *eucatastrophe* is taken as the distinguishing feature of the faerie-story genre, Davenport argues, then rather than seeing the Tolkien narrative as a biblical allegory, perhaps we should see both biblical as well as Middle Earth narratives as faerie-stories. Both feature major as well as minor *eucatastrophes* throughout. In the Tolkien stories, these include the final destruction of the Ring, which Frodo and Sam in fact failed to accomplish on their own (since Frodo finally succumbs and claims the Ring upon reaching the fires of Mount Doom), but which the sudden and unexpected appearance of

Gollum makes possible. The biblical text is, of course, replete with miraculous interventions in the face of catastrophic ruin, with the resurrection of Jesus (signifying victory over death) and the foretold final redemption of the world (signifying victory over sin, evil, and suffering) as primary examples.[24]

Writing for *TIME* magazine in 2002 and again in 2014, Lev Grossman notes that, if "the great [entertainment] franchises of the late 20th century tended to be science fiction—Star Wars, Star Trek, The Matrix—somewhere around 2000… we began to pay attention to other things, like magic… and fantasy." As Grossman recounts:

> I first realized this was happening in the late 1990s, when Harry Potter started levitating up best-seller lists, but he was only the most visible example. Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy had come out in 1995 and was already a big deal. George R.R. Martin published *A Game of Thrones* in 1996. When I was a kid, a blockbuster movie based on a fantasy novel was deeply implausible, but *The Lord of the Rings* arrived in 2001 and won four Oscars. *Eragon*, *World of Warcraft*, *Twilight*, *Outlander*, *Percy Jackson*, *True Blood* and the *Game of Thrones* TV shows all came tumbling after.[25]

If science fiction "reflected a deep collective faith that technology would lead us to a cyber-utopia," our preoccupation with the magical is said to point to "the enchantment of America," which for Grossman represents an attempt to recapture the optimism formerly invested in science and technology, only this time cast in fantasy. Works within this genre, Grossman argues, share a number of features. They each tell of a magical world "modeled loosely on agrarian medieval Europe," and offer "a water-colored memory of a way things never were." They also offer a diversity of magics.[26] In the *Harry Potter* universe, magic is largely subject to human control. What differentiates Harry from the arch-villain Voldemort is not the sort of magic each employs, but their goals and methods. Voldemort is happy to use lethal magic to dominate and coerce whereas Harry is not. In the Tolkien universe, by contrast, alongside the instrumental and mechanical

magic of wizards such as Gandalf and evil sorcerers such as Sauron, there exists the far

more mysterious power of enchantment, found in its most potent form among the faerie,

and with which properly humble human beings may ally themselves and thereby

participate in *eucatastrophic* "happy endings." So too each of the alterities Grossman

mentions. In short, the kinds of magics with which the fantasy genre funds the collective

imagination are not one but many. What they share in common is the view that human

beings could conceivably inhabit a very different kind of world, one in which they are

capable of far more than what currently seems to be the case.

STAR WARS

The *Star Wars* saga has been described as nothing less than "the central story of

its era," one which brought Americans back to the cinema in large numbers, saved

Twentieth Century Fox from economic collapse, and rendered science fiction a dominant

cinematic expression.[27] Indeed, the *Star Wars* universe has recently been articulated in a

yet another (seventh) Hollywood film initiating yet another (third) trilogy, and while the

franchise has for some time stood as the most successful in cinematic history, *Star Wars:*

The Force Awakens (2015) quickly earned in excess of three billion U.S dollars in ticket

sales worldwide, surpassing even *Avatar* (2009) as the highest earning single film to

date.[28]

The *Star Wars* trilogies tell of the fall and redemption of the Skywalker family

and the Jedi Order. For thousands of years, the Jedi Knights were peacekeepers and

guardians of the Galactic Republic. During this time, the Republic was kept in place by

the Jedi's supernatural powers, made possible by their connection to the mystical energy field known as the Force, as well as their unwavering commitment to a just social order. As the centuries passed, however, the Jedi Order grew calcified in its thinking and unable to perceive the imminent demise of the Republic at the hands of their nemesis, the Sith. The Sith represent the polar opposite of the Jedi. Drawing their own set of supernatural abilities from the Dark Side of the Force, the Sith desire power in order to control, coerce, or destroy that which resists them. In the waning days of the Republic, an especially powerful Sith Lord clandestinely rises to supreme political power and the Republic is swiftly and violently transformed into an Empire. Crucial to this transition is Anakin Skywalker. Initially trained as a Jedi and possessing a uniquely potent connection to the Force, Anakin succumbs to the temptations of the Dark Side and makes possible the annihilation of the Jedi. Luke Skywalker, Anakin's son, is initially hid from him, grows up to become a Jedi, and ultimately destroys the Emperor, turns his father from the Dark Side, and thereby clears the way for the re-emergence of the Jedi Order and the Republic.

If *Star Wars* abounds with futuristic technologies such as light-sabers, spaceships, super-liminal travel, laser-blasters, advanced robotics and Death Stars, it likewise displays profoundly magical dimensions, most evident in the figure of the Jedi and their relationship to the Force. An all-pervasive energy field, the Force is said to interpenetrate and interconnect all living things, and those who learn to tap into it become capable of super-human feats, including telekinesis, telepathy, a stunningly accurate sense of intuition, clairvoyant glimpses of the future, the past, and distant locations, as well as spectacular fighting and acrobatic skills. Interpreters largely concur that much of the

popular success of the *Star Wars* saga lies in the relationship between the Jedi and the Force, though they have read the semiotics of these two figures in markedly different ways.

According to James Lawler, *Star Wars* represents the mythology for our time because it distills the primary insights of the world's religions into a unified and empowering vision. Not only does *Star Wars* address ageless mythological themes such as the struggle of good against evil and the temptations of rage and revenge, its message is unambiguously hopeful. If human beings have been trained to look to technology or institutional religion for a sense of control over the world around them, Lawler argues, *Star Wars* points to an "inner power of the human spirit," one that has more to do with feeling and intuition than with instrumental reasoning, that "binds us all together in a powerful unity, and by which we can resist and overcome all inner darkness and every unjust form of rule." For Lawler, *Star Wars* represents 'the story of our times' because, in rendering for contemporary audiences the subterranean and cosmic spiritual reality suggested by the Force, *Star Wars* points to precisely the sort of new religious consciousness our present age so desperately requires. [29]

Others have read *Star Wars* through a distinctly Christian lens. For John C. McDowell, the Force functions as "God or Spirit Itself," here imagined as a quasi-pantheistic deity and cosmic energy rolled into one. Spiritual adepts gradually learn to access it and allow it to flow through them, and while it controls their actions, it also obeys their commands. As a kind of cosmic ultimate, the Force is the basis for benedictions ("May the Force be with you"), and imparts a clear moral burden upon those who participate in it. The Jedi may use their powers "for knowledge and defense," but

"never for attack." The Dark Side of the Force tempts young Jedi to indulge their aggressive and angry feelings. To go down such a path, however, is to give oneself over to a destructive power by which one is sure to be consumed, as are the Sith. For McDowell, the Force represents an eclectic, magico-religious understanding of the divine which, while drawing also from "eastern" spiritual traditions, articulates a message entirely compatible with Christian discipleship.[30]

Other interpreters have been markedly less positive. For Kevin J. Wetmore, who interrogates the *Star Wars* mythology by means of a post-colonial lens, the notion of Force-wielding Jedi Knights resonates so profoundly with contemporary Americans because its "spiritualized violence" allows them to indulge in an imperial mentality, one which mirrors American geopolitical priorities, cast as something else entirely. The science fiction genre, he points out, emerged during the latter centuries of Western colonialism, and thus tends to be freighted with all sorts of colonial themes. It frequently presents extraterrestrial civilizations as would-be invaders, destroyers, and enslavers of Earth and its inhabitants.[31] In the *Star Wars* films, an imperial mentality is subtly disguised as spiritual wisdom employed by the wise for the good of the many. Here, the Force functions as a divinely sanctioned, supernatural weapon which the Jedi deploy against those who resist the ideological imperatives of the Jedi Order.[32] It is precisely its inherently deceptive nature, Wetmore insists, which drives its popularity: The *Star Wars* narrative flourishes in contemporary American culture precisely because it offers an authoritarian ideology in the guise of an uplifting spirituality.

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

Like the fantasy genre, magical science fiction is similarly well-represented in the worlds of television and cable-television. Soon after the release of the first *Star Wars* film, *Star Wars: A New Hope* (1977), the ABC television network featured a new series, *Battlestar Galactica* (1978). For some it seemed that *Battlestar* partook too liberally of *Star Wars'* themes, featuring a small band of rebels fleeing a larger and quite sinister force, and heroic pilots flying similar spaceships armed with laser-blasters. George Lucas himself sued ABC on these grounds though he lost the case. Still, if *Battlestar* "got little respect… always in the shadow of *Star Wars*," some "[s]ixty-five million people of all ages, cultures, and backgrounds tuned in to see its debut" in September of 1978 and, although the show lasted just twenty-one episodes, it is said to have "become a near-religious experience for many fans due to the spiritual overtones and ancient mythology woven into the fabric of the story."[33] *Battlestar* told of an ancient human civilization, Caprica, its thirteen planetary colonies with names inspired by astrological lore (e.g., Geminon, Picon, Airilon, Tauron, etc.), and their creation of a sentient race of robotic servants, the Cylon. In time the Cylon rebelled, destroying Caprican civilization save for a small number of survivors who fled the thirteen colonies, guided and protected by the Battlestar Galactica, in search of a mythical planet known as Earth, to which Caprican scriptures claimed the thirteenth tribe of colonists journeyed long ago. The Cylon, however, bent upon destroying the last remnant of humanity, relentlessly pursue the humans in their search for Earth. The original series was cancelled after just one season, and so no clear denouement was achieved.

In 2004, however, the Sci-Fi channel aired a remake of the original series, *Battlestar Galactica* (*BSG*), to much critical acclaim. In 2007, for instance, *TIME* magazine rated *BSG* the top television drama. But where the original series featured clean-cut characters, clear lines between good and evil, and nicely resolved one-hour episodes, *BSG* reflected the mood of post-9/11 America: it was "much darker," offered "more reality and less fantasy," and dealt explicitly with "edgier" topics such as the horrors of terrorism, war, weapons of mass destruction, genocide, the torture and rape of prisoners, personal and political betrayal, and the temptation of fascism in the face of existential threats.[34] It also featured magical dimensions quite distinct from that of *Star Wars*. Where Jedi Masters and Sith Lords deftly wielding the Force are the stuff of *Star Wars*, *BSG* showed us a profoundly trans-human reality in the Cylon, and an equally profound mystical reality which, while both human and Cylon may participate in it, ultimately transcends the understanding of either.

Transhumanism is, of course, a philosophical movement which has emerged and to some extent flourished in American culture over the past four decades. Transhumanists seek to re-imagine what it means to be a human being in light of technological "augmentations," making humankind "healthier, heartier, smarter, and better looking." As the philosopher David Koepsell explains:

> New technologies could literally give us superhuman powers or merge us with our machines in useful (or terrifying) ways. Imagine being able to plug into the Internet without a computer; using bionic eyes to see in infrared, complete with zooms; or jumping a fence 12 feet high 'in a single bound.' Consider a computer-enhanced brain, capable of recalling every memory, or carrying *Encyclopedia Britannica* right behind our eyelids. These enhancements all hover now within the range of technical possibility, and only scratch the surface of dreams that people are now expressing, and searching for ways to realize, to remake themselves in the divine image.[35]

BSG imagines radically expanded human potentials of transhumanism in the form of the

Cylon. At first no more than competent robotic servants, after their rebellion the Cylon

quickly evolve, crafting physical bodies for themselves that are indistinguishable from

those of human beings, though Cylon are stronger, faster, smarter and mostly better

looking. They also reincarnate, upon death "downloading" their consciousness into a

Cylon mainframe and promptly reborn into a new and genetically identical body. The

transhuman is likewise prefigured in the eventual blending of human and Cylon peoples,

a development brought about by the "mystical quality" said to "permeate" and tie

together the larger *BSG* narrative.[36]

This mystical dimension plays out in complex ways, and even at the series'

conclusion remains mysterious. Religiously, colonial civilization is polytheistic,

worshiping "The Gods of Kobol," deities reminiscent of those of classical Greece (e.g.,

Zeus, Apollo, Athena.). The Cylon are devout monotheists, whose God is said to be

loving and foreknowing, but also brutally wrathful. He sanctions the annihilation of

humanity. For the first two seasons, it appears that Cylons have a monopoly on truth:

they deftly destroy colonial civilization and virtually all of humanity, and they claim to

understand God's purposes, plans and intentions. Over time this certainty is undermined,

first by the emergence of other Cylon models who are committed atheists or agnostics,

and later by plot twists which leave even the most evangelical of Cylons utterly

mystified. In the end, it is through a series of radically synchronistic events that the last

remnants of humanity and Cylon (following a Cylon civil war) arrive together at the

planet they decide to call Earth. The blending of human and Cylon peoples at the series'

close leads to the emergence of present-day human societies on present-day Earth, where

once more the construction of artificial and robotic life-forms, to be employed as servants, is underway. In the mythology of *BSG*, "all of this has happened before, all of it will happen again."[37]

As in the fantasy genre, the magical dimension assumes quite varied forms within different science fiction alterities. The Force is something which controls the Jedi's actions, but also responds to her commands, and hence manifests as all sorts of paranormal abilities which Jedi use in order to shape the world around them in preferred ways. In the *BSG* universe, though, the mystical dimension is something which, while human beings may participate in it, and while it is productive of miraculous outcomes, is entirely unpredictable, uncontrollable, intangible, illusive, unresponsive to human (or even Cylon) manipulation, pleas for help, or suffering, and ultimately impossible to contain within a given belief system.

TWILIGHT AND TRUE BLOOD

The popular success of contemporary vampire fiction, in virtually any form, rivals that of the fantasy and science fiction franchises discussed above. Helen T. Bailie writes in *The Journal of American Culture*:

> [a] perusal of the popular novel section in any bookstore will affirm that the paranormal, and specifically the vampire figure, is enjoying a remarkable resurgence of interest among readers. Not to be outdone, the film and television industry is currently benefitting from this interest and producing works like the film *Twilight*, based upon the by Stephanie Meyer, and the TV show *True Blood*, based upon Charlaine Harris' Sookie Stackhouse series.[38]

Indeed, by 2009 the paranormal genre figured in just over half of all books sold in the U.S., and a sizable proportion of these told of vampires. But if the cultural presence of

vampires vies with that of wizards, witches, faerie, and Jedi, not everyone concurs as to why this is the case. Some argue that vampire fiction has always reflected Western anxieties concerning cultural transnationality and hybridity, and that so long as such anxieties persist, so too the vampire myth. The vampire is said to undermine a binary fundamental to all human cultures, that of living vs. dead. As such, the vampire symbolizes the terrifying inability to distinguish self from other. During the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the figure of the vampire gave voice to European fears of an undesired mingling with colonial subjects and a fading racial purity. In the post-colonial, post-9/11 context of the early twenty-first century, the vampire represents the fear of further dissolving cultural and individual boundaries. After centuries of defending and reifying national identities, the attempt to create globalized societies threatens those structures which in the past seemed to preserve relative degrees of cultural coherence and stability.[39]

The *Twilight* and *True Blood* imaginaries, Deborah Mutch points out, in fact rehearse different strategies for dealing with such perceived threats. In the *Twilight* novels and films, the primary strategy is isolation. The Cullen "family" of vampires, for instance, "go to great lengths to hide their true identity for fear of violent intolerance in the US and elsewhere." A similar tactic is embraced by other non-human races, such as werewolves. The dangers of social contagion are countered by a rather strict communitarian ethos: each "kind" keeps to themselves and carefully observes those boundaries which preserve intact communal boundaries and individual identities. In the *True Blood* alterity, the dominant strategy is integration. The series opens with the public revelation that vampires really exist, but do not require the consumption of human blood

in order to survive, thanks to a synthetic alternative developed in Japan. While other races (e.g., faeries, werewolves, shapeshifters, and some vampires) continue to maintain closeted identities, the overriding theme is that of the challenges faced by those (such as the vampire, Bill Compton) who wish to live openly in a cosmopolitan society.[40] On Mutch's analysis, the popularity of vampire narratives such as *Twilight* and *True Blood* lies in their capacity to play out in dramatic form not only contemporary anxieties, but their potential resolutions.[41]

If interpreters such as Mutch see the symbolic function of vampires as fairly consistent across the past two centuries–they always express fears of undesired racial or cultural boundary crossings–others have emphasized the ways in which the vampires of contemporary fiction represent a profound discontinuity with the past. Vampires have, in essence, been transformed from pestilent embodiments of an evil and sinister force to handsome Gothic playboys. Over the past decade, Helen T. Bailie reminds us, vampire narratives comprise nearly twenty percent of all romance novels sold, and their vampire characters are epitomized by those of *Twilight* (Edward Cullen) and *True Blood* (Bill Compton) in that neither are the stuff of the traditional horror genre. They retain the power, ruthlessness, and predatory nature of the traditional vampire, but such traits are offset by a constellation of other characteristics. Both Cullen and Compton, avoid the drinking of human blood. Nor do they seek power over others. Instead, they endeavor to live cooperatively and harmoniously among humankind, and frequently end up fighting to protect the innocent rather than preying upon them. The modern "reformed vampire" has, as Angela Tenga and Elizabeth Zimmerman put it, "developed a conscience," one which prompts him to acts of compassion and self-sacrifice. Even the blood of the new

vampire has healing and regenerative powers. He similarly exudes sexuality, virility, experiences a profound connection with anyone with whom he does exchange blood (often done in order to save a human character from severe injury or death), and he ultimately finds salvation in his romantic relationship with a human heroine. Rather than undermining the distinction between self and other, the contemporary vampire upholds and even intensifies this distinction. These vampires tend to be well-educated, thoughtful, law-abiding entrepreneurs. They passionately affirm individuality, self-determination, the right to private property, the necessity for social order and the maintenance of proper social, political, economic boundaries. So well does the modern vampire instantiate aspiring middle-class values, Tenga and Zimmerman observe, that the need has arisen for a new sort of monster, one who is in fact savagely mindless, uncaring, cannibalistic, incapable of being reasoned with, utterly bent upon tearing apart human civilization and even human bodies, a true horror capable of embodying contemporary fears of a globalized society in which "infectious Others" walk among us, hence the re-emergence of the zombie in popular entertainment.[42]

Contemporary vampire fiction also, and rather obviously, displays profoundly magical dimensions, which play out in what Jennifer L. McMabon sees as a potent form of wish fulfillment. In at least four ways, she argues, vampire fiction offers a vivid depiction of what it would be like to transcend the limitations of humanity. To begin with, vampires are essentially immortal. They do not age, though they do amass great knowledge, experience, wealth and affluence as the centuries pass. They are nigh invulnerable, subject to neither illness, injury, nor death, save in a small number of cases (e.g., sunlight or staking, and in some cases vampires are immune to even these).

Secondly, vampires possess numerous super-powers, such as greatly enhanced strength, speed, beauty, and charm, even to the point of dominating the will of others when they desire to do so. In some alterities vampires possess still other psychic abilities as well, including mental telepathy, telekinesis, precognition, and clairvoyance. Thirdly, vampires are existentially independent. They are loners, dependent upon no one, and capable of living indefinitely in a self-sufficient manner. Fourthly, and perhaps most compelling of all, vampires live extemporaneously, surrendering to their passions and instincts, taking who and what they want with few, if any, obstacles. In all such ways, the vampire offers a supernatural rendition of the transhuman, and as such it should come as no surprise that contemporary audiences, whose lives are characterized by precisely the opposite set of experiences, should vicariously satisfy their own desires for immortality, invulnerability, comic-book superpowers, and unchecked spontaneity by consuming these sorts of cultural products.[43]

POPULAR ENTERTAINMENT AND THE CATEGORY MAGIC

As the work of Jose Cabezon (discussed in chapter one) suggests, reading different sorts of data through a given category requires that categories remain perpetually open to modification. Otherwise, the interpretive project begins to take on an imperial function: important differences are obscured, overridden and ignored in lieu of features believed to be essential to the category, features which are then imposed upon objects of study. On Cabezon's approach, reading data through an interpretive category is very much a two-way process: the category should help scholars to think in new and

interesting ways about the data, and exposure to different kinds of data should help them to think in new and interesting ways about the category.

In this present chapter, some of the expressions of popular entertainment examined are read quite easily through the lens of magic as it has been configured in the introduction and first chapter with little need for modification. In the world of *Harry Potter*, the spells wizards and witches cast tend to yield specific and predictable results (e.g., levitating a book, repairing cracked spectacles, washing dishes, teleportation to a desired destination), and they do so by way of particular patterns of thought, emotion, and speech, precise hand gestures, and exact material components. The Jedi access the Force in a somewhat similar manner, by remaining calm and at peace, focusing their awareness and mental intention, and by using the Force in morally permissible ways. Thus, the magical dimension in *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* emerges as the result of either a learned skill or an acquired character, largely under human control, and productive of desired outcomes.

The Middle Earth, *BSG*, *Twilight* and *True Blood* imaginaries, however, suggest substantive modifications to the category. Within the Tolkien alterity, the illusive enchantment of the faerie realm does not respond to human will or intention at all, but to sincere humility. The 'mystical quality' threaded throughout the *BSG* series is similarly beyond human (or Cylon) control or even understanding, and in fact seems wholly unconcerned with the consolation of human or Cylon needs and desires. Rather, the mystical element makes use of humans and Cylons, bringing about instances of profound synchronicity which further its own cosmic purposes, despite heavy tolls upon humans and Cylons alike. In *Twilight* and *True Blood*, the supernatural abilities of vampires and

other such creatures are gained not as learned skills or acquired characters, or through alignment with a greater power, but through physiological transformations or biological inheritance. Characters *become* vampires or are *born as* werewolves, fey, or shifters. Consequently, in order to accommodate these latter examples, magic cannot be conceptualized as *necessarily* under human control and direction. Secondly, it cannot be assumed that accessing the magical dimension is *always* productive of desired consequences. Quite to the contrary, in some alterities, not only is it the magical dimension itself which is in control, but participation in it is dangerous or even downright detrimental to those involved.

Importantly, it is not only expressions of popular entertainment such as books, films, and television shows per se that are suggestive of the magical, but also the vast majority of product advertisements which inevitably become associated with and are sandwiched around them. The typical television commercial, for instance, weds instantly attainable physical beauty, virile sexuality, a euphorically happy domestic life, financial success and upward social mobility, as well as orgasmic peak-experiences, to commodities as mundane as anti-aging skin cream, domestic beer, pick-up trucks, luxury cars, touch-screen computer pads, and chocolate candy. In such instances, the world of commodities "interacts with the human world at the most fundamental of levels: it performs magical feats of transformation and bewitchment, brings instant happiness and gratification, captures the forces of nature, and holds within itself the essence of important social relationships."[44]

Similarly, as Peter Bebergal has recently argued, the profound commercial success and cultural influence of much popular music, from 1960s rock to hip-hop, lies in

the ways in which contemporary artists deploy occult symbols and ideas in their lyrics, album or cd covers, and on-stage performances. Despite vast differences in musical genre, Bebergal explains, much contemporary music (from the Beatles to Madonna) "share a common thread: they reference a reality beyond normal perception, a vast metaverse inhabited by demons and angels, aliens and ancient sorcerers, all of which could be accessed by potentially dangerous methods such as magic."[45] As Kripal suggested, popular American culture is truly awash in the magical.

In the following chapter, still other cultural goods, in this case a variety of popularized mind-body texts, are read through the category magic, and what the act of so doing suggests about such discourses, as well as the category magic, is considered.

Chapter Three: Magic and Mind-Body Medicine

If religious worlds are in some sense imaginary worlds (as was suggested at the outset of chapter one), they are also fundamentally miraculous worlds. That is, they tend to be worlds in which a divine reality, or its emissaries, intervenes in the lives of ordinary human beings for purposes of protection, redirection, assistance, and most especially healing.[1] Religion in contemporary America is no exception. Scholars have identified a kaleidoscope of theological, narrative and ritual resources for the healing of minds, bodies and spirits in any number of religious and spiritual traditions comprising the American landscape.[2] Alongside and frequently entangled with such resources, there exists an extensive history of "mind-body" medicine, one which imagines sickness as well as healing in terms of mental/emotional energies with which all human beings interact and some learn to perceive and manipulate.[3]

In recent decades, interventions such as meditation, guided relaxation, visualization, distant prayer, and hands-on energy healing–essentially any therapeutic technique which taps the healing energies of positive intention–have moved increasingly into the cultural mainstream. In 2016, for instance, Americans are projected to spend some fifteen billion dollars on alterative medical treatments generally, with mind-body approaches making up a sizable portion.[4] While alternative medical philosophies and practices have always had a cultural presence, Daniel Goleman and Joel Gurin explain for *Psychology Today,* "two things are different today: these approaches are gaining more respect and interest from researchers in major medical institutions; and evidence is mounting that mind-body techniques may actually affect the course of disease itself."[5] In what follows, a range of increasingly mainstream ideas and practices derived from

contemporary mind-body research, much of which has been extensively studied by credentialed academics at leading institutions, are read through the magical hermeneutic employed in the previous chapter. As with expressions of popular entertainment, what so doing suggests about mind-body medicine, and about the category magic, are considered.

FROM THE RELAXATION RESPONSE TO THE HEARTMATH SOLUTION

A comprehensive history of mind-body medicine would move in many different directions indeed.[6] That said, any such account would surely include the past four decades of research undertaken by Herbert Benson and William Proctor at Harvard Medical School. Initially, in the early 1970s, Benson and Proctor demonstrated that the practice of Transcendental Meditation (TM)–a particular contemplative technique which employs brief periods of mantra recitation and is associated with the Indian teacher, Maharishi Mahesh Yogi (1918-2008)–triggers profound physiological changes within meditators. These include a decreased respiratory rate, decreased consumption of oxygen, increased production of slow alpha waves within the brain, and a significant increase in feelings of relaxation, ease and well-being. Benson and Proctor labelled this health-inducing reaction "the relaxation response," and showed that even small doses (e.g., twenty minutes) of TM twice daily could reliably trigger the response and thus mitigate the harmful physiological effects of stress.[7]

Over the ensuing four decades, Benson and Proctor have extended their findings considerably. To begin with, the physiological benefits of the relaxation response are far more extensive than initially imagined. Rather than influencing discrete physiological

functions only (such as heart rate, or blood pressure, or respiration), its impact is systemic, altering the ways in which the entire sympathetic nervous system (i.e., the involuntary part of the nervous system which governs our physiological reaction to stress) functions. The relaxation response has also been shown to produce healthful changes at much subtler physiological levels. On a molecular level, it stimulates the production of nitric oxide within the blood stream, which has antibacterial and antiviral properties, protecting the body against infectious agents. On the level of brain structure, it encourages the thickening of those regions of the cortex associated with attention, sensory, cognitive, and emotional processing, and can even offset age-related cortical thinning. On a genetic level, it "switches on" genes associated with healthful traits (e.g., longevity), and "switches off" those associated with harmful traits (e.g., dementia). To be clear, activating the relaxation response cannot alter the genes one has inherited, but it does influence which genetic markers are activated and which lie dormant. The range of medical conditions which may be alleviated or even prevented is also far more extensive than was originally suspected. Potentially, Benson and Proctor contend, it may be employed with respect to "virtually every single health problem," including relatively common ailments such as anxiety, depression, asthma, obesity, and chronic pain, as well as more serious, life threatening conditions such as autoimmune disorders, Parkinson's disease, congestive heart failure, and cancer. Finally, may other meditative, relaxation, and prayer-based techniques besides TM have been shown to reliably trigger the relaxation response. As practitioners consistently activate the response on a daily basis, Benson and Proctor conclude, they can "expect a significant expansion of their mind-body healing powers over time," and these "healing powers" may be accessed by

virtually any contemplative practice and alleviate or prevent virtually any medical condition.[8]

If the work of Benson and Proctor locates expanded healing powers in the *calming of the mind*, researchers at the Institute of Heartmath in Boulder Creek, California, ground personal, interpersonal, and even global healing potentials in an *engaged heart*. Founded as a non-profit organization in 1991 by the American author, Lew "Doc" Childress, Heartmath's research explores the healthful benefits of heart-driven coherence, that is, a state of consciousness which originates within the heart, but which then brings all other bodily functions, including those associated with the brain such as thought and emotion, into "entrainment" with the heart. Childress explains:

> Cognitive breathing exercises [such as TM] *impose* a breathing rhythm on our heart rhythms when we breathe at a slow, rhythmic rate… But we've discovered that people find it very difficult to consciously maintain a slow breath rate for very long…. When we focus on the heart and breath 'through' the heart, in a relaxed way, smooth, entrained… patterns occur more naturally. As a result, they're easier to sustain for longer periods of time.[9]

The Hearthmath approach thus explicitly rejects approaches which privilege mind. From the Heartmath perspective, engaging the heart represents a more readily accessible, sustainable, and potent method of activating our natural healing powers. This approach is based upon neuro-cardiological research which has emerged since the early 1990s, demonstrating that the nervous system within and around the heart is in fact enormously sophisticated, rivalling that of the brain and central nervous system. The human heart, apparently, "can learn, remember, feel, and sense." It is capable of processing vast amounts of complex information in such a way as to facilitate uncannily accurate, real-time decision-making, and it does all of this independently of the brain. More still, the heart is capable of bringing into entrainment and regulating the entire range of bodily

systems, including those pertaining to relaxation and stress, immune system function, and the higher regions of the cerebral cortex. From the perspective of such research, it is the heart, not the brain, which emerges as the body's dominant organ and the true seat of our healing potential.[10]

On the Heartmath approach, then, the heart must be powered up in order to bring all other bodily systems (e.g., respiration, hormone production, cognition, affect) into harmony with it. Powering up the heart is accomplished by means of brief, imagery-based practices such as "breathing in and out of the heart," and sincerely holding positive emotions such as appreciation and gratitude. Childress writes:

> If anger and frustration create increased disorder and incoherence in the heart's rhythms and in the autonomic nervous system, thereby affecting the rest of the body… positive emotions such as love, care, and appreciation create increased harmony, order, and coherence in the heart's rhythms and improved balance in the nervous system.[11]

Much like triggering the relaxation response, initiating heart-driven coherence has been shown to produce a cascade of healthful benefits. It shields the body's systems from the physiological damage caused by chronic stress, reducing the risk of serious medical conditions such as coronary disease, heart attack, cancer, and early morbidity. It counteracts psychological conditions associated with chronic stress, such as anxiety, depression, attention disorders, chronic anger, and decreased levels of commitment to one's spouse, children and friends. It is also characterized by a distinctly pleasant phenomenology: those who employ Heartmath's recommended exercises for activating heart-driven coherence, even for brief periods of twelve to fifteen minutes once daily, are said to report increased feelings of peacefulness, well-being, empathy with and connections to others, a sense of being in control, and intuitive guidance helpful in addressing everyday problems and challenges.[12]

Whereas Benson and Proctor have emphasized the physiological changes produced within individuals by way of the relaxation response, Heartmath has hypothesized extensively as to the social dimensions of heart-driven coherence. "The heart's electromagnetic field," Childress writes,

> is by far the most powerful produced by the body; it's approximately five thousand times greater in strength than the field produced by the brain… The heart's field not only permeates every cell in the body but also radiates outside of us; it can be measured up to eight feet away.[13]

If engaging the heart by way of sincerely held, altruistic thoughts and emotions produces an experience of personal coherence, this inner state is also said to radiate outward, contributing to interpersonal and even global coherence. For, on Heartmath metaphysics, the mental/emotional states human beings cultivate are more than simply internal, psychological phenomena. They also generate energetic signals which are propagated outward, "broadcast person to person," ultimately feeding into the "consciousness climate" of the planet (i.e., the energetic field that is said to surround, connect, and interpenetrate everyone "like the air we breathe"). In a very real sense, then, Heartmath sees its mission as transforming human consciousness on a global level, as more individuals, families, and social institutions include heart-driven coherence practices in their day to day activities and our planet's consciousness climate shifts toward the calm, peaceful, and compassionate end of the continuum.[14]

The approaches of Benson and Proctor as well as Hearthmath emphasize the healing capacity of human consciousness, though they look to different practices as a means of activating this potential, and emphasize differing degrees of scope. Despite such differences, both forms of mind-body medicine suggest expanded understandings of human nature. Here, the mind or the heart become generators of a profoundly healing

energy with interpersonal implications. Other mind-body researchers will push the limits of human potential further still, exploring the ways in which conscious intention may be employed for the healing of others.

CONSCIOUS INTENTION IS GOOD MEDICINE

In a 2009 story for NPR, "Can Positive Thoughts Help Heal Another Person?", Barbara Bradley Hagerty poses the following question: 'if mind-body medicine can play a role in healing our own bodies, does that mean that our thoughts can directly affect the bodies of other people?' Hagerty pursues this query by way of the "Love Study." Conducted in 2002 at the Institute for Noetic Sciences in Petaluma, CA, the "Love Study" involved couples in committed, long-term relationships. During the experiment, one partner was placed in an electromagnetically shielded room, while the other was seated in another room some distance away before a closed-circuit television. At random intervals, the image of the first subject (in the electromagnetically shielded room) would appear on the television screen for periods of ten seconds, at which time the second subject was asked to send his/her partner "loving, compassionate intention." The results were striking.

> After running 36 couples through this test, the researchers found that when one person focused his thoughts on his partner, the partner's blood flow and perspiration dramatically changed within two seconds. The odds of this happening by chance were 1 in 11,000. Three dozen double blind, randomized studies by such institutions as the University of Washington and the University of Edinburgh have reported similar results.[15]

Reigning scientific paradigms, Hagerty notes, offer no conceptual resources whatsoever for understanding the results of the Love Study, which is unfortunate. That human

consciousness might function like the quantum phenomena described by modern physics, where mutually-entangled particles influence one another instantaneously across any distance (i.e., non-locally), portends a revolution in contemporary understandings of human nature and the cosmos at large. It would also establish a basic principle of mind-body medicine, namely, that consciousness cannot be reduced to the chemical-electrical interactions that occur in the brain, but is instead spread throughout space and time such that it is capable of directly influencing events in the external world.

The Love Study is by no means the only, or even the primary, experimental evidence supporting a more expansive understanding of human consciousness. Actually, the popular science writer, Lynne McTaggart, points out, such evidence is considerable and falls into three broad categories: experiments with small-scale organisms, such as cells or enzymes; experiments with laboratory animals; and experiments with human beings.

Since the 1960s, a number of studies have suggested that conscious intention is capable of directly influencing subjects in the first two categories. Bernard Grad, of McGill University, for instance, conducted several experiments to determine whether psychic healers were capable of projecting a healing energy outward from their own physical body. In the first of such experiments, experienced psychic healers were asked to "lay hands" upon sealed containers of water in which various kinds of seeds were afterwards soaked: the seeds exposed to the healer-treated water grew taller than those which were exposed to the non-healer-treated water, and the plants grown from this first group of seeds were healthier and heartier by every measure.[16] In later studies, Grad had laboratory animals such as mice, who had been given skin wounds (in one experiment) or

tumors (in a second experiment), treated by psychic healers: again, those that had been exposed to the healers saw, alternately, their skin wounds heal "far more quickly," or the growth of tumors significantly reduced.[17] Over two hundred such experiments, attests Larry Dossey, former chief of staff at Humana Medical City Hospital in Dallas, Texas, have shown similar results with all sorts of living organisms, including bacteria, fungi, yeast, a variety of seeds and types of cells, as well as a wide range of laboratory animals.[18]

Studies involving human beings have proven more challenging. Many early studies indicated a strong connection between mind-body treatments such as distant prayer and heightened degrees of healing, though researchers frequently failed to control for important variables (e.g., whether patients were also taking medication for their ailments). One especially rigorous and well-controlled study, however, was that conducted in the 1990s by Elisabeth Targ. Targ's experiment enrolled terminal-stage AIDS patients, all with the same degree of illness, symptoms, and medical care. Using a double-blind approach (i.e., one in which neither patients nor medical staff know who is or is not receiving treatment), a group of some forty well-known healers from around the United States was selected to administer "healing sessions" at a distance for those patients in the treatment group. Interestingly, these healers possessed quite varied backgrounds. Some identified as "spiritual but not religious," others as Christian (Catholic or evangelical), Buddhist, Kabbalist, or Native American. They also employed very different healing practices, including theistic prayer, visualization, Qigong, drumming, chanting, bell ringing, and the smoking of a sacred pipe. In addition to the particular techniques healers employed, each "was asked to hold an intention for the

health and well-being of the patient for an hour a day, six days a week, for ten weeks,
with alternate weeks off for rest." Healers were given a photograph and the name of the
patient with whom they were currently working, though all other information was
withheld. Each client in the treatment group was treated by each healer the same number
of times. Much like the Love Study, the results were remarkable.

> During the six months of the trial period, 40% of the control population had died. But all ten of the
> patients in the healing group were not only still alive but had become healthier, on the basis of
> their own reports and medical evaluations…. and their condition yielded one inescapable
> conclusion: the treatment was working.[19]

So striking were these results that Targ chose to repeat the entire experiment, lest she
publish her results prematurely. This time she controlled for even more variables. All
subjects would be the same with respect to age, personal habits (e.g., smoking), daily
exercise, recreational drug use, and religious beliefs, as well the stage of their illness, the
symptoms they were manifesting, and their medical treatments. "In scientific terms,"
McTaggart observes, "this was a batch of men who were as close as you could get to a
perfect match." The results of the second experiment paralleled those of the first:

> [a]fter six months, the treated group were healthier on every parameter–significantly fewer doctor
> visits, fewer hospitalizations, fewer days in hospital, fewer new AIDS-defining illnesses,
> improved T-cell levels, less medical intervention, improved psychological well-being.[20]

So impressive was Targ's study that in January 2002 the National Institutes of Health
awarded her a one and half million-dollar research grant for two further prayer-at-a-
distance studies, one dealing again with AIDS and another with "glioblastoma
multiforme, an aggressive and almost inevitably fatal brain tumor." Sadly, and ironically,
Targ herself was soon thereafter diagnosed with precisely this kind of brain tumor, and
the new studies were postponed. When Targ's diagnosis was made public, the Institute of
Noetic Sciences webpage reports, "healers began calling, visiting and praying from a

distance…. But they could not save her." Targ died in July of 2002, and the NIH funded

studies were never completed.[21]

Still, researchers working at other institutions have replicated the methods

employed in Targ's study, and in some cases have achieved positive results. The MAHI

study, for example, was conducted in 2000 at the Mid-America Heart Institute. Over the

course of one year, the approximately one thousand cardiac patients who were admitted

to the institute's critical care unit were divided into two groups. Half were prayed for by a

group of volunteers and the hospital's chaplain, and the other half were not. The health of

the participants in both groups was monitored by a third party unaware of which patients

were receiving special treatments. At the conclusion of the experiment, the patients who

were prayed for had significantly fewer heart attacks, strokes and life-threatening

complications. Once again, prayer seemed to improve the health of the prayed-for, even

when the prayed-for where unaware of such efforts on their behalf.[22]

If some researchers and medical professionals have been uncomfortable with the

reduction of sacred practices such as prayer down to empirically measurable medical

treatments, others have responded enthusiastically. "Prayer," Larry Dossey writes,

> is back! After sitting on the sidelines for most of this century, prayer is moving back toward center stage in modern medicine. Doctors are taking prayer not just into their offices, clinics, and hospitals, but into experimental laboratories as well. Medical journals are more willing than ever to publish studies on the healing effects of prayer and faith.[23]

Less reservedly still, one Mid-America physician remarked, "[t]his study offers an

interesting insight into the possibility that maybe God is influencing our lives on

Earth!"[24] But studies showing the efficacy of intercessory prayer do not necessarily prove

the existence of one or more deities. They may also, and perhaps more parsimoniously,

be explained in terms of an expanded view of human consciousness as suggested by

McTaggart above: namely, that consciousness functions much like a quantum field, one

in which non-local causation (i.e., instantaneous cause-and-effect across any distance)

represents a fundamental property, and the key to its activation lies in focused

metal/emotional intention. In fact, precisely this sort of model may explain why some

distant prayer studies demonstrate powerful results whereas others fail to do so.

Some of the most well-funded, publicly visible, and methodologically sound

prayer studies have been utter failures. Perhaps the most infamous example is the Study

of Therapeutic Effects of Intercessory Prayer (STEP), which was conceived and directed

by Herbert Benson in the late 1990s in response to a flurry of large-scale studies in which

prayer had failed to produce a measurable result. STEP recruited cardiac patients at five

major U.S. hospitals, and received more than two million dollars in support from the John

Templeton Foundation. Benson's hope was that this study of prayer "would be the

largest, most scientifically rigorous of all time," and would show definitively that prayer-

at-a-distance could and should be counted on as a reliable medical intervention. Some

eighteen hundred patients were recruited and divided into three groups. The first two

groups were not informed whether they would receive prayer, though the first group did

receive it and the second group did not. The third group also received prayer, but patients

in this group were told that they would be prayed for. This design allowed Benson to

discern whether the knowledge that one was being prayed for yielded any additional

benefits. The prayer groups for this study were drawn exclusively from Catholic and

Protestant traditions. They were provided with pictures as well as the first names and last

initials of patients, though all other information was withheld. They were also required to

include in their prayers the following phrase: "for a successful surgery with a quick, healthy recovery and no complications." The patient groups were assessed over a thirty-day period, and at the conclusion of the experiment, "[t]he results shocked the world and bewildered the researchers… no amount of prayer under any condition, whether the patients knew it or not, made any difference to the outcome of the operation." In fact, the patient group that researchers predicted would see the most benefit (those who were prayed for and knew it), had the *worst* outcomes of all three groups, followed closely by those who were prayed for and did not know it. Most ironically, the group that faired best was the group that was *not* prayed for but did not know either way.[25]

Reactions to STEP have varied. Firm believers in the efficacy of prayer, such as Larry Dossey, have maintained that the number of studies in which prayer has been shown to be effective still outnumber those in which it does not, and that further prayer studies will surely vindicate STEP. Others insist that STEP was, just as Benson had intended, a definitive study, only one that demonstrated once and for all that prayer does not work. Still others, such as McTaggart, argue that the key to understanding STEP lies in contrasting it to successful studies such as Targ's AIDS study. The healers in Targ's study possessed many years of experience and were widely recognized as such, but this was not at all the case with the prayer groups selected by Benson. Targ's healers were spiritually diverse, and encouraged to structure their healing interventions according to their own traditions, whereas Benson endeavored to standardize prayer across all prayer groups. In fact, Benson's required prayer reads suspiciously like a New Thought affirmation, which may not have resonated with other Christian prayer groups. What these differences amount to, McTaggart suggests, is that healers in Targ's study were free

to craft their own healing practices in ways which made sense within their own spiritual worlds. As a result, the "prayers" of Targ's healers functioned more like simple, authentic healing intentions, whereas Benson's standardized approach ruled out this organic, creative component. McTaggart explains:

> Hidden in the failure of the large prayer studies [such as STEP] lies vital instructions not only about the design of such mass experiments, but also about those elements that maximize the power of intention…. Targ tried to isolate the effect of simple healing intention, which is different from prayer. With intention, the agent of change is human; with prayer, it is God… to study the effect of remote intention, it may be necessary to move away from prayer.[26]

What failed studies as STEP may show us, then, is that effective distant healing is the not the result of a successful appeal to a given deity or the mechanical recitation of a prescribed prayer, but rather a clear healing intention which emerges authentically from one's own religious/spiritual understanding. Asking healers to hold a clear healing intention within the context of their own worldview and system of practice is a relatively simple matter, and one that is to some degree open to public confirmation. Assessing the possible intervention of a divine being is another matter entirely. More fundamentally still, McTaggart suggests, the ability of prayer to influence events in the external world remains at best uncertain. The ability of human consciousness to do so, however, has been conclusively demonstrated. To consider this claim, our discussion shifts from mind-body medicine per se to parapsychology.[27]

AN EVER-EXPANDING HUMAN POTENTIAL

Mind-body medicine and parapsychology may at first glance appear to represent entirely distinct endeavors, one increasingly mainstream, the other stubbornly fringe, one largely scientific, the other pseudo-scientific. They are, however, related in a number of

ways. Historically, researchers in one domain have often worked in the other. Elisabeth

Targ and Dean Radin, for example, tend to be classified differently, Targ as a mind-body

researcher, Radin as a parapsychologist, though both worked together at the Institute of

Noetic Sciences on numerous projects, including the Love Study and Targ's AIDS study.

Conceptually, mind-body medicine and parapsychology overlap a great deal. They pursue

many of the same queries by way of the same rigorous methodologies, and explore

considerably broader views of consciousness, human potential, and the cosmos, relative

to the larger culture.

Parapsychology is often associated with the work of J. B. (Joseph Banks) Rhine

(1895-1980) at Duke University. Beginning in the 1930s, Rhine collaborated with

William McDougall, Chair of the Department of Psychology at Duke, on thousands of

experiments designed to test for what Rhine called "extrasensory perception" (ESP), that

is, "the apparent ability of some people to acquire information without the use of the

known (five) senses." Over time, Rhine came to draw careful distinctions between

different sorts of ESP, such as telepathy (perceiving the thoughts of others), clairvoyance

(perceiving events at distant locations), and precognition (perceiving future events).

Rhine and McDougall's experiments typically employed a deck of cards designed

specifically for them. Zener decks, as they are called, consist of twenty-five cards, and

each card bears one of five possible symbols, a cross, star, wavy lines, circle, or square.

Under various experimental conditions, subjects would attempt to correctly perceive the

symbol on a given card, whether in the mind of a researcher, at a distant location, or to be

drawn from the deck at some future point in time. In literally millions of trials involving

hundreds of subjects, Rhine and McDougall reported success rates significantly above

what chance would predict, with the odds of this degree of success occurring by chance calculated at one in one million or more. Human beings, four decades of their research suggests, are in fact capable of perceptive feats which go well beyond the five basic senses, perceiving the correct Zener cards in the minds of researchers (telepathically), at great physical distances (clairvoyantly), and even in cases in which the cards in question would be drawn at some the future point in time (precognitively).[28]

There exists a considerable amount of research supporting the ESP (or psi, as it has more recently come to be called) hypothesis beyond that amassed by Rhine and McDougall. Perhaps the most prestigious instantiation of such research is that designed, conducted, and overseen by Robert G. Jahn, Dean of Princeton University's School of Engineering and Applied Science, and Director of the Princeton Engineering Anomalies Research project (PEAR). Jahn's professional interest in psi began in 1979, when an undergraduate student proposed an experiment to test whether the focused intention of human subjects could influence the results of a random number generator (RNG). Jahn agreed to direct the research, and at the conclusion of the student's three-year study, the results were remarkable: the output of an otherwise entirely random device, which when left unattended accorded perfectly with what chance would predict, could seemingly be nudged by the conscious intentions of human subjects. The size of the effect was small, but quite reliable, and beyond that which could be explained by chance.[29]

Intrigued, Jahn founded the PEAR project to explore and test further the student's hypothesis, this time under maximally rigorous controls. Over the ensuing three decades, a number of senior researchers from a variety of academic disciplines (e.g., psychology, physics, engineering, mathematics) would participate in PEAR, designing and conducting

thousands of experiments, involving millions of trials, several hundred subjects (known as "operators"), and "a variety of mechanical, electronic, optical, acoustical, and fluid devices" each of which, like the student's RNG, produced entirely random output when unattended. After controlling for potentially confounding variables (e.g., humidity, vibration from nearby automobile traffic, device malfunction), the PEAR trials consistently displayed deviations from what chance would predict. Again, though the effects were small in size, they were statistically significant and, as all other causal factors had been ruled out, "can only be attributed to the consciousness of their human operators." The otherwise random output of *all sorts of mechanical devices*, it seems, can in fact be subtly ordered by the conscious intention of human subjects.[30]

In addition to studying "human-machine anomalies," PEAR also conducted experiments in "remote perception," or what Rhine and McDougall would call clairvoyance. Across some six hundred and fifty trials, PEAR explored "the ability of human participants to acquire information about spatially and temporally remote geographical targets, otherwise inaccessible by any of the usual sensory channels." In these experiments, a researcher (the "agent") was stationed at a randomly selected geographical location and asked to carefully record its details, while a research subject (the "percipient") located far from the location at which the agent was stationed and with no knowledge of it, attempted to perceive and report on it nonetheless, ideally in a manner which matched the observations of the agent. "Even casual comparison of the agent and percipient narratives produced in this body of experiments," the PEAR website relates,

> reveals striking correspondences in both their general and specific aspects, indicative of some anomalous channel of information acquisition, well beyond any chance expectation…. Beyond

confirming the validity of this anomalous mode of information acquisition, these analyses demonstrate that this capacity of human consciousness is also largely independent of the distance between the percipient and the target, and similarly independent of the time between the specification of the target and the perception effort.

If the first class of PEAR experiments demonstrate that conscious intention imposes a subtle but measurable order upon the external world, this second class of experiments goes considerably further, suggesting that human consciousness is capable of perceptive acts utterly transcending ordinary spatial and temporal limitations. Ultimately, on the basis of these two classes of studies, PEAR researchers concluded that, with modest training, "the 'anomalous' phenomena observed in the PEAR experiments [could] become quite normal expectations" for human beings generally. Thus, Jahn writes in a press release announcing the end of the PEAR project in 1997, "the door is open for all manner of creative consciousness/environment interactions."[31]

In fact, PEAR research has been developed further, and in ways which build upon its most intriguing insights. Shortly after the end of the PEAR project in 1997, a number of its senior researchers designed a long-term experiment, also to be hosted at Princeton University, for exploring further one of PEAR's most consequential hypotheses, namely, that the capacity of human consciousness to influence the external world appears to be amplified by the number and coherence of the human subjects involved. If so, they reasoned, there should be some way to measure the reaction of the human consciousness to major world events. Accordingly, in the summer of 1998, the Global Consciousness Project (GCP) was launched. In this experiment, which continues as of this writing, a network of some seventy RNGs was distributed around the world (e.g., in Europe, U.S., Canada, India, Fiji, New Zealand, Japan, China, Russia, Brazil, Africa, Thailand, South America, Australia), each of which generates a random series of numbers at a rate of one

trial per second, twenty-four hours a day, three hundred and sixty-five days each year, and transmits this data to Princeton University servers for analysis. In the absence of major global events, network output is wholly random and fully consistent with what chance would predict. However, in the wake of major global events in which there is widespread participation (e.g., Earth Day, Christmas, New Year) or to which there is widespread emotional reaction (e.g., terrorist attacks, the death of celebrities, national elections, ecological disasters, plane crashes), network output deviates from expected norms, taking on a coherence which varies in intensity with respect to different kinds of events. As the CGP website explains:

> The effects are larger in proportion to the importance of the events we examine, and they are larger if the level of emotional involvement is high. We see stronger effects when events embody or evoke deep feelings of compassion, but smaller effects when the level of fear is high. That last point seems counterintuitive to many, but upon consideration, the relationships make sense and they bear strong implications for us. Compassion is an interpersonal, connecting emotion, while fear drives us toward personal survival; it separates us. The bottom line is that something associated with mass consciousness is changing the physical world—our network of physical random number generators.

Although each RPG functions independently of the larger network, network output over the past sixteen years following some five hundred specific events of global significance, and especially those which engender intense compassion, has displayed degrees of coherence such that "the probability that the effect could be just a chance fluctuation is less than one in a trillion." During moments of great importance to human beings, this research suggests, collective human consciousness imposes a measurable order upon otherwise completely random physical processes. Like the work of Rhine and McDougall, as well as PEAR researchers, such conclusions "present a challenge to status quo physics and psychology," and "as the data are brought into perspective, they may help place mind and consciousness in more broadly competent models of the world." For

the present, Radin and McTaggart argue: if the evidence for prayer's effectiveness is ambiguous and uncertain, there is strong evidence for the assertion that conscious intention exerts a measurable influence upon external reality.[32]

Perhaps the most radical implication of the foregoing research pertains to the idea of time. That our ability to perceive and order the world around us remains limited to the present moment is a given of ordinary human experience. But there is growing evidence, Radin and McTaggart argue, to think that consciousness is also spread out in time (as well as space), equally present in the past as well as the future, and thus capable of perceiving and influencing events in both domains by means of intention alone.

The parapsychological study of "time-displaced phenomena" frequently involves inverting ordinary experiments. For example, in 2011, Daryl Bern, a psychologist at Cornell University, modified an entirely mainstream experiment involving the "mere exposure effect" in order to test for trans-temporal causation. In typical "mere exposure" experiments, a computer randomly selects one of two equally likeable images and presents it to a human subject subliminally (i.e., so quickly that the subject is not consciously aware of seeing the images). Afterwards, when shown the two images in an ordinary manner, subjects tend to select as preferable the image to which they were subliminally exposed, suggesting that people prefer that with which they are familiar. In the time-reversed version of this experiment, the subject is *first* asked to select as preferable one of the two random images, *and then* the computer randomly selects and presents subliminally one of these images to the subject. In numerous trials involving thousands of participants, Bern reported that subjects consistently selected the images *which would later be selected and presented subliminally by the computer,* with odds

against chance calculated at seventy-three billion to one. There are in fact many versions of such experiments which, Radin argues, collectively demonstrate that information 'leaks backwards' from the future to the present, and that human subjects possess the ability to receive, albeit unconsciously, this information.[33]

Over the past four decades, McTaggart reports, the Dutch physicist, Dirk Bierman, and fellow researchers at the University of Amsterdam and the Lockheed Martin Corporation, have designed experiments to determine whether focused human intention could *influence* events in the past. In the first of these, a random event generator (REG) was used to produce series of audile clicks over a given period of time, and the output of this process was audio-recorded. Later, human subjects were asked to listen to this series of clicks by means of headphones, consciously intending that the number of clicks increase while they listened. When the subjects had worked through the full audio recording, the tape would be analyzed for any changes. Again, across numerous trials, the number of clicks was consistently found to have *increased* by a fractional amount. This experiment has been replicated numerous times, employing different kinds of phenomena as a basis for creating a random series of clicks, including the decay of radioactive materials, the migration of animals, and the passing of human pedestrians and automobile traffic past fixed geographical points, and in each instance they point to the same conclusion: focused human intention is capable of influencing events which have already occurred in the past.[34]

For Radin, that the effect size in the parapsychological research discussed above tends to be small indicates that, although all human beings possess innate powers of perception and influence which go well beyond the ordinary five senses, for most these

manifest as "micro-powers."[35] They do impose a subtle order upon the external world, but they do so only in very small ways. Yet, because they are innate to consciousness itself, Radin argues, practices such as meditation and yoga, which expand, deepen, and refine consciousness, should in turn expand, deepen and refine such innate abilities, such that micro-powers emerge as more obvious macro-powers. Aspects of this process, Radin contends, are evident in presentiment experiments, in which human subjects are exposed to physical stimuli (e.g., a flash of light, an audible tone, a pleasurable or upsetting image on a computer screen) at random intervals, and their physiological responses (e.g., skin conductivity) are measured. Universally, human subjects (as well as non-human animal subjects) react to strong or upsetting stimuli a fraction of a second *before* they actually occur. Radin takes this result as further evidence that information about future states of affairs is continually flowing backwards into the present and being reacted to by, in this case, human nervous systems. Subjects who have practiced yoga or meditation consistently for some time, however, react on average one-point-five seconds earlier than non-yogis and non-meditators. More, their reactions tend to be more fully developed, involving brain wave fluctuations as well as skin conductivity.[36] While this difference is also quite small, Radin holds, it is highly suggestive, foreshadowing what will characterize the "future human," as an ever-expanding view of human potential takes root within contemporary culture.[37]

MIND-BODY MEDICINE AND THE CATEGORY MAGIC

Chapter two's study of popular entertainment disclosed a diversity of magics. If the category lined up well with the narratives of *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars*, where the

spells and powers employed by wizards and Jedi remain largely under their control and productive of desired results, in Tolkien's Middle Earth, *Twilight, Trueblood*, and *BSG*, however, something of a gap emerged. In these alterities, those who access magical realms and powers are not necessarily in control of them, nor is so doing always productive of desired consequences. The category magic, then, had to be broadened such that both sorts of examples might be accommodated. This seemed justified in that a basic sense of the magical–in which human beings are seen as capable of tapping otherwise unknown sources of transformational energy–is retained.

In this present chapter, there are also different magics. Some of the research discussed, for instance, differs in terms of how one activates healing energies and of what such energies are capable. For Benson and Proctor, one triggers the relaxation response by calming the mind, and doing so consistently over time prevents or heals virtually any medical condition within one's own body. On the Heartmath approach, it is heart-driven coherence which heals one's own body and mind, but which also propagates positive, uplifting energies out into the world, contributing to the collective healing of human society. For researchers such as Larry Dossey, it is the return of theistic forms of prayer which render us capable of assisting in the healing of others. For Targ, McTaggart and Radin, however, it is by the power of focused human intention, not a deity's intervention, that distant prayer works at all. On their approach, as McTaggart suggested, 'it may be time to move away from prayer' in order to further clarify and maximize the efficacy of conscious intention. The parapsychological research of Rhine and McDougal, PEAR, GCP, and others as reported by Radin and McTaggart, point to a broad horizon of

paranormal powers presumably within the grasp of ordinary human beings, and which Radin sees as the future of a highly spiritualized humanity.

Each of these alterities line up rather well with the category magic as it was initially formulated in the introduction: if magic represents the ability to tap into otherwise unacknowledged sources of power in order to transform one's circumstances along desired lines, then *all* of the data in this chapter are highly magical. They identify different methods for accessing such energies and link them to different sorts of effects (e.g., physical healing, telepathy, clairvoyance, telekinesis, precondition). But they all imagine such powers as triggered by conscious intention and largely under human control. Unlike some of the magics of popular entertainment, neither the relaxation response, heart-driven coherence, theistic prayer, or the psi powers associated with conscious intention represent ambivalent forces and powers which might turn on those who access them in unpleasant ways. That no modifications seem necessary to accommodate this data set, whereas major modifications were required for the data of chapter two, suggests something interesting about contemporary mind-body medicine, namely, that the view of human nature emerging from such cultural production is as magical as the most paradigmatic forms discussed in the previous chapter, namely, the *Harry Potter* and *Star Wars* narratives.

In the following chapter, some of the most popular metaphysical, new age, prosperity, and self-help teachings from the contemporary landscape are read through the category magic, with an eye as to what this shows us about such spiritual discourses as well as the taxon magic.

Chapter Four: Magical Spiritualities

If terms such as religion and magic have been widely contested in the scholarly literature, so too spirituality. "Defining spirituality and locating it within social life," Courtney Bender tells us, "is notoriously difficult. Much like religion or experience, spirituality is bedeviled not by a lack of definitions, but by an almost endless proliferation of them."[1] Still, scholarly constructions of this term, as well as popular understandings in the larger culture, tend to emphasize the authority of individuals over that of institutions and historical tradition, an authority typically premised on the notion that each person has his or her own independent connection to the divine. Despite the fact that, as Bender has herself shown, most aspects of contemporary spirituality movements are thoroughly entangled with social groups, institutions, and historical traditions, the primacy of individuality remains irreducibly present. Thus spirituality and magic, like religion and magic, are never that far apart, and for the same reasons. To many contemporary Americans, spirituality has to do with an ideal and flexible connection to the divine, which can be had inside or outside of institutional religious contexts, and one which directly aids in improving one's health, peace of mind, relationships, professional success, in a word, personal fulfillment. To access divine power for such purposes is to arrive at the understanding of magic assumed by this present study. In what follows, a variety of spiritualities are read through the lens of magic.

THE CELESTINE PROPHECY

It is difficult to overstate the cultural influence of James Redfield's small book, *The Celestine Prophecy: An Adventure* (1993). It certainly helped to shape the New Age

movement of the mid-1990s. But it also, and more importantly, influenced the broad and

sustained interest in spirituality that has persisted well into the following decades.

Originally self-published and sold out of the trunk of the author's car, *The Celestine*

Prophecy was the top international best-seller in 1996, spent some one-hundred and sixty

five weeks on the *New York Times* best-seller list, and inspired a cottage industry of

Redfield-centered products and services, including an array of additional metaphysical

adventure novels, workbooks, audio-recordings, worldwide

 speaking engagements, and a film.[2] That said, probably no one considered Redfield's

novel great literature. It is, Wouter J. Hanegraaff attests:

> an appallingly shallow piece of writing, produced by an author without an ounce of literary talent, and whose 'insights' evidence a remarkable lack of profundity or originality. I cannot recall ever having encountered a book of worse quality during more than five years of studying New Age literature.

Still, this same critic readily concedes, it "is an extremely significant book which should

be on the reading list of anybody who wishes to understand what is happening to religion

in contemporary Western societies."[3]

This book takes the form of a first-person narrative. Drawn unexpectedly to the

mountains of Peru in search of an ancient "Manuscript" and its nine "Insights" said to

predict a global spiritual renaissance in our time, the narrator confronts challenges

externally as well as internally. Government and religious authorities pursue, imprison,

and even eliminate those connected with the Manuscript, fearing that its content will be

made public and undermine prevailing social, political, and religious power structures.

Gaining access to the Insights also turns out to require something rather special: an

experiential understanding that surpasses mere intellectual learning. "It wouldn't work

for me to just tell you," the narrator is repeatedly warned. "You might have the

information about each of them but you wouldn't have the insights. You have to discover them in the course of your own life." [4]

The Insights primarily have to do with the correct perception of, and participation in, the "energy" said to flow through the natural world and human interactions. That which is positive, uplifting, and healthy is said to be full of energy. That which is negative, unhealthy, and harmful drains away one's energies. Filling up on energy represents "not just one Insight; it's all of them…If one can connect and build up enough energy, then coincidental events begin to happen consistently."[5] Coincidences are especially helpful or enlightening events which appear to have happened by mere chance or luck, but in fact represent the primary mechanism by which human beings engage "the feeling that some other process is operating" in one's life, that a larger and benevolent intelligence is in fact present within the universe.[6] Filling up with positive energies and thus provoking coincidences may be accomplished in several ways: appreciating the beauty of nature; engaging in uplifting conversations with other people; trusting one's intuitions, hunches, and visions; and remaining attentive to potentially meaningful encounters and events no matter how ordinary or random they may initially appear.

While such a worldview admittedly "doesn't quite fit with our modern day common sense," it is precisely how the global spiritual renaissance is here imagined.[7] As larger numbers of human beings learn to fill up with energy, they will be "guided by their intuitions, everyone will know precisely what to do, and this will fit harmoniously with the actions of others."[8] Those who refuse to participate will be left behind to fend for themselves in this present world of mass-consumption and conflict.

> [A]s we humans continue to increase our vibration, an amazing thing will begin to happen. Whole groups of people, once they reach a certain level, will suddenly become invisible to those who are vibrating at a lower level. It will appear to the people on the lower level that the others just

disappeared, but the group themselves will feel as though they are still right here–only they will feel lighter.[9]

Indeed, this is precisely what the narrator experiences in the final pages of the book. With government soldiers closing in, he and his companions take in the beauty of ancient Mayan ruins nestled amidst majestic Andean peaks. They speak enthusiastically of the Insights and the coming global awakening in which "everyone will vibrate highly enough so that we can walk into heaven."[10] As a result, they physically shift into a higher dimension and the soldiers pass by unseeing, at least so long as the group is able to maintain their blissful, high-energy state. With the encroachment of anxious and fearful thoughts and emotions, their energy plummets; they phase-shift back into the dense earthly dimension, and are promptly captured. The story concludes with the narrator briefly imprisoned, barred from returning to Peru, and left with the realization that, since the Manuscript will not be forthcoming, its Insights must be passed on by word of mouth and by example to those capable of connecting with energy and following their inner, intuitive voice, "otherwise the whole human race can go back to pretending that life is about power over others and exploiting the planet, [and] then we won't survive."[11]

For Hanegraaff, the popularity of works such as *The Celestine Prophecy* signal a major restructuring of Western societies: from cultures possessing shared religious canopies to those comprised of innumerable and idiosyncratic spiritualties.[12] Whether such a restructuring is in fact occurring on the scale Hanegraaff suggests, the ways in which he has imagined "spiritualties"–as highly individualized connections with a transcendent reality–offers a fruitful way of thinking about the different kinds of texts discussed in this chapter.[13] From Redfield's metaphysical adventure novel, various self-help philosophies, new age discourses, and prosperity teachings, each of the texts

examined in this chapter represents not only a spirituality in Hanegraaff's terms, but also a magical spirituality.

In *The Celestine Prophecy*, for instance, what may at first appear as mundane aspects of daily life–the beauty of nature, uplifting social interactions, intuitive hunches, random images before the mind, chance events–turn out to represent points of connection to the world of intuitive guidance which, when taken seriously and pursued, are said to create an experience of flowing along with a guiding intelligence, of "mysterious events" capable of changing lives for the better.[14] What is not indicated here, however, is an individual capacity to determine precisely how such energies will operate in one's life. In Redfield's imaginary, the spiritual adept does not wield magical energies in order to shape her life circumstances as she sees fit. To the contrary, she learns to recognize islands of meaning and significance as she comes upon them, trust and pursue coincidences wherever they may lead, and remain connected to energy at every turn. The spiritual seeker is not in charge here. She follows the leadings of a greater intelligence and participates in the energies which flow through the world.

For spiritualties that offer the additional capacity of high degrees of personal control over the work that magical energies perform, this chapter looks to the writings of Rhonda Byrne, Tolly Burkan, Wayne Dyer, and Russell Simmons. While each represents a spirituality that may be read as magical, they differ in terms of precisely where magical energies are located and how they are accessed and activated.

THE SECRET

Rhonda Byrne (1951-present) is an Australian television writer and producer who, in the depths of personal, professional, and financial crises, was given a copy of Wallace Wattles' *The Science of Getting Rich* (1910) by her daughter. "A year ago," she writes in the opening pages of *The Secret*,

> my life had collapsed around me. I'd worked myself into exhaustion, my father died suddenly, and my relationships with my work colleagues and loved ones were in turmoil. Little did I know at the time, out of my greatest despair was to come the greatest gift…the secret to life.[15]

Wattles' book, in which "the secret to life" was apparently revealed, Byrne explains, "lit a fire in me," offering a vision which "was exactly the opposite of the way I thought life worked," namely, that by changing what we think, we can create whatsoever we desire. Byrne "spent the next two and a half weeks tracing Wattles' philosophy, discovering that its roots lay in 3000 BC," and that many of the "greatest thinkers in human history…Plato, Shakespeare, Newton, Hugo, Beethoven, Lincoln, Emerson, Edison, Einstein" employed this principle. Determined to produce a film or television show that would make accessible to everyone what had for millennia been known only to a handful, Byrne "went to the U.S. to interview more than fifty teachers and philosophers who shared a belief in the power of personal thought."[16] While the resulting film, *The Secret*, did not premier in movie theatres worldwide as Byrne had envisioned, its online distribution was quite successful, as have been the books it inspired, including *The Secret* (2006), *The Power* (2006), *The Magic* (2012), and most recently, *Hero* (2014).

In their somewhat snarky review of Byrne's work for the *New York Times,* entitled "Fight the Power," psychologists Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simmons work to capture the essential logic of Byrne's philosophy. Her books, they write,

offer a self-help philosophy based on the 'law of attraction,' which Byrne describes as
a fundamental universal law akin to gravity…. The law of attraction states that whatever
you experience in life is a direct result of your thoughts…. If you think about being fat, you will
get fatter. If you think about thin people, you will become thin yourself. If you think about your
bills, you will get more bills, but if you think about checks instead, your mailbox will overflow
with them. According to [Byrne] your thoughts and feelings have magnetic properties
and 'frequencies.' They 'vibrate' and resonate with the 'universe,' somehow attracting events
that share those frequencies back to their thinker.[17]

This account is correct so far as it goes. Nevertheless, in its haste to capture essential

features, it obscures important differences among Byrne's various writings, differences

that give rise to varied practices, understandings, and embodied subjectivities. *The Secret*

is surely dominated by "the law of attraction," which is said to be activated by mentally

visualizing what one desires intensely and often. Its chapters feature numerous quotations

from motivational speakers such as Jack Canfield and Joe Vitale, New Thought ministers

such as Michael Beckwith, and physicists such as Fred Allan Wolfe, discussing the

applicability of this principle to everything from money, relationships, health, and world

peace. *The Secret* is also replete with exercises in which readers are instructed to "ask

[for], believe, and know" that those things they desire "already exist in the Unseen," and

are thus on their way to manifesting in the physical.[18]

But *The Power* offers a somewhat alternate route to manifesting one's desires.

This book emphasizes not only a mental state in which aspirations take on an intense

verisimilitude–that is, they become descriptions of that which already exists in thought–

but an equally acute and focused emotional dimension, one of sustained enjoyment,

enthusiasm, and "love" for that which one intends to manifest. Whereas *The Secret*

privileges the ideational, *The Power* privileges the affective, and offers a number of

exercises for sustaining the proper sentiments. For, "love" is here conceptualized as far

more than "merely a feeling…but a positive force," an energy that literally "holds

together atoms and universes," and is therefore capable of attracting and "holding onto" anything one desires.[19]

In *The Magic* the emphasis shifts yet again, this time locating a sustained experience of gratitude as the source of magical energies. One is instructed to saturate virtually every aspect of one's life in sincerely felt gratitude. This includes not only those things we currently desire, but those we enjoy in the present and have enjoyed in the past, for instance, family, friends, jobs, and pleasant memories, anything for which we can conceivably feel gratitude. Indeed, this book offers a highly structured thirty-day program designed to integrate a feeling of gratitude into one's everyday awareness. As with "belief" in *The Secret* and "love" in *The Power*, in *The Magic* "gratitude" is conceptualized as far more than simply an inner subjective state. It too represents a fundamental force capable of performing transformative work both internally and externally such that, "whatever it is that you want to be, do, or have, gratitude is the way to receive it."[20] To be fair, Byre intends that each of these techniques and the embodied subjectivities they produce be used together in a mutually-reinforcing manner. As much is suggested, for instance, in her "magic-check-writing" practice, available on her website, in which participants print out the blank check "from the Universe" pictured on the site, fill in the date, one's name, and "the amount [they] wish to receive in the currency of [their] choice." Participants are instructed to post the check "in a prominent position" where it will be seen daily, and thus prompt the appropriate beliefs, images, sentiments, and ultimately the manifestation of the desired amount.[21]

SLOT MACHINES AS SPIRITUAL TEACHERS

Tolly Burkan (1948-present) is the founder of the American fire-walking movement, and teaches self-improvement, spiritual growth, and prosperity workshops with such remarkable titles as, "The Unlimited Wealth Seminar," from his home in Twain Hearte, California. In *Extreme Spirituality: Radical Journeys for the Inward Bound* (2001)*,* Burkan describes a range of practices regularly taught in such workshops. In addition to walking barefoot on red-hot coals and shards of broken glass, these include breaking boards and bricks with bare hands, passing sewing needles through the physical body, smelling highly disagreeable odors (e.g., of one's own excrement) without attachment, snapping arrows with one's bare throat, and using slot machines as biofeedback devices.

Prefacing his work with slots machines, Burkan explains that, "[t]oday, [these] machines are controlled by... computer chip[s]" which have been shown to respond to the power of human thought. "By paying attention to our thoughts while sitting in front of a slot machine, we can find out what it is that we do with our minds that keeps us cut off from receiving grace and love." [22] Thus, he relates, while sitting in a casino before a slot machine,

> I experimented, visualizing angels, calling upon Jesus, even imagining I was Jesus. I practiced forgiveness, offered gratitude for grace, sang silent hymns, laughed, and cried. At the moment I thought my heart was open, I would put a coin in the slot machine and pull the handle. If money came out, that indicated my heart was indeed open…. If nothing came out, that was a signal to work a little more. [23]

After gaining an initial proficiency in this practice of "opening the heart," he says, "I decided to process my relationship with my former wife. I began forgiving her for all the incidents that I had been holding onto for so long…. I began to appreciate those qualities in her that are extraordinary." Determined to have his heart "open completely," he

promised to give ten percent of all his winnings to his former wife. When winnings were

not forthcoming, this prompted him "to go deeper" into his own psyche, of which he

confesses,

> [a] part of me was still competing with her… still trapped in jealousy, and so of course the
> machine paid nothing…. In a subtle way, I discovered that I really didn't want to give her the
> money I had promised...I could fool myself, but I couldn't fool the slot machine. It, like
> everything else in the universe, was an expression of God…. an empty mirror reflecting
> everything within myself…. I finally was able to ferret out every obstacle keeping me from
> opening my heart completely to my ex-wife…. I took out my checkbook and wrote her a large
> check. Regardless of what happened with the slot machine, I would give it to her. In went a coin,
> down went the handle, and of course, out came a jackpot![24]

It is worth noting that for Burkan financial gain is not really the goal of learning to master

the slots. As his website explains, the [Unlimited Wealth] "seminar is actually not about

money. It is about realizing your connection to the source of unlimited supply… The

result: you will never worry about money again!"[25] For Burkan, then, mastering the slots

is really about healing the inner self, which is then reflected back to us by the external

world.

WISH FULFILLMENT

Wayne W. Dyer (1940-2015) began his professional career in 1965 as a high-

school guidance counsellor in Detroit, and after completing a doctorate in 1971, served as

a professor of counseling education at St. John's University in Jamaica, New York. From

the outset, Dyer emphasized an optimistic philosophy of life, and while at St. John's,

where he taught courses on motivational speaking as well as psychology, his "upbeat,

positive message was very well received; students began bringing their friends to Dyer's

classes, and he amassed a small following." With the encouragement of a literary agent,

Dyer crafted the ideas presented in his lectures into his first book, *Your Erroneous Zones*

(1973). Although initial sales were "abysmal," Dyer resigned his professorship as well as

his private practice as a counselling psychologist, purchased all available copies of his book, and "set out on the road to make publishing and self-marketing history," appearing in bookstores across the country as well as radio and television shows, most notably Phil Donahue, Johnny Carson, and Merv Griffin. As a result, *Your Erroneous Zones* went on to become one of the best-selling books of all time, and Dyer has since written some two dozen additional books, many of which have spent time as national best-sellers, and all of which develop in some manner the basic idea of self-help through positive thinking.[26]

Despite this single unifying theme, progressively magical orientation within Dyer's work is clearly discernible. *Your Erroneous Zones* instructs readers as to how they might eliminate their own self-destructive behaviors. The book is structured much like a typical counselling session: specific behaviors, such as chronic anger, procrastination, and anxiety, are identified; the reasons why they occur are considered; more adaptive and happiness-inducing attitudes are suggested.[27] The book's basic premise is that human beings are free to choose how they interpret and react to what they experience in the course of their lives. Rather than locating the cause of one's happiness or unhappiness in the approval or disapproval of others, for instance, *Your Erroneous Zones* insists that lasting happiness requires an internally grounded sense of self-acceptance and self-confidence. The book concludes with a "portrait of a person who has eliminated all erroneous zones and is living in an internally rather than an externally controlled emotional world."[28] Such "fully functional" persons have chosen to "live completely in the present moment" and display "an uncanny ability to be creatively alive at every moment." They neither worry nor seek out the approval of others nor seem troubled by the irritations and frustrations that plague ordinary people. They are "different from run-

of-the-mill individuals" in that they are "strikingly independent… do not worry… do not complain," because they are too busy enjoying life, seeking out new things, and growing personally.[29] While attaining this state of being may appear miraculous to the "run-of-the-mill" human being, Dyer insists that there is nothing "supernatural" about it.[30] To the contrary, neurosis-free living is said to represent a perfectly "natural" state of affairs, achievable through nothing more than "hard work and clear thinking."[31]

Whereas the teachings of Rhonda Byrne and Tolly Burkan align quite readily with the category "magic" as it has been developed here, reading Dyer's *Your Erroneous Zones* through this same lens, as if it were a magical text, yields interesting results. On one hand, it might be argued, because this text does not include transcendent or "supernatural" sources of power, it is difficult to see it as providing even a spirituality in Hanegraaf's terms, much less a magical one. In fact, if Dyer's approach seems reminiscent of the American psychologist, Albert Ellis', highly pragmatic and this-worldly Rational-Emotive Therapy, it is. Ellis, with whom Dyer personally studied, publicly accused Dyer of plagiarism.[32] On the other hand, *Your Erroneous Zones* offers practices said to be radically transformational, and imagines human nature in a significantly expanded manner, for example, as capable of entirely neurosis-free living. Indeed, for Dyer, locating emotional control internally rather externally may itself be said to function as a source of considerable power, the very means by which we can become something more than merely an ordinary human being.

By the early 1990s, Dyer's thinking had taken an explicitly magical turn. In *Real Magic: Creating Miracles in Everyday Life* (1992), Dyer posits the existence, "deep within human consciousness," of a "field of unlimited possibilities" which, when

properly engaged, brings forth whatever we desire: loving relationships, financial

prosperity, a clear sense of meaning and purpose, robust physical health, and even the

quickening of a worldwide spiritual renaissance. "When you become competent at going

to this wonderful place," Dyer writes,

> you will discover an entirely new realm of human experience where all things are possible…. Limits simply do not exist here, and you seem to always be in the right place at precisely the right time. It is here that you make synchronistic 'unbelievable' connections with others and can almost read the thoughts of those around you…. It is here that whatever or whoever is necessary to create prosperity and abundance in your life appears. It is here that the precise cure for your ailments shows up, or the right book or tape arrives into your life as if guided to you by some invisible, mysterious force.[33]

Across several lengthy chapters, *Real Magic* lays out an extraordinarily complex

"blueprint" for accessing this miraculous inner field. Its complexity lies in two primary

features. Firstly, each chapter is comprised of seemingly endless lists of cognitive and

affective tasks which must be performed in order to access the miracle-inducing field,

each of which might reasonably be said to require a lifetime to master. In the opening

chapters alone, such lists include (but are by no means limited to): achieving complete

mental equilibrium; finding meaning and purpose in one's life; leaving behind all

personal weaknesses; realizing that a single life force exists within the universe and that

our thoughts, as an expression of this life force, create our realities; transcending logic

and skepticism regarding what is and is not possible. Secondly, some of the things that

tapping into this field are said to produce (e.g., a strong intuitive sense of meaning and

purpose) are in fact required for accessing it. Such a state of affairs is, at best,

paradoxical. Probably it is fair to say that *Real Magic* offers not so much a blueprint as a

warehouse crammed full of virtually every insight that could possibly be gleamed from

the pages of self-help, human potential, New Age, and New Thought literatures available

through the early 1990s, with anecdotes from the author's personal experience included.

While its title hardly suggests as much, *Wishes Fulfilled: Mastering the Art of Manifesting* (2012), offers a far more restrained, or at least more focused, discussion, one that also develops Dyer's evolving symbolic/ritual system in new and interesting ways. Here, each chapter develops a single idea–the creative power of the imagination, or of embodied emotion, or of focused attention, or the subconscious mind. While many of these are present in *Real Magic*, what makes *Wishes Fulfilled* distinctive (aside from its being far more readable) are its theistic and paranormal elements. Dyer relates, for instance, a series of mystical encounters he had with the figure of Saint Francis of Assisi. While self-identifying as neither Catholic, nor Christian, nor even as formally religious, Dyer nonetheless felt drawn to St. Francis for many years. Francis' teachings and example, he recounts,

> seemed more like a technology than a prayer. I loved the idea that hatred could grow into love, and darkness could be illuminated–not by asking God to do it, but by *being* love and light. It seemed to promise that we human beings had the ability to literally change suffering and pain by transforming ourselves… [St. Francis] had come into my life, and his influence began to engulf me as the years passed.[34]

For Dyer, Francis' growing influence included pilgrimages to Assisi in which he "walked in the fields where Francesco walked… meditated in the same little chapel where he prayed… stood at his tomb mesmerized by the overwhelming feeling that [he] was one with this man who had lived 800-plus years before." Dyer writes of a growing sense of divine mission in his own life, "a healing in my body that to this day remains a mystery to me and my medical doctor friends," and at least one occasion upon which, while speaking publicly about St. Francis, he "felt something take over [his] body, and… was rendered speechless" such that even the audience became aware that "a truly metaphysical happening was transpiring."[35] Alongside such experiences, Dyer discusses a number of paranormal events including: the appearance of "orbs" of white light said to

have been observed and photographed at his public talks and around him in particular; a distant-healing of a physical disease from which Dyer himself suffered by the Brazilian figure, John of God; numerous readers' letters telling of visions they had of Dyer in which Dyer appeared as figures such as Lao Tzu during precisely those years in which Dyer was composing a book about the ancient Chinese sage; and Dyer's adventures into his own past-life memories. All such experiences are relevant to the project of manifesting one's wishes and desires, Dyer insists, because they point out that human beings are far from alone in their spiritual journeys, and that considerable degrees of guidance and assistance are available, if only they can begin to cultivate an awareness of them and, even more so, extend a conscious invitation to them.

BEING SUPER RICH

Russell Simmons (1957–present) is not easily confined to a single vocational category. Commonly known as the "godfather of hip hop," he co-founded Def Jam Records in the early 1980s, which subsequently launched the careers of artists such as Run DMC, Beastie Boys, Public Enemy, LL Cool Jay, and Jay Z, among others. An aspiring designer, Simmons also created the Phat Farm clothing company to market his line of custom hip-hop apparel, essentially casting popular music as material culture. After selling both companies for more than one-hundred million dollars each, as of 2011 Simmons' estimated monetary worth topped three hundred and forty million dollars. An advocate for social change, he has worked in support of a variety of causes, including animal rights, marriage equality, Muslim-Jewish relations, and Occupy Wall Street.[36] Simmons has also developed a reputation as a spiritual/self-help teacher, thus far having

authored three guides to personal, professional, and spiritual success: *Do You! Twelve Laws to Access the Power in You to Achieve Happiness and Success* (2008); *Super Rich: A Guide to Having It All* (2011); and *Success Through Stillness: Meditation Made Simple* (2014).

Each of these books develops a personal spirituality synthesizing diverse cultural resources. *Do You!*, for instance, emphasizes pragmatic business advice blended with ample doses of enlightened self-interest, articulated in twelve "laws of success." The foundation of Simmons' teachings in *Do You!*, his first "law of success," involves tenaciously pursuing one's personal vision. "There's only one thing that will always steer you toward success," he tells us, "[t]hat's to have a vision and stick with it."[37] For Simmons, one's ultimate motivations can never be solely about making money. They must be grounded in the authentic expression of personal creativity, the pursuit of an initial founding vision, and work which one sincerely wishes to do in the world. On Simmons' view, he himself has been successful precisely because his vision has always come first. "You can never go by the bottom line alone when you're following your vision," he explains, "even in the face of nay-sayers and the many challenges that will arise." Hence, the remaining eleven laws have to do with staying firmly committed to one's vision (e.g., "there are no failures, only quitters"), taking concrete steps to bring this vision about ("stop frontin' and start today"), but yet also remaining flexible and open to change. Simmons likewise emphasizes the need for generosity: whatever it is one wishes to do in the world, begin by giving it away for free to everyone and anyone; this is how widespread enthusiasm for a product or service is quickly generated.[38]

Throughout *Do You!*, these "laws of success" are also presented as participating in a kind of spiritual power. He suggests variously, for instance, that: (i) "[our] visions are actually God's way of communicating with us"; (ii) "the imagination of God is the collective imagination of man"; (iii) "[y]our imagination is God itself." This significantly recasts the creative insights of aspiring entrepreneurs, and certainly Simmons' own financial successes. "Selling Phat Farm for $120 million might have made headlines in the business pages," he writes, "but I really saw it as more of a spiritual victory."[39] On this view, since new business ideas find their origins in divine promptings, entrepreneurial ventures become something akin to spiritual journeys, the obstacles encountered turn out to be no more than "God's way of testing you," and success and failure separate the "small number of us who follow through" on our divinely given visions from the many who do not.[40] For Simmons, then, the twelve laws of *Do You!* represent a path of this-worldly wisdom which also contribute to one's spiritual growth and larger social change: "Once you find yourself consciously operating under the laws," he assures us, "you can begin to effect the same change that you feel in your heart throughout the world at large."[41]

Whether we count *Do You!* as a magical text largely depends upon the relationship we take to exist between Simmons' twelve laws and the success one achieves. Are these laws conducive to success merely because they represent cogent business strategies, or because they tap into transformational energies, or both? If *Do You!* is ambivalent on this point, Simmons' later book, *Super Rich*, resolves the ambiguity. It begins by redefining the notion of "Super Rich." "The journey I'm proposing," Simmons writes,

is not one that's going to culminate in a mansion with a luxury car in the driveway. What I'm encouraging you to strive for… [is] a state where you'll be able to appreciate that your entire experience as a human being is blissful and sublime. And as a result of this state, you'll understand that you don't need money or toys to be happy… when you're Super Rich you'll be able to see that happiness is actually a state of needing nothing.[42]

From such a state of being, one's connection to the divine is said to be "so strong that there's no difference between being broke and being a millionaire." The paradox is not merely that the Super Rich individual will avoid attachment to material wealth, but that sustaining this state of consciousness is,

[e]xactly how you get paid! Needing nothing is how you're actually going to get everything! When you can give your full attention to something to serving the world, instead of worrying about the world giving you things, you will be so attractive that people will literally start throwing money at your feet."[43]

Each of the book's chapters develops some aspect of the Super Rich state of being, in some cases re-imagining aspects of *Do You!*. The practice of giving away one's work for free, for example, is here given an explicitly metaphysical basis, as not only effective advertising, but a means of "attracting and making oneself irresistible to the world." In other places, practices such as sitting meditation, yogic breathing exercises, theistic prayer, and the "renunciation of the fruits of your labors" as described in Hindu sacred texts such as the *Bhagavad-Gita*, are advocated as spiritually and materially efficacious technologies.[44]

Whereas *Super Rich* appropriates a handful of classical Hindu resources, *Success Through Stillness* (2014) reframes basic Buddhist resources for modern day readers who may know little of Buddhism, its healthful and happiness-inducing benefits and, Simmons believes, its usefulness in one's personal and professional life.[45] Like his first two books, *Success Through Stillness* fuses pragmatic, this-worldly strategies with the suggestion of a magical spirituality anchored in Buddhist notions of inner peace through sitting meditation practice. However, does the mental calmness attained in Buddhist

practice simply bring about greater clarity of thought and emotional balance and thus help one to make better decisions? Or does it tap into more tangible energies that somehow shape the course of events along preferred lines? Or both? *Success Through Stillness* thus returns to the ambiguities of *Do You!*, in some places suggesting a more magical reading, others less so.

CONTEMPORRAY SPIRITUALITIES AND THE CATEGORY MAGIC

The spiritualities discussed in this chapter bring together diverse cultural resources in positing their own approaches to a transcendent realm of meaning and purpose, and thus all count nicely as "spiritualities" in Wouter J. Hanegraaff's terms. According to Hanegraaff, we should expect the proliferation of such highly individualized ritual-symbolic systems across the cultural landscapes of contemporary Western societies, but no widely accepted, over-arching, religious canopies. Hanegraaff has certainly identified an important dimension of contemporary societies. But the fact that a diverse range of cultural products examined over the course of the last three chapters may be coherently and fruitfully read through a magical hermeneutic begins to suggest that something more than mere fragmentation is at play. The days of monolithic religious canopies, if they ever truly existed, may be gone for good, but this does not rule out the possibility of magical landscapes, that is, the possibility that contemporary American culture (and perhaps others) is increasingly preoccupied with cultural goods suggestive of the magical.

That said, reading the spiritualities featured in this present chapter through the lens of magic suggests modifications to the category. As in chapter two's study of

popular entertainment, the notion of human control represents a primary point of divergence. The teachings of Rhonda Byrne, Tolly Burkan, Wayne Dyer and Russell Simmons line up rather nicely on this point. They each specify different practices said to engender certain beliefs, emotions, attitudes, and changes in character, which in turn are said to transform one's circumstances in desired ways. Thus, they each identify different magics, different methods for tapping into a source of transformational power. In each of these magics, transformational energies are also under human control, provided that we adhere to the specified rules and requirements. In James Redfield's philosophy, however, magical energies elude human control, and may only be accessed by properly aligning oneself with a larger intelligence. For Redfield, this larger intelligence is manifest in experiences of 'filling up with energy,' 'following coincidences,' and the serendipitous events which are said to unfold as a consequence. This seems quite distinct from the teachings of Byrne and others, who emphasize the direct causal power of focused human consciousness to bring you 'whatever you want.' Once again, in these alterities, it is not *always* the case that the magical dimension is subject under human control. In some, it is the magical dimension that is in charge.

The following chapter turns to the work of four evangelical minister-authors, some of whom were touched upon in this book's introduction, reads each through the frame of magic, and considers what the act of so doing suggests about the broader culture as well as the category magic.

Chapter Five: Evangelical Magics

Much like terms such as new age and spirituality, the category "evangelical" has been imagined in markedly different ways by scholars working towards quite different analytical, as well as ideological, ends.[1] In many traditional scholarly imaginaries, evangelicals represent a fundamentally positive force in American cultural history. In the now classic works of William McLaughlin and Nathan O. Hatch, for example, evangelical traditions become carriers of quintessential American values such as revival, reform, and democratization.[2] For Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, they are among the "winners" in America's free and unregulated religious marketplace, consistently delivering high quality religious goods.[3] Within such scholarly constructs, evangelicals are frequently depicted as residing at the "heart" of the American religious and cultural mainstream.[4]

In others, however, evangelicals are cast in terms that they themselves would find less appealing. Rather than keepers of an unchanging Christian tradition standing over and against American popular culture, Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sintiere argue that, from the time of George Whitfield, evangelicals have been the bringers of religious innovation and change, continually recasting Protestant Christianity in ways which resonate with, rather than oppose, popular culture.[5] Instead of bearers of fundamental democratic values, for a growing number of scholars, contemporary evangelicals instantiate a theocratic ideology "hostile to certain basic features of democracy" and tantamount to an "American fascism."[6]

This chapter draws upon the work of some of these scholars, though ultimately understands the category "evangelical" in terms of self-identification. On this approach,

someone counts as an evangelical if they claim this identity for themselves, and their "evangelicalism" is whatever they say it is. This approach has advantages as well as disadvantages. One on hand, it highlights the manifold ways in which evangelical religious worlds are imagined and lived by those who inhabit them. One the other hand, it obscures the ways in which evangelicals share a common history.[7] In any event, this chapter looks at popular motivational writings offered by four contemporary, self-identified evangelicals, Joel Osteen, Pat Robertson, Rick Warren, and Keith Craft, and reads each through the frame of magic that has been brought to previous chapters. Ultimately, it is argued, the evangelical magics on display here share a great deal more with those of popular entertainment, alternative medicine, and "new age" spiritualties than is commonly supposed.

SEASONS OF INCREASE

Joel Osteen (1963-present), *Bloomberg Businessweek Magazine* states in 2005, **"**is arguably America's most popular preacher."

> His Lakewood Church in Northeast Houston is America's largest, attracting some 30,000 worshipers to its weekend services. But far more Americans know Osteen through TV. Over the course of the average month, some 18 million individuals tune in for one of his sermons, making him the most-watched preacher on television.[8]

Lakewood Church was founded in 1959 by Joel Osteen's father, John Osteen. A minister trained in the Southern Baptist tradition, in the mid-1950s the elder Osteen experienced what in Pentecostal theology is understood as a blessing by the Holy Spirit in which he spoke, while in prayer, spontaneously and fervently in one or more divine languages which only those who have been similarly blessed are able to correctly interpret. Deeply

impressed with this experience, the senior Osteen's sermons and writings came to emphasize the role of God's power in supernaturally transforming the life of the sincere believer, bringing health, happiness, and prosperity in its wake. If such a theological shift prompted John Osteen's departure from Hibbard Memorial Baptist Church where he had served as pastor for many years, it also brought about the founding of Lakewood Church, and provided the theological background which shaped Joel Osteen's understanding of the Christian message. Working in Lakewood's media department, the younger Osteen at first expressed considerable ambivalence regarding a pastoral role. When his father died unexpectedly in 1999, however, he promptly assumed the position of lead pastor and, he attests, with a far stronger sense of divine calling than he had previously experienced. In a mere handful of years Lakewood Church had grown to become the largest congregation in the nation, and Osteen emerged as "one of America's most popular preachers."[9]

It is not clear into which theological or denominational camp Joel Osteen best fits. Lakewood Church is officially non-denominational. According to *Businessweek,* the younger Osteen is "a leading proponent of what is sometimes called the 'prosperity gospel,' which teaches that God wants people to prosper in all areas of their lives– including material success."[10] Some religious historians, however, insist that,

> [i]t is more accurate to distinguish [Joel] Osteen as a Charismatic or neo-Pentecostal preacher because he places less emphasis upon speaking in tongues than traditional Pentecostals, and more focus on the power of God's spirit to transform every aspect of the believer's life. Joel Osteen tells members to trust in God's supernatural powers and yet focuses on personal agency by exhorting members to have positive thoughts and to speak positively in order to shun negativity from all aspects of their lives.[11]

It may also be the case that the younger Osteen is simply not concerned with church doctrine and denominational boundaries, but rather with emphasizing what he takes to represent the rather straightforward and uplifting message of the Gospels: namely, that

God wants human beings to succeed in their lives and has laid out a clear and practical

path for our so doing.[12] As Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sintiere explain:

> [Joel] Osteen's message of redemption reminds his followers that God has a great future for them and that they can leave their past behind. He encourages his listeners to take inventory of their inner dispositions, watch what cultural evils they consume, and keep their inner spirits healthy and whole by listening to edifying sermons.[13]

Osteen's first two books, *Your Best Life Now: Seven Steps to Living at Your Full

Potential* (2004) and *Becoming a Better You: Seven Keys to Improving Your Life

Everyday* (2007), do this by means of seven-step self-improvement programs. *Your Best

Life Now* instructs readers in the development of a healthy self-image, which here means

acknowledging that one's thoughts and words have creative power in the world, and

urges readers to think in terms of much grander visions for their lives. *Becoming a Better

You* teaches gratitude for one's family and for whatever is good in one's present

circumstances. Both books emphasize the developing of healthy relationships, letting go

of bad habits, and cultivating an exclusively optimistic outlook. Both books have also

sold millions of copies, spent considerable lengths of time on various national best-seller

lists, and have been developed into a variety of more specialized products such as daily

devotionals, workbooks for busy mothers and business executives, as well as a board

game (e.g., *Your Best Life Now: The Board Game*), in which players "roll dice the dice

and try to succeed at life."[14]

     Osteen's third major book, *It's Your Time: Activate Your Faith, Achieve Your

Dreams, and Increase in God's Favor* (2009), proceeds more thematically.[15] Here,

Osteen offers a creative and interesting reading of the biblical text which seeks to "speak

faith into the lives of others, encouraging them when they are discouraged, calling forth

the seeds of greatness God planted within, assuring them that their best days are ahead."

His goal, he says, "is not simply to inspire and motivate… but also to help you see that God's plan is at work in your life… God would not withhold wisdom, creativity, good breaks, the right connections, strength, joy, or victory."[16] *It's Your Time* is thus comprised of chapters with such heady titles as, "Believe for a Supernatural Year," "All Things Work Together for Our Good," and "Thriving, Not Just Surviving," each of which identifies a "seed of greatness God planted within" and the key role played by one's attitudes and beliefs in bringing such "seeds" into fruition. As Lee and Sintiere point out, for Osteen, "God's activities in the human realm… depend largely on [our] cultivating the right thoughts and speaking spiritual desires into material reality." Whereas for John Osteen God provided a spiritual power "upon which human beings could draw," for Joel Osteen God's power is itself constrained by those things we decide to believe and speak aloud.[17]

The centrality of human belief emerges most clearly in the fourth chapter of *It's Your Time*, "New Seasons of Increase." Working from the texts of Job and Psalms, Osteen argues that, just as in biblical times, there are periods in life which God intends to be filled with rich material blessings.

> Psalm 102 says there was a set time for favor. That means that there was a set time for people to receive increase, a set time that they would see blessings. It's the same way today. God has seasons in which supernatural doors will open, seasons in which you will accomplish things you never thought possible, seasons in which you'll see great things happen to you.[18]

Some people will be prepared for this, and receive the opportunities and good things God would like to send them. Others will not. The determining factor is one's belief because, Osteen repeatedly insists, "God is limited by our beliefs." People who find themselves too pessimistic to believe that 'their season is at hand' turn out to be correct: "They missed their season of favor." Those willing to risk faith in that which is as of yet unseen

go on to receive. A common stumbling block, he teaches, is that in dealing with worldly problems, human beings look only "at the natural, [but w]e have a *super*natural God." Consequently, even if something "doesn't look possible," one can nevertheless "sense new seasons of increase, seasons of promotion" about it; despite how unlikely something one desires to do, have, or experience, may appear "on paper," one can still sense premonitions that "supernatural opportunities are coming my way…. You have to be perceptive and sense what is coming," Osteen urges, "long before it arrives. Learn to walk by faith and not by sight."[19]

In teasing out precisely how one might cultivate a sufficiently strong sense of belief and the extrasensory perceptions he commends, Osteen looks to the biblical prophet Elijah who, he says, in the midst of a drought, announced to King Ahab that he could "hear the sound of the abundance of rain" even though "there wasn't a cloud in the sky when he said that. There wasn't rain in the distance. It wasn't thundering. But Elijah could sense what was coming long before it arrived." Central to Elijah's success, Osteen argues, is that he did not rely upon the physical senses; he "heard it down in his spirit. And he was bold enough to announce it." Like Elijah, then, readers are urged to sense and hear those things they desire "in their spirits," and announce it boldly, despite the fact that others, who look only at the physical world, will fail to comprehend.[20]

But Osteen extends this teaching further still, recalling also the story of Hezekiah, a Hebrew Bible figure who went to the prophet Isaiah after contracting a serious illness. When Isaiah told him that he would die from this illness, Hezekiah "pleaded his case" to God, reminding God "of everything good he had done," and as a result Hezekiah "entered a new season, a season of increase. When did it happen? When he believed, when he

expected God's goodness." Readers are urged to do the same. "In your own time of need you should call in all those seeds you've sown…. Remind Him…. God is into increase, not decrease. With our faith we can change God's mind." Indeed, on this view, "[e]very time you come to church, every time you watch a service, you are storing up mercy for you and your family. You can look back and remind God."[21]

TITHING TO THE LORD

After what he himself describes as a difficult religious conversion in his mid-twenties, Pat Robertson (1930-present) went on to be ordained as a Southern Baptist minister, and has since founded and overseen some of the most powerful and influential institutions within the world of American evangelicalism, including: the Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN); CBN's flagship television program, *The 700 Club*; Regents University; the International Family Entertainment Channel (currently the ABC Family Channel); and the Christian Collation, to cite but a handful of examples.[22] In addition to his many institutional successes, Robertson has authored more than a dozen books, some of which, such as *The New World Order* (1991), have made the *New York Times* best-seller list. He has also appeared as a presidential candidate, and developed a reputation for particularly controversial statements following or predicting natural disasters and acts of terrorism.[23]

Robertson's books come in two varieties: those which apply his biblical exegesis and theology to one's personal life, and those which apply them to American geo-politics. *The Secret Kingdom: Your Path to Peace, Love, and Financial Security* (1982), belongs largely to the former category, although domestic and geopolitical issues are

discussed as well. In this text, Robertson presents what he takes to represent fundamental

biblical principles or "laws" (e.g., the law of greatness, the law of miracles, the law of

dominion) which, when dutifully obeyed, lead to a flourishing life. The first and foremost

of these, "The Law of Reciprocity," governs what one receives in the world on virtually

every level. This law, he says,

> is quite evident not only in the Bible, but also in the physical world: for every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction. Smile at another person, and he'll probably smile back at you. Be critical of others, and they'll respond in kind. As you give, you will receive.[24]

Robertson goes to considerable effort to ground this principle not only in daily

experience and the biblical text, but in the history and authority of Western scientific

discovery, as a "basic law of physics" discovered and used by human beings to

marvelous effect, for instance, in propelling jets through the air and rockets into space.[25]

When applied to one's professional and financial life, the law of reciprocity is

said to have far reaching consequences. If we want a higher salary in our jobs, we must

start by giving generously of our own resources. Like the backward thrust that propels jet

engines forward, our own giving naturally produces a series of beneficial results. "Those

with good salaries are not people who sit back and scheme and spend all their time

thinking of ways to promote themselves," Robertson explains. "The people who are

recognized in an organization are those who work harder, think more creatively, and act

more forcefully on behalf of the enterprise." In short, "[t]hey give," and they do so with

"a proper attitude." "Those who give in meanness or anger or trouble will get it back….

'The way you give to others is the way God will give to you.' That's a law."[26]

In addition to a general theory of giving, Robertson provides a special theory of

monetary giving, or tithing. Tithing is here defined as the consistent "giving to the Lord"

of at least ten percent of all the wealth one receives. Citing passages from the Hebrew

Bible and New Testament, he argues that tithing is something the Lord takes very seriously. For, "He has gone to great lengths to teach us how things work. If we want to release the superabundance of the kingdom of heaven, we must first give… tithes and offerings to the Lord …. Your return, poured into your lap, will be great, pressed down, and running over." Tithing, then, is a kind of biblically enjoined supernatural investment strategy capable of miraculous returns. Investments in human financial systems can offer dividends of five to twenty percent, whereas tithing is said to yield returns of "3,000 percent, 6,000 percent, and 10,000 percent."[27]

It would be overly simplistic, however, to reduce Robertson's doctrine of tithing to nothing more than a supernatural investment strategy. He does offer a plethora of testimonials from those whose careers and finances have been transformed by way of their tithing practice. But these stories tell also (and perhaps more poignantly) of chronic physical diseases, broken relationships and families, and mental/emotional worlds, which have seen remission, reunion, and healing by way of tithing. Similarly, Robertson leaves opened-ended precisely where tithing should be directed. "It's important," he says, "that you give your tithe to the place that feeds you spiritually…. Today, since the Body of Christ has so many manifestations (churches, colleges, television and overseas ministries, hospitals, relief agencies, etc.), people can choose where their tithes should go."[28] At the same time, Robertson clearly hopes that his own religious organizations will be on the receiving end of such giving. The testimonial videos offered on the CBN website, for instance, frequently point out that many of those who have experienced the most profound healings and breakthroughs decided to include CBN in their giving. On daily installments of the *700 Club*, the names and monthly pledges of exemplary tithers scroll

across the bottom of the screen much the same way stock prices appear on financial news

networks.

TAPPING GOD'S POWER

Rick Warren (1954-present) is the founder of, and senior pastor at, Saddleback

Church in Lake Forest, California, currently ranked among the ten largest churches in

America. As *TIME* magazine notes in 2005, "these are heady time for Rick Warren."

> His book, *The Purpose Driven Life*… has sold more than 20 million copies over the past two years and is the best-selling hardback in U.S. history. When he took the podium to pray on the final night of Billy Graham's Los Angeles crusade at the Rose Bowl… the 82,000 congregants cheered as if Warren had scored the winning touchdown. And on the eve of the presidential Inauguration, Warren, who pastors the 22,000-member Saddleback mega-church in Lake Forest, Calif., delivered the Invocation at the gala celebration. Later he met with 15 Senators, from both parties, who sought his advice and heard his plan to enlist Saddleback's global network of more than 40,000 churches in tackling such issues as poverty, disease and ignorance. And when 600 senior pastors were asked to name the people they thought had the greatest influence on church affairs in the country, Warren's name came in second only to Billy Graham's.[29]

If Pat Robertson might be reasonably said to represent the more conservative wing of

American evangelicals, Warren stands considerably closer to the center.

Warren has authored a number of devotional texts, at least two of which suggest

magical dimensions. In the opening pages of *God's Power to Change Your Life* (1990),

Warren asks his readers, "[w]hat would you like to change about yourself? Would you

like to be more confident and relaxed… more outgoing, less anxious, or less fearful?" In

essence, where is improvement desired?[30] Throughout this book, the attainment of moral,

religious, psychological and social virtues such as "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness,

goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" is primary. But worldly success and

material prosperity likewise play a prominent role, and in ways that link them to the

attainment of the above virtues. The person who truly "dwells in the Lord," Warren

holds, drawing from biblical passages such as Psalm 1, "is like a tree planted by streams

of water, which sheds fruit in season but whose leaf does not whither. Everything he does prospers." [31] So too the person who is "faithful," that is, a person who is "reliable, trustworthy, dependable, consistent," and who regularly tithes ten percent of the wealth that comes to them. For "God rewards faithfulness... [and] the Bible says that the faithful person will be richly blessed" both in this life and in heaven.[32]

The achievement of any of the virtues discussed above, as well as the worldly prosperity said to result from faithfully "dwelling in the Lord," however, cannot be had solely by human effort. When we try to solve our problems and live good lives "with our own power," we fail. We "fall back into the same ruts" and as a result "[w]e are tired all the time." Instead, Warren teaches, "God has a place in our spiritual growth, and we also have a part. He provides the power, but we must flip the switch to turn the power on." 'Flipping the switch' involves religious practices historically associated with evangelical Protestantism, such as accepting Jesus as one's personal savior, daily Bible reading and prayer, joining and contributing to a local church, asking the Holy Spirit to work within oneself, examining one's life circumstances for lessons God is trying to teach, and sincerely doing one's best to be a morally good person. The sincere awakening to the Christian message said to result from such practices, Warren insists, creates "a new beginning with a big difference. We now have a new nature and the indwelling Holy Spirit, and a set of 'spiritual batteries' is included to provide the power," which in turn makes the achievement of both inner virtues and outer prosperity possible. [33] Living the life of sincere Christian discipleship, in other words, opens up the flow of power from God to human beings, and this power is said to bring salvific results everywhere it goes.

While *God's Power to Change Your Life* remains for sale on Warren's website, Warren is best known for his later book, *The Purpose Driven Life* (2002), said to be the best-selling hardback nonfiction book of all time, and currently the second most translated book after the Bible, earning Warren the coveted title of "top earning author."[34] *The Purpose Driven Life* offers a forty-day course, with brief readings scheduled for each day, helping readers to discover for themselves the meaning of their lives. That said, Warren himself considers *The Purpose Driven Life* an 'anti-self-help' book, in that it locates existential meaning not in human interests and agendas, but in the plans and purposes God has established for human beings. "It's not about you," the book's opening sentence boldly declares.

> The purpose of your life is far greater than your own personal fulfillment, your peace of mind, or even your happiness. It's far greater than your family, your career, or even your wildest dreams and ambitions. If you want to know why you were placed on this earth, you must begin with God. You were born *by* his purpose and *for* his purpose.[35]

In so far as *The Purpose Driven Life* is concerned, 'beginning with God' means accepting not only the authority of the biblical text, but Warren's reading of it, and this turns out to be a more or less traditional Southern Baptist theology cast in the upbeat language of megachurches. Here, the purpose of life is to "join God's family" by worshipping in a manner that pleases God (i.e., as conservative, white, suburban, American evangelicals tend to worship), learning to "think like a servant," cultivating honesty and kindness to others, overcoming temptation, and avoiding the dangerous spiritual waters of "other religions" and "New Age philosophies" which teach that human beings not only determine for themselves the meaning and purpose of their lives, but that they are able to create for themselves, as if by magic, whatsoever it is they desire. But, Warren admonishes, human beings are lowly "creatures" crafted by God for God's purposes and

subject to His will in all things; "we will never be the creator." [36] More, *The Purpose Driven Life* suggests a different kind of magic relative to *God's Power to Change Your Life*. If the earlier text imagined evangelical practice as tapping God's power directly, in *The Purpose Driven Life* one specific mode of religious behavior that is imagined as accessing divine power:

human obedience to God's commands. "The Holy Spirit," Warren explains,

> [r]eleases his power *the moment* you take a step of faith. When Joshua was faced with an impossible barrier, the floodwaters of the Jordan River receded only *after* the leaders stepped into the rushing current in obedience and faith. Obedience unlocks God's powers. God waits for you to act first. Don't wait to feel powerful or confident. Move ahead in your weakness, doing the right thing in spite of your fears and feelings.[37]

In *The Purpose Driven Life*, then, it is human obedience to God's will, and not the broader cluster of behaviors associated with a traditional Protestant religious identity, which taps into divine power. Importantly, so doing is not necessarily designed to increase human comfort, for that is never really God's aim, but rather the furthering of His cosmic plan, and this might well be to the immediate detriment of human beings.

YOUR DIVINE FINGERPRINT

If Keith Craft is not yet a household name, there is reason to believe that he soon may be. As Valerie Wigglesworth of the *Dallas Morning News* reports in 2010, Craft has "shared the stage with the likes of Margaret Thatcher, Mikhail Gorbachev and Bill Clinton… [and f]or the past decade, he's been at the helm of an interdenominational church whose rapid growth has mirrored that of the suburb it calls home."[38] Craft is the founder and lead pastor at Elevate Life Church, in Frisco, Texas, also known as the "Cathedral of Frisco" for its ten-story Gothic architecture, sprawling twenty-seven-acre

campus, stadium-style seating for three-thousand, and its state-of-the-art entertainment

technology. Prior to serving as megachurch pastor, Craft

> was among a group of Christian bodybuilders touring the world to preach the gospel while wowing crowds with feats of strength. They bent steel. They busted apart police handcuffs. And they crushed giant stacks of concrete… 'People are drawn to the spectacular,' Craft said of his reason for founding Strike Force. 'It was a tool to reach people for Christ.'[39]

Craft also worked as motivational speaker, "meeting with corporations and appearing at

events big and small alongside some of the world's most renown leaders," and has

appeared regularly alongside Joel Osteen. In 1999, Craft and his wife were invited to start

a church of their own in Frisco. Celebration Covenant Church was formally launched in

January 2000, and has seen considerable growth as well as notable speakers such as

Texas Governor Rick Perry. In 2009 the church underwent a major re-branding, emerging

with a new name and logo considered more relevant to contemporary times, "Elevate Life

Church: When you elevate your thinking, you elevate your life."[40]

Craft has thus far authored one book, *Your Divine Fingerprint: The Force That*

Makes You Unstoppable (2013). It opens with what he refers to as the "defining moment"

of his life, despite occurring in his infancy. On the evening of Friday, May 13, 1960,

while sleeping in his crib, a large plastic bag is said to have been carried on a breeze from

an open window and covered his face while he was sleeping. He soon began to

asphyxiate, and by the time this was discovered by his grandmother, he recounts,

> I had turned blue from the lack of oxygen… Blood was flowing from my nose, ears, and mouth. I wasn't breathing. As she held me close, Mamaw called the emergency number. Then she rushed outside to wait for help to arrive. She prayed. She hoped against hope. She cried. She believed…. After several failed attempts to revive me, I was pronounced dead at the scene. It was at this point that Mamaw prayed one last desperate prayer: 'God, You are the One who gave him life and You can resurrect him!' At that moment, to everyone's astonishment, a breath of air shot out of my mouth, ad my eyes popped open! I was alive! The only thing everyone knew that day was that they were all witnesses to a miracle.[41]

Craft's interpretation of this narrative serves as a model for the self-help philosophy offered throughout the book. His miraculous resurrection came to pass, he argues, because his grandmother turned the catastrophic moment upon which she had come (i.e. her asphyxiated grandson) into a supernatural and miraculous moment by way of her reaction to it. For Craft, "[n]ot all moments are wonderful things." Sometimes very bad things happen which we cannot control. But "every moment can be a super-natural event," and this happens "[w]hen we take moments, positive or negative, and use them to create positive momentum, the moment becomes a super-natural moment," and miraculous events become possible. The paradigm example, Craft argues, is that of Jesus of Nazareth.

> In what was the worst moment of Jesus's life, He used death to give us life. The moment Jesus died on the cross, He chose to create not only momentum for our miracle of a super-natural life but momentum as well for His own miracle: His resurrection![42]

Like Craft's grandmother, human beings follow Jesus' example by cultivating life-affirming beliefs, attitudes, and expectations, and by making use of them in constructive, optimistic forms of speech and behavior.[43]

If all human beings possess the capacity to transform moments from "natural" to "super-natural" by means of positive momentum, each individual is also said to possess talents, skills, and abilities which make them unique, much like each possesses a unique fingerprint. Craft refers to these forms of self-expression as our "x-factors." They are particular aptitudes, ways of thinking, skills and talents in almost anything which come easily to us and which we find inherently rewarding and desire to do. They also help to make individual human beings distinctive, are vital to the kinds of work each is here on earth to do, and are ultimately to be "discovered, developed, and deployed" by during one's lifetime. Consequently, Craft devotes a number of chapters to the project of

replacing negative patterns of belief, speech and behavior with those that are optimistic and uplifting, and to strategies designed to make the identification and development of one's x-factor more accessible.[44]

Importantly, the human capacity to induce supernatural moments, as well as individual x-factors, derive directly from God Himself. Having been created in His image and likeness, blessed by Him to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue the earth, and have dominion over all things, human beings are empowered to "do what He does– Prosper, Reproduce… Rule and Reign the earth!" In essence, human beings possess a facsimile of God's power within themselves. Activating this God-power, it turns out, also requires that one accepts Jesus as "Lord and Savior." Interestingly, Craft seeks to distance so doing from the idea of religion. "Religion," he says, "is man-made"; it is concerned with following rules and performing rituals, and is thus of little spiritual value. Instead, he recommends finding and attending a church where one experiences "a relationship with God." It is only in this way, Craft insists, that "you may realize the Force that makes you unstoppable," and truly flourish professionally, financially, socially, and personally.[45]

POPULAR EVAGELICALISM, THE CATEGORY MAGIC, AND AMERICAN CULTURE

As with previous chapters, many of the examples in this present discussion are read quite easily through the lens of magic. The early teachings of Rick Warren, as well as those of Pat Robertson, Joel Osteen, and Keith Craft are as magical as they are theistic. In Warren's earlier text, *God's Power to Change Your Life* (1990), it is basic devotional

practices that 'tap God's power' which, in turn, functions like an electric current flipped on by a switch, performing all sorts of helpful and productive work in our lives, empowering us to be better people, opening up professional opportunities, making available greater financial resources, healing relationships, and so forth. For Robertson, constructive, optimistic attitudes are mirrored back in desired ways (e.g., through a promotion or raise at work or the success of a business venture) by means of a fundamental structure built into the universe by God Himself, and the special practice of regular and generous tithing offers human beings a metaphysical lever for working the reward system also said to have been built into the universe by the Creator. For Osteen, it is through optimistic belief, expectations, and 'speaking words of power' that God may successfully delver those blessings He wishes to send. In Craft's alchemical method of transmuting natural moments in time into supernatural ones, and thus setting the stage for miraculous phenomena, the decision to act in optimistic, life-affirming, and faithful ways creates the momentum by which such transformations are said to occur.

So nicely do these teachings align with the notion of magic that numerous affinities with the cultural goods of previous chapters are readily suggested, and only a slight modification to the category is necessary. If magic is understood as an expanded view of human potential, one which says that human beings may, by means of some practice, tap into previously unrecognized sources of power in transforming their circumstances in desired ways, then it is not only imaginaries such as *Harry Potter*, *Star Wars*, Heartmath, and Rhonda Byrne's *The Secret*, among many others, which clearly express a magical dimension, but also those of Warren, Robertson, Osteen, and Craft. Each is easily read as paradigmatic instance of a fundamentally magical way of thought

and practice. Each fixes tremendous power and efficacy in the thought, word, and deeds of human beings, which function as a portal or lens, the proper opening or dilating of which is absolutely necessary for accessing transformational energies and reaping the rewards thereof.

Rick Warren's later writings, however, do point to the need for an important modification to the category, though once again in ways that are reminiscent of previous data sets. *The Purpose Driven Life* teaches that it is by acts of obedience to God's will that human beings create the potential for divine intervention and miraculous events. Here, though, there is no guarantee whatsoever that the effects of such phenomena will be to one's immediate benefit. God's miracles are working out His divine purposes, not human self-interested desires, and this may entail immediate results which human beings find quite undesirable. This suggests comparison with Tolkien's Middle Earth, in which the magical is located in the realm of faerie enchantment, or James Redfield's *The Celestine Prophecy*, in which magical power resides in various forms of 'energy' which work according to the designs of a larger guiding intelligence, or even the latter *BSG* series, where the magical dimension is located in the larger and mystical reality which uses human and Cylon alike for the completion of its own purposes, often to the detriment of those involved.

Given the affinities linking the evangelical and other cultural goods discussed above, it is important to remember that American evangelicals have always sought to distance themselves from the larger society, even as they have eagerly participated in and appropriated its dominant themes. In the twentieth century, fundamentalist, neo-evangelical and later televangelical preachers commonly railed against the evils of

modern society, and especially science and technology, all the while making highly efficient use of them (e.g., radio, television, the internet) in bringing the gospel to the American public. More recently, popular evangelical culture has creatively appropriated all sorts of additional resources from the larger society. These include recreational sexual practices, a pre-occupation with the occult, a fascination with physical violence and handguns, and even an interest in science fiction. Such appropriations have resulted in a flourishing market of evangelical Christian sex-toys, yearly and especially graphic anti-Halloween "Hell Houses," Christianized re-writings of *Harry Potter*, Christian "cage-fighting" ministries and "fight-club" churches, "open-carry" church services, and even a re-imagining of *Star Trek* convention-goers as Klingons for Christ. Re-inscribing such popular cultural goods within a specifically Christian framework purifies, sanctifies, and renders acceptable what would otherwise be considered anathema.

Evangelicals, like everyone else, draw upon and are shaped by the broader culture in which they live. Were they to cease to do so, they would soon be perceived as irrelevant and uninteresting. Like everyone else, they selectively appropriate and re-imagine all sorts of things, making sex toys, the occult, prosperity teachings, an intense desire for wealth and success, a preoccupation with violence, a love of science fiction, and so forth, their own, and therefore biblical and properly Christian. The appropriation of cultural goods is necessarily selective, because tensions invariably exist between traditional evangelical worldviews and the resources to be appropriated. This is glaringly evident in recent evangelical support for the presidential bid of Donald J. Trump. Trump embodies much of what evangelicals have, for generations, preached against. As Frank Bruni writes in *The New York Times,* "he personifies greed, embodies pride, radiates

lust," goes on angry rants about the "losers" in American society (that is, anyone who is not independently wealthy), treats women deplorably; essentially, he's "a one-man master class in… misanthropy."[46] Russell Moore, the head of the Southern Baptist Convention's Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, seems to concur:

> Trump has made his living as a casino mogul in an industry that preys on the poor and incentivizes immoral and often criminal behavior… He's someone who is an unrepentant serial adulterer who has abandoned two wives for other women… He's someone who has spoken in vulgar and harsh terms about women, as well as in ugly and hateful ways about immigrants and other minorities. I don't think this is someone who represents the values that evangelicals in this country aspire to.[47]

Yet, polls consistently show not only that many evangelical prefer Trump as their presidential candidate, but that they do so over and above more religiously conservative contenders. Selective evangelical appropriations of Trump, however, are no more mysterious than the appropriation (by evangelicals or any other social group) of anything else. So doing is as necessary as it is inevitable. It is necessary in order for evangelicals (or anyone else) to remain relevant to an ever-changing culture. It is inevitable because evangelicals (like everyone ese) are fundamentally shaped by the larger culture in which they exist. American evangelicals creatively appropriate Trump, sex toys, cage-fighting, handguns, science fiction, or magical forms of thought and practice, even while denouncing similar expressions elsewhere, because such practices are the stuff of continued social existence while the maintaining of an imagined distance from the larger culture is constitutive of evangelical identity.

Chapter Six: The Further Interpretive Reaches of Magic

The Oxford English dictionary (OED) offers one approach for thinking about the term magic. Concisely defined as "the use of ritual activities and observances intended to influence the course of events," the OED traces magic back to its Middle English forms in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* in the fourteenth century, its Old French, classical Latin, Hellenistic Greek, and ancient Greek cognates, and ultimately to its philological origins in the Old Persian terms *magus* (in the singular) and *magi* (in the plural).[1] The *magi* of ancient Persia, Albert De Jong, writing for the *Encyclopedia of Religion* (2005), explains, were associated with a rather complex set of social roles, serving as priests and astrologers, but also legal experts and administrators. The image of the *magi* which has come down to us over the centuries and has shaped even the OED's entry, however, is another matter altogether. Within this highly mythologized construct, the *magi* appear as figures of great mystical power and ambivalent intent. In ancient Greek, Roman, and Christian literature, De Jong continues,

> [t]he Persian magi were thought to have special powers in visiting the realm of the dead, in guiding souls to the otherworld, or evoking the spirits of the dead. They excelled in magic, using herbs, stones, and spells for their purposes, and they developed a reputation for astrological knowledge and interests…. The despised figure of Simon Magus shows the negative use of the term, whereas the Magi who first recognized the newborn king of the Jews show the lasting impact of the positive reputation of these 'Persian' wise men in the realms of astrology and divination. In general, however, the Western traditions on the magi are a Western invention fueled by stereotyped views of the East as a place from which one could expect both unfathomable wisdom and acute danger.[2]

Thus there has always been a great deal at stake in how magic is conceptualized. In the hermeneutic of academic historians such as De Jong, which insists upon locating historical subjects in their proper historical context, Persian *magi* remain largely mundane priest-bureaucrats busy with the quotidian legal, administrative, and ritual affairs of daily life.[3] It is in the imaginaries of others' that the *magi* appear primarily as astrologers and

diviners, healers and wise men, invokers of the dead, traffickers with demons, and so forth.

Over time, the *magi* came to be detached from Persian culture and were imagined in even more generic terms, as magicians, wizards, sorcerers, and oculists at home in any cultural context. Indeed, Allison P. Coudert argues that well into the eighteenth century terms such as magic (as well as religion and science) not only carried weighty social consequences, but remained highly unstable qualifiers. Throughout medieval, renaissance, and early modern Europe and America, the physical world was understood as home to many different kinds of beings and forces, and debates raged as to how even something commonly observed should be understood, such as when a piece of (magnetic) stone is passed over iron filings and the filings leap through the air and come to rest upon the stone. Does the power by which this occurs reside in the filings themselves, in the stone, in the air, in the person handling the stone, or in the intervention of God, angels, spirits, or demons? Such conceptual instability, Coudert points out, meant that the social and legal grounds upon which numerous practices (e.g., reading the stars, tending to illnesses, assisting in childbirth, crafting protective amulets, helping to locate lost or stolen objects, seeking revenge against or protection from others) were judged to be instances of proper religion (which was always permissible), natural science (which was often permissible), natural magic (which was sometimes permissible), or dark and demonic magic (which was never permissible), were continually in flux, and what might be acceptable for privileged members of society could bring the most severe penalties for those at lower levels of the social hierarchy. In the context of a deeply misogynist culture,

more women were executed for the crime of witchcraft from 1480-1700 than for all other crimes combined.[4]

Thus the epistemic plane of scholarship overlaps with the social, political, and penal. The ways in which scholars imagine and deploy interpretive frames may have real world consequences for those to whom they are applied. Even in contemporary America, individuals and communities associated with magical practices and traditions are likely to incur quite negative social consequences, including disapproval and ridicule, the heightened suspicion of law enforcement agencies, loss of employment, and even loss of one's children to local government protective services.[5] Such consequences, Yvonne Chireau points out, disproportionately impact ethnic minorities. The notion of "African American magical spirituality," she notes, "retains strongly negative meanings," so much so that African and other supernatural practices, which conjure in the public mind unsavory images of voodoo and black magic, "often reach the acceptable limits of tolerance for 'other' religions in the United States."[6] For all such reasons, responsible deployments of the category must necessarily acknowledge what is at stake and for whom.

At the same time, recent developments in the broader culture have begun to challenge the pejorative meanings often associated with the idea of magic. Neo-Pagan writers such as Starhawk and David Farren, the German feminist philosopher Donate Pahnke, and scholars of South Asian and Indigenous Central American religious cultures such as Ariel Glucklich and Michael Taussig, have each noted the many ways in which magical worldviews offer conceptual resources for resisting modernity. The magical thinking and practices such thinkers valorize, Randall Styers notes, profoundly unsettle

the embodied subjectivities entangled with modern Western societies. If, for instance, modernity is predicated upon hyper-individualism, commodification, and coercive hierarchical structures, magical thinking and practice are said to encourage an ontology of interconnection, interdependence, and intuitive sources of knowledge and action. In such ways, contemporary efforts to reclaim systems of magical thought and practice suggest the emergence of a more cooperative and sustainable global society, and "[m]any of these new structures," Styers points out, "appear to be materializing around us in this very moment… [and] may come to displace the dominant cultural understandings of magic as they move us beyond the limits of Western modernity." In so far as magical worldviews instantiate "the unthought" of modernity, they may offer compelling resources for re-thinking and rebuilding social worlds along more egalitarian, tolerant, and inclusive lines.[7]

Taken together, such considerations point to a rather complex role for the taxon magic in the work of contemporary scholars of religion. In light of the potentially negative consequences for those studied by means of the category, it seems crucial to deploy magic with care. This study has endeavored to do so by reading various cultural goods *as if* they were magical texts, attending to differences, and avoiding authoritative classification. More, thoughtful scholarly deployments of the category may well contribute to the broad reassessment of modernist norms said to be ongoing. This dissertation has also (and obviously) endeavored to humanize magical expressions of thought and practice by avoiding pejorative connotations in constructing the category, and by exploring the ways in which a wide range of cultural products might be said to participate in a dominant cultural theme. So long as scholarly deployments work in such

ways, scholars themselves are not responsible for the ways in which their analyses are appropriated by under-informed and ill-intended commentators.[8]

With the conceptual as well as social-political grounds cleared for thoughtful deployment, in what follows, this chapter explores the further hermeneutical gains which might be made by means of the taxon magic. In so doing, it looks to the work of the mid-twentieth century anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski (1884-1942), discussed briefly in chapter one, as well as his critics, his later scholarly appropriators, and what a Malinowskian lens might contribute to the present study.

MALINOWSKIAN MAGIC

Malinowski, it will be recalled, based his understanding of magic, as well as religion, upon his fieldwork among the people of the Trobriand Islands. He believed that the patterns he observed among the Trobrianders where generalizable to other cultural worlds, and hence his contention that 'there are no peoples' without religion, magic, or some form of science. On Malinowski's view, magic emerges 'at the gaps.' When ordinary means of accomplishing an important task are deemed unreliable, human beings turn to the extraordinary, the supernatural, the magical. A number of researchers working in the American context have thought about magic in strikingly similar ways.[9] Malinowski's approach has also been subject to some important criticisms. Each is discussed below, and an argument for the pragmatic appropriation of Malinowski's 'theory of the gaps' is advanced.

In the years following the Second World War, Princeton University press published a study of American soldiers who had experienced ground-combat conditions "sufficiently powerful as to dissolve a soldier's functioning personality." High percentages reported prayer to have been helpful in such circumstances. Soldiers' prayers, however, are said to have been "less a matter of conversation with a familiar figure than an expressive quasi-magical act," one employed under horrifically stressful, uncontrollable, unpredictable, and violent circumstances. Under such conditions, soldiers would routinely,

> carry protective amulets or good-luck charms, some of which had religious symbolism and some of which did not: a cross, a Bible, a rabbit's foot, a medal. They might carry out prebattle preparations in a fixed 'ritual' order. They might jealously keep articles of clothing or equipment which were associated with some past experience of escape from danger. They might scrupulously avoid actions regarded as unlucky.[10]

By recourse to such practices and structures of thought, soldiers are said to "bolster confidence and perhaps alter the course of events… [such that] the threat of the unexpected and unpredictable is brought within acceptable bounds." Regretfully, the authors conclude, all such "compulsions, incentives, and supports" proved insufficient, as "no motivational structure was adequate to sustain the average soldier in stress of combat indefinitely."[11] While the Princeton study does not explicitly cite Malinowski, its basic assumptions as to how and why magic emerges are quite similar: like the Trobrianders facing the uncertain dangers of deep-sea fishing, soldiers confronting unpredictable battlefield conditions turn to extraordinary means, in this case the use of special behaviors and items thought to be capable of providing a measure of protection.

Appearing in the *American Journal of Sociology* some two decades after the Princeton study, James M. Henslin's "Craps and Magic" offers an ethnographic analysis of "craps-shooting" among St. Louis cab drivers in the mid-1960s. While their actions

reflect an awareness of, and conformity with, basic probability, Henslin argues that the "rational aspect of crap-shooting falls far short in explaining the behavior of these driver-players." "Driver-players," Henslin recounts, insist that "[i]t is possible to control dice by verbal and non-verbal gestures, by words and actions." Within such discursive worlds, craps-shooting becomes a game of skill rather than chance. One maximizes control over the dice by means of the proper practices, regains control when it lessens, and keeps others from gaining control. So doing involves throwing the dice in the correct manner (e.g., hard throws are thought to produce high numbers, soft throws low numbers), taking time and fully preparing for each throw, maintaining concentration, mental effort, and confidence, talking to the dice and commanding them to deliver the desired number, and still other techniques such as snapping one's fingers after the dice are thrown and pointing at the dice, all of which are thought to bear directly upon one's "power" to manipulate dice-throwing outcomes.[12] If the stakes of craps shooting are far from those of the modern battlefield or Trobriand deep-sea fishing expeditions, still Henslin's driver-players consistently encounter a gap unbridgeable by ordinary means, namely, controlling the outcomes of presumably random dice-rolls, and a Malinowskian frame directs our attention to the extraordinary or supernatural means they employ in overcoming this gap.

In the early 1970s, British historian Keith Thomas published an extensive study of everyday magic in early-modern England explicitly predicated upon Malinowskian theory.[13] In this time and place, Thomas notes, human beings suffered daily from innumerable woes which ordinary efforts were powerless to prevent. Lack of food, famine, disease, plagues, fires that swept through entire towns and cities, wars, criminal violence, painful and frequently lethal medical techniques: all of these plagued rich and

poor, aristocracy and commoners, men and women, young and old. In such circumstances, Thomas argues, people naturally turned to all sorts of magical practices in hopes of allaying the day-to-day suffering which ordinary means were unable to remedy. Many such practices were thoroughly entangled with dominant religious frameworks in Catholic as well as Post-Reformation Protestant England. Special powers and properties of all sorts were attributed to religious artefacts (e.g., Bibles, the Eucharist, priestly vestments, churchyard soil, saintly pictures and shrines) and practices (e.g., benedictions, attendance at religious services, Bible reading, prayer, visits to religious sites, and the use of amulets and charms).[14] In the early modern context, Thomas argues, virtually every aspect of religious life was infused with magical efficacy.

George Gmelch's study of "baseball magic"–published first in 1978 and updated in 2003–notes that, for a very small number of people, "baseball is more than just a game. It is a vocation. Since their livelihoods depend on how well they perform, many use magic to try to control the chance that is built into baseball." Players' magic is said to be "associated mainly with pitching and hitting–activities with the highest degrees of chance–and not fielding." Fielders execute their tasks successfully some ninety-seven percent of the time, but success rates for pitchers and hitters are significantly lower. The league's most elite hitters succeed little more than thirty percent of the time. Thus, with respect to pitching and hitting, players commonly engage in ritual actions that seek to influence the course of otherwise unpredictable events, adhering strictly to set routines, performing the same actions before, during, after, and between games, avoiding taboos, and employing items associated with good luck and past successes. Such strategies, Gmelch argues, "are comforting; they bring order into a world in which players have

little control" but much at stake, reducing feelings of uncertainty and suggesting a degree

of influence over the course of events.[15] Of significance here is Gmelch's observation

that, like lagoon fishing among Trobrianders, players' actions which are not particularly

doubtful (e.g., fielding, where success rates approach one hundred percent), are far less

likely to provoke extraordinary methods than those which are very much in doubt (e.g.,

hitting and pitching). The implication, of course, is that it is the presence of seemingly

unbridgeable gaps which stimulates and supports magical thought and practice.

In their study of Canadian undergraduate life in the late 1980s, sociologists Daniel

Albas and Cheryl Albas argue that, if "magic" is defined as "action directed toward the

achievement of a particular outcome with no logical relationship between the action and

the outcome, or indeed, any empirical evidence that one produces the other," then twenty

to thirty percent of the students studied included magic as part of their test-taking

strategies.[16] The Albas' in fact distinguish two kinds of examination magic: the use of

magical items, and the performance of magical actions, both of which are associated in

the minds of students with heightened exam taking capacities. Magical items include

favored pieces of clothing, jewelry, perfumes, or colognes, a particular hair style, pens

and pencils used on previous exams to good effect, and numerous other items associated

with good luck generally, such as "rabbit's feet, dice, coins… tiny teddy bears,

kangaroos, and other cuddly toys." Magical actions include abstinence from gossip or

popular entertainment or sex, an emphasis upon virtuous behavior, "compulsively

scrupulous prayer," and "a dread of offending God," in the days leading up to the exam.

Drawing from Malinowski as well as Frazer, the authors interpret examination magic as a

"coping mechanism" aimed at stress reduction and providing undergraduates with "a

sense of being in command of their destinies," since such practices emerge only as exams approach and are discontinued afterward.[17]

Each of these analyses reads its respective data through an essentially Malinowskian lens. Whether Trobrianders working to save garden plants from a mysterious blight, soldiers hoping to survive horrific battlefield conditions, driver-players wanting to influence the roll of dice, early modern Europeans seeking to allay difficult life conditions, professional baseball players striving to succeed at the plate or on the pitching mound, or college undergraduates facing uncertain exams, each population is plausibly read as encountering a gap between the results they very much wish to achieve and the limitations of ordinary methods available to them. Combat training and even the best equipment often fails to preserve soldiers' lives and limbs. Knowledge of statistical probabilities does not guarantee gambling wins. Long hours of preparation and study do not rule out failure, whether at the plate, on the mound, or in the classroom. In light of such gaps, each population turns to the extraordinary and magical.

Two important criticisms have lead many scholars to set aside Malinowski's approach to magic. The first was articulated by the anthropologist, Alfred Kroeber, in the late 1940s. On Malinowski's theory, Kroeber observes, the presence of magic in a given culture should be directly proportional to the number and intensity of unbridgeable gaps that culture faces. Those with few unbridgeable gaps should have little magic; those with many should have much. But, Kroeber points out, numerous counter-examples may be adduced from the anthropological literature of cultures with few unbridgeable gaps but a wealth of magic, and little magic but numerous gaps. Therefore, he concludes,

Malinowski's account of magic "as a function of a constant and imperative need,
universally intrinsic to the human psyche, pretty much falls to pieces."[18]

The second criticism was put forth in the early 1960s by Murray Wax and Rosalie
Wax. They dispute Malinowski's claim that Trobriander culture in fact discerns clear-cut
divisions between the ordinary and extraordinary. "In every case where magical rites are
performed," they argue,

> we may surely infer the existence of risk or hazard or anxiety, because in fact all human activities
> are uncertain as to their outcome and expose the actor to hazard. In order to validate Malinowski's
> theory, we would have to demonstrate, not the occurrence of risk, but of its opposite: supposing
> the theory were true, how could there be any activity or enterprise which was not accompanied by
> some sort of magical rite? [19]

Their point is that, if magic is employed whenever there is doubt as to a given outcome,
and if doubt is always to some degree present in any activity or event, why would
Trobrianders not to employ magic at every turn, in every activity, and with respect to
every action and event? Why would they leave anything to purely ordinary means? More,
they continue, in distinguishing between ordinary events and extraordinary events,
Malinowski fails to relay what Trobrianders themselves have to say about such matters.
Instead, we have to rely upon his interpretation of their planting of yams, mending
fences, lagoon and deep sea fishing, etc. It could well be the case, they write, "that the
Trobriander viewed the broken fence as a result of a loss of magical Power, or of magical
Power directed against him by an enemy, and it is highly unlikely that he conceived of
his own activities in terms of 'natural conditions and causes.'"[20] Put differently,
Malinowski's own assumptions as to the naturalness of distinguishing between the
ordinary and extraordinary may have been imposed upon his subjects rather than native

to their way of thinking, and he has not provided sufficient ethnographic data for later scholars to assess this possibility.

If Kroeber's objection identifies an inappropriate leap from the particular to the universal in Malinowski's theorizing, the Waxes point out assumed distinctions regarding the ordinary and extraordinary, physical and non-physical, natural and supernatural, which may well have distorted precisely what Malinowski sought to understand. While these are important objections, it does not follow that Malinowski's approach is therefore entirely without potential interpretive utility. Certainly Kroeber has shown that Malinowski's theory of magic does not represent a human universal, though one may surely do interpretive and even comparative work without reference to a given social phenomenon's universality. Similarly, the Waxes pose a serious challenge as to whether Malinowski succeeded in presenting the Trobrianders in ways that they themselves would recognize as authentic, and this could have been avoided by more thoroughly documenting emic voices. Taken together, the objections of Kroeber and the Waxes demonstrate that we cannot wield Malinowskian theory as a totalizing lens disclosing the essence of magic everywhere and everywhen, or even draw firm conclusion as to how the Trobrianders themselves thought. But this by no means rules out employing a Malinowskian lens heuristically, as a hermeneutical framework for guiding analytical imaginations in potentially interesting ways, as a *provisional hypothesis* which may or may not obtain in historically particular contexts. Such an approach is precisely what the remainder of this chapter proposes to pursue. In thinking along with Malinowski with respect to the cultural products examined in previous chapters, and most especially the

prosperity-oriented teachings discussed in chapters four and five, this chapter draws attention to the post-1980 American economy.

THE POST-1980 AMERICAN ECONOMY

In the years leading up to the 2008 economic collapse and resulting Great Recession, Barbara Ehrenreich explains, "things were getting worse for most Americans, not better." Despite brisk economic growth and low unemployment between 2002-2006, most Americans were working jobs that paid lower wages, offered fewer benefits (such as health insurance and pensions), and provided little job security, "as employers downsized, reorganized, outsourced, and otherwise sought to [further increase] their quarterly profits." Such developments contributed to "an unimaginably huge buildup of wealth at the upper extreme of the economic spectrum," while earning power and social mobility significantly decreased for the bottom eighty to ninety percent of Americans. It is, she writes, as if "every household in that bottom 80 percent is writing a check for $7,000 every year and sending it to the top 1 percent," who then sink such largess into yet new high-risk, high-yield investments while living wildly lavish lifestyles.[21]

The biggest problem with extreme wealth concentration, Berkeley economist Robert Reich argues, is not that the wealthy spend too much, but that they spend too little. A relatively small segment of the population, the top one percent, or even the top ten percent, are simply incapable of consistently spending enough to sustain a flourishing national economy. It is the sustained economic activity of a broad, deep, and expanding middle-class that drives a robust economy. Such spending requires that middle-class

incomes are themselves robust and growing proportionately along with the larger economy, which is precisely what has not been the case over the past four decades.

American economic history, Reich explains, "swings much like a pendulum between periods during which the benefits of economic change are concentrated in fewer hands, and periods during which the middle class shares broadly in the nation's prosperity and grows to include many of the poor."[22] Reich identifies three such pendulum swings over the past century and a half: 1870-1929, 1947-1975, and 1980-2010. The first and third are characterized by diminishing wages, reduced purchasing power, ballooning mortgage and personal debt among the middle-class, the redistribution of wealth upwards to the top economic strata, and financial collapses followed by extended periods of depression and recession. The intervening period, which Reich calls "The Great Prosperity," saw a wide range of policy changes (commonly referred to as the New Deal), which restructured the American economy in fundamental ways. Variable tax rates on the wealthiest Americans were sharply increased (as high as ninety percent under President Eisenhower), and as a result the share of after-tax income going to the wealthiest Americans declined, "from more than 23 percent [in the 1920s] to 16-17 percent in the 1930s, then to 11-15 percent in the 1940s, and to 9-11 percent in the 1950s and 1960s, finally reaching the valley floor of 8-9 percent in the 1970s."[23] Employers were required to provide additional pay for work beyond forty hours a week. The collective bargaining power of workers was strengthened such that by the 1950s, more than a third of all American workers belonged to a union. The federal government provided low-cost mortgages and increased access to higher education. It built and maintained massive infrastructure projects such as interstate highways, dams, bridges,

and state parks, which employed large numbers of American workers and was paid for

with tax revenues. More so than at any other time in modern American history, Reich

notes,

> [t]he nation provided its workers enough money to buy what they produced [and nearly] everyone who wanted a job could find one with good wages, or at least wages that were trending upward. [The] wages of lower-income Americans grew faster than those at or near the top. The pay of workers in the bottom fifth more than doubled over these years–a faster pace than the pay of those in the top fifth.[24]

Since the 1980s, however, these trends have been largely reversed. In part due to

globalization and automation, which allowed American companies to outsource jobs to

low-wage workers in other countries, or to replace American workers with mechanized

forms of production, the jobs available to working-class Americans have not paid nearly

as well as the ones that were lost. More puzzling still, Reich observes, is that rather than

enforcing policies which were well known to bring about a flourishing economy, the

American government did precisely the opposite.

> Starting in the 1970s, and with increased fervor into the 1980s, it increased the cost of public higher education, reduced job training, cut public transportation, and allowed bridge, ports, and highways to corrode. It shredded safety nets–reducing aid to jobless families with children, and restricting those eligible for unemployment insurance so much that by 2007 only 40 percent of the unemployed were covered. It halved the top income tax rate… allowed many of the nation's rich to treat their income as capital gains… and shrank inheritance taxes that affected only the topmost 1.5 percent of earners.[25]

Ironically, the past four decades have seen tremendous increases in worker productivity,

corporate profits, executive pay, and economic growth, suggesting that the redistribution

of wealth upwards at the direct expense of the lower economic classes had nothing to do

with fiscal necessity, but everything to do with political power.[26]

Meanwhile, Reich continues, faced with flattened wages and diminished

purchasing power, but at the same time a growing economy producing an ever-expanding

range of highly desirable commodities, middle-class American families looked to three

primary coping strategies: both spouses working full-time outside of the home; both

spouses working longer hours and multiple jobs; and the accumulation of high levels of

personal debt.[27] "By the 2000s, the typical American worker put in more than 2,200

hours a year," a full six weeks more per year than in 1979. By 2007, the typical American

household owed one hundred and thirty-eight percent of its after-tax income to mortgage

debt, student loans, credit cards, and other forms of consumer debt, whereas during the

Great Prosperity total household debt averaged between fifty and fifty-five percent of

after-tax income. "Americans," Reich succinctly observes, borrowed from everywhere

and for everything, bigger and better houses, higher education, new appliances, vacations,

luxuries, new cars, and most often by refinancing their existing homes, at least until the

housing and credit markets collapsed.[28] By the late summer of 2008, he writes,

poignantly:

> [m]edian incomes had stopped growing, and the proportion of total income going to the middle-class had continued to shrink. The only way most Americans could keep consuming as if wages hadn't stalled was to run through the coping mechanisms. But each of these reached its inevitable limit. And when the debt bubble burst, most Americans woke up to a startling reality: they could no longer afford to live as they *had* had been living; nor as they thought they *should* be living relative to the lavish lifestyles of those at or near the top, nor as they *expected* to be living given their continuing aspirations for a better life, nor as they assumed they *could* be living, given the improvements they had experienced during the Great Prosperity.[29]

If popular media have tended to portray the accumulation of vast levels of personal debt

as evidence of an undisciplined middle-class, for Reich it represents an understandable

attempt to attain (or retain) key symbols of the American Dream when in fact diminishing

financial means would not support such a standard of living.

But there is a fourth coping strategy Reich seems to have overlooked, one which

emerges when we think along with Malinowski in relation to the cultural products

examined in previous chapters. All of these cultural goods, from magical expressions of

popular entertainment, alternative medicine, and the self-help texts of spirituality and

evangelical writers, show us ways in which human beings overcome seemingly

unbridgeable gaps by recourse to extraordinary means. Indeed, the self-help, prosperity, and success-oriented teachings go further still, spelling out precisely how contemporary Americans may bridge specifically financial gaps, and pay their mortgages, provide for the families, send their children to college, purchase a new house or new car, pay off debt, find money for retirement, and enjoy the lifestyles they have been unable to achieve by ordinary means. For Rhonda Byrne, such means are found in learning "the secret" of holding in one's mind precisely what one wishes to experience and bathing such images in the proper emotional energies (e.g., love, gratitude). For Tolly Burkan, they reside in playing the universe like a grand slot machine, a cosmic biofeedback device which mirrors back to us whatever we most deeply accept as truth. For Wayne Dyer, they are found in accessing the miracle-inducing field of consciousness within oneself, and with the assistance of divine beings in other dimensions. For Russell Simmons, they are found in pursuing one's dream by means of enlightened self-interest, Hindu notions of non-attachment, and Buddhist meditation practices. For Joel Osteen, they are found in believing and boldly declaring that "one's season of increase" is at hand. For Pat Robertson, they reside in consistently tithing at least ten percent of one's income to the Lord. For Rick Warren, they are found in tapping God's power by means of a devout evangelical Protestant identity. Whether or not these writers are speaking for most Americans, they are certainly speaking to them, and in so doing are laying out distinctly magical strategies for coping with an economy which has been re-structured such that ever-diminishing incomes are available to the lower and middle economic classes.

WHAT ABOUT THE 'DEEP HISTORY' OF MAGIC IN AMERICAN CULTURE?

The forgoing account connects the many different magical alterities of the previous chapters with the broader economic context of post-1980 America. Nevertheless, students of American religious history might object to such a configuration by asking, in short: what about the many "magical" texts and practices which flourished in prior periods, such as Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking* (1952)? The brilliance of Peale's book, Mitch Horowitz explains in his study of "positive thinking" movements in American cultural history, "was to craft a system that reprocessed mind-power teachings through Scriptural language and lessons." That is, it recast somewhat esoteric New Thought Christianity (with its many visualizations, affirmations, and verbal formulas for success) in a theological and scriptural framework more easily recognizable to mainline Protestants, using "Biblical references and practical, everyday anecdotes that were reassuringly familiar in tone to the churchgoing public." The result was that *The Power of Positive Thinking* "became the kind of book that could be found in households everywhere, including those where there were few other books."[30] This enormously successful book also emerged within the very heart of what Reich identifies as the "Great Prosperity," a time during which "almost anyone who wanted a job could find one with good wages."[31] Consequently, the objection goes, if we account for the magical alterities of the previous chapters, and especially the prosperity and personal success teachings, by means of the worsening economic conditions of post-1980 America, why are there similar kinds of texts emerging in periods in which precisely the opposite economic conditions exist?

At least three responses are possible. To begin with, even if the years of the Great Prosperity were good for many Americans, there is good reason to believe that Americans continued to perceive their financial circumstances as unstable during this time. Since the early decades of the nineteenth century, Scott Sandage contends, the American economy has witnessed a steady progression of booms and busts. If booms made capital available to more people and created periods of economic stability, a consistent stream of "financial panics," recessions, and downturns in regional and national economies repeatedly demonstrated to nineteenth and twentieth century Americans not merely that poor financial decisions wrought disaster, but that "[t]he vicissitudes of capitalism were such that honest dealings and hard work could [also] earn failure."[32] In the context of such struggles, Sandage explains, American understandings of failure underwent a profound shift during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, from something unfortunate that happens to people, to something that constitutes the identity of unfortunate people. This shift from failure as an experience to failure as an identity occurred, he writes, "because a century and a half ago we embraced business as the dominant model for our outer and inner lives." Consequently,

> [o]urs is an ideology of achieved identity; obligatory striving is its method, and failure and success its outcomes. We reckon our incomes once a year but audit ourselves daily, by standards of long-forgotten origin. Who thinks of the old counting house when we 'take stock' of how we 'spend' our lives, take 'credit' for our gains, or try not to end up 'third rate' or 'good for nothing'? Someday, we hope, the 'bottom line' will show that we 'amount to something.' By this kind of talk, we 'balance' our whole lives, not just our accounts.[33]

Thus, if the 1950s represent a prosperous economic period for the American middle class, Americans nevertheless were likely to perceive their financial circumstances as fundamentally unstable. Not only had prudent and hard-working folk been ruined by no fault of their own numerous times in the past, but by the twentieth century thinking of

success and failure as denoting 'how much one is worth' had become firmly established in the American mind, and one's existential value had come to be largely equated with one's economic success. At the same time, mid-twentieth century America was also witness to wars of varying kinds, two worldwide, others regional, one Cold. The threat of atomic or nuclear exchanges with the Soviet Union was ever present, and a broad civil rights and series of social revolutions raised serious questions about national unity.[34] When we consider such historical factors, it would hardly be surprising to find that even in the 1950s, Americans perceived their ability to attain or retain key symbols of the American Dream as tenuous and uncertain, and therefore looked also to extraordinary means, in this case the Christianized mind-power proffered by Peale and others.[35]

Secondly, whatever one's life circumstances, there will always be further goals which come to be desired, especially in a cultural context like that of twentieth century America, in which (as Sandage attests) boundless ambition and acquisition are virtues in themselves. Accordingly, even those who have achieved a solid middle-class standing and are enjoying the key symbols of the American Dream are likely to desire more still. Put differently, as an object of desire, the American Dream, once reached, may well be inflated and this expanded vision pursued. Where ordinary means seem unlikely to bring this new goal about, it is not unreasonable to expect that individuals turn to extraordinary or magical means. This also is perhaps even more likely in the modern American context, where long-standing positive thinking movements and metaphysical religion provide ample resources for such efforts. It is conceivable, then, that even relatively well-off Americans in the 1950s might turn to magical means, Christianized and otherwise, in order to have still more.

Thirdly, associating the category magic with Malinowskian insights need not require that the two be connected in a necessary manner. Instead, like other interpretive frameworks in the academic study of religion, magic may be configured polythetically. Chapter one argues that our categories must remain open to modification as they are applied to new data, but modifiable categories are not necessarily polythetic. Polythetic categories, as initially outlined in the work of Jonathan Z. Smith, take a "family resemblance" approach to definitions.[36] On this approach, a category is constructed in terms of a cluster of characteristics, none of which is absolutely necessary, but any of which may obtain in a given context. A polythetic approach to magic is helpful here because, on such an approach, the relationship between magical forms of thought and practice and economic conditions becomes only one way in which magical expressions may emerge, and not the only way. With what other additional features magic might come to be polythetically associated can only be determined by means of detailed case studies of new data sets and by thinking along with theoretical resources from varied fields, that is, by means of future research.[37]

This chapter has endeavored to expand the interpretive utility of the taxon magic by looking to the work of the mid-twentieth century anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, his critics and later appropriators, and also to economic theorists and historians such as Robert Reich and Scott Sandage. In the end, a polythetic approach to the category has been suggested, one in which Malinowskian insights as to how magical notions and practices may emerge represent provisional hypotheses which may (or may not) obtain in historically particular contexts. When read through a Malinowskian lens, the magical cultural goods of chapters four and five especially appear, like the magical

practices Malinowski ascribed to Trobrianders, as strategic attempts at overcoming

otherwise unbridgeable gaps, in this case direct consequences of the post-1980 American

economy. A brief concluding chapter considers the interpretive utility of the landscape

metaphor, and the grounds for positing a contemporary American magical landscape.

Conclusion

To invoke the idea of landscapes, whether religious, economic, political, or magical, is to employ a mapping metaphor. The scholarly use of such metaphors, in so far as they assume a direct correspondence between maps and territory, has been subject to considerable criticism. However, as Mark Gardiner and Steven Engler have shown, mapping metaphors predicated upon more pragmatic epistemic grounds, as intellectually useful models only, avoid such difficulties. It is on precisely such grounds that the "magical landscape" metaphor has here been deployed. Thus, to speak in terms of a contemporary American magical landscape does not point to some unified, monolithic structure 'out there' where magical thought and behavior predominate and overshadow all else. Instead, the notion of a "contemporary American magical landscape" is offered here as a kind of useful fiction, one which (it is hoped) directs the analytical gaze in illuminative ways. [1]

The value of the magical landscape metaphor is warranted for at least three reasons. Firstly, it makes visible a cluster of related themes within contemporary American culture, themes which scholars may not have noticed otherwise. Magic is not only employed as a means of self-identification by figures such as Rhonda Byrne. As chapters two through five hope to have shown, there exists a wealth of cultural goods which may be fruitfully analyzed and compared by means of a magical hermeneutic. If magic has to do with accessing unacknowledged sources of transformational power, then many different modes of magical thought and practice may be discerned across contemporary American culture, in some of the most popular novels, films, TV shows, music and advertisements, at the heart of mind-body medicine, in new age and prosperity

spiritualities, and even in the inspirational writings of conservative evangelical Christian minister-authors who go out of their way to distance themselves from the goods and practices associated with the broader culture.

Thinking along with the magical landscape metaphor also provides a context for the anti-magical discourse which has emerged in recent years, and which seeks to debunk the magical wherever it might be found. This discourse is evident in Harold Blooms' critique of the *Harry Potter* materials. Bloom argues that their commercial success was far from an isolated phenomenon, but part of a broad social movement which valued retreat into childhood fantasy over sober reasoning. But the anti-magical discourse, like the magical cultural expressions it seeks to undermine, takes many different forms.

Sometimes the anti-magical discourse appears as personal narrative. In *My Year of Magical Thinking* (2005), for example, novelist Joan Didion discusses the "stubbornly magical" patterns of thought she experienced following the sudden death of her husband in 2004. "Of course," she recalls,

> I knew John was dead…. I had already delivered the definitive news to his brother and sister…Yet I was myself in no way prepared to accept this news as final: there was a level on which I believed that what had happened was reversible. That was why I needed to be alone… so that he could come back. This was the beginning of my year of magical thinking.[2]

For quite some time, Didion explains, she was "incapable of thinking rationally," but reasoned "as small children think, as if my thoughts or wishes had the power to reverse the narrative, change the outcome." She was, for instance, unable to give away her husband's shoes, since "he would need shoes if he was to return."[3] If Didion's confession falls short of an unambiguous condemnation, it does point to a certain degree of disquiet.

For Didion, her 'stubbornly magical patterns of thought' suggest a quasi-delusional reverie from which it took months to fully escape.

In other instances, the anti-magical discourse manifests as a broad cultural jeremiad. Barbara Ehrenreich, for instance, insists that entrenched American tendencies toward "positive thinking"–here equated with "primitive" expressions of "sympathetic magic" such as the use of "fetishes"–directly contributed to the economic collapse of 2007-2008 and resulting Great Recession. Investors, financial managers, corporate executives, leading politicians, and even government regulators, Ehrenreich argues, persistently indulged in unprecedented levels of "wishful thinking" despite reliable evidence drawn from decades of past experience to the contrary (e.g., in the assumption that housing prices would increase indefinitely into the future). What is especially pernicious about this trend, she holds, is the way in which it blinds otherwise intelligent people as to what could possibly go wrong with a given venture. Consequently, Ehrenreich concludes, the insistence that exclusively positive thinking necessarily yields exclusively positive results lead to tragic consequences not only in the housing market, but in the stock market generally, the war in Iraq, and across the nation's economic, social, and political, landscapes.[4]

Explicitly citing Ehrenreich's critique, some have proposed self-help regimens of "anti-positive thinking" as a path to happiness for people who find positive thinking intolerable.[5] Oliver Burkeman argues that great comfort can be found in "negative thinking" practices, such as considering worst-case scenarios, recalling the many instances in which one has been mistaken in the past and may be in the present, giving up the desire to control the circumstances of one's life, reveling in life's uncertainties and

insecurities, and contemplating one's ultimate demise on a daily basis.[6] Perhaps ironically, Burkeman and other writers in this genre at times frame the benefits of negative thinking in ways which approach the magical, suggesting that it is through sustained pessimism and caution that we may heal our inner and outer lives.

The anti-magical discourse has also taken aim at mind-body medicine. In *Do You Believe in Magic? The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine* (2013), Paul A. Ottif notes that fifty percent of Americans make regular use of "alternative medicine," a category that here includes a diverse array of allegedly health-inducing techniques, such as chiropractic, vitamin supplements, herbal remedies, acupuncture, homeopathy, and hands-on energy healing. Because, Ottif explains, these approaches offer the comfort of extended, one-to-one encounters with sympathetic practitioners (whereas doctors are often perceived as overly distant and authoritarian), and because they tend to function as mildly-effective placebos, such practices do have a proper place as adjuncts to allopathic medicine. They become problematic, descending into "quackery," in so far as they discourage patients from seeking legitimate allopathic treatments and "promote magical thinking which," Ottif laments, "is everywhere you look." By "magical" Ottif seems to intend something like, 'beliefs, practices, and expectations that are incompatible with prevailing medical/scientific paradigms,' and offers as an example the popular practice of wearing titanium necklaces in the hope of having more energy in one's daily life. While advertisements claim that such items 'promote the healthy flow of electricity within the body,' Ottif insists that, because electricity cannot be generated without some initial force which the necklaces are incapable of generating, the expectation that they will perform as advertised is fundamentally "magical," that is, it asserts that what cannot be, will be.[7]

In other instantiations, the anti-magical discourse takes aim at magical thinking generally. Stuart Vyse offers an analysis of magical beliefs and behaviors broadly construed and captured by the term "superstition."[8] That superstition is widespread within contemporary America is indicated, Vyse tells us, by the sustained cultural presence of beliefs and practices that contradict established scientific principles of the day, such as astrology, numerology, ghosts, reincarnation, extraterrestrial visitation, clairvoyance, telepathy, channeling, psychic healing, and the medical benefits of prayer. For Vyse, each of these represents the epistemic equivalent of medieval alchemy, the claims of which are simply impossible given the laws of nature as posited by modern chemistry and physics. Nevertheless, surveys and polls consistently point to large percentages, and indeed majorities, of the American public that take seriously all sorts of paranormal phenomena, and engage in practices thought to engender good luck while avoiding those thought to bring bad luck (e.g., knocking on wood, carrying a good luck charm, not walking under a ladder, avoiding the number thirteen).[9] Vyse is particularly interested in supernatural beliefs and behaviors that are pragmatic, that is, "used to attain a particular end."[10] People become enamored with pragmatic superstitions, he argues, for a number of reasons: group membership (athletes display higher degrees of superstition than the general population); predisposing personality traits (those with higher levels of anxiety are more likely to engage in superstitious behaviors); basic errors in reasoning (e.g., the tendency to assign a cause-and-effect relationship to things contiguous in space and/or time); a desire to exert control over that which is otherwise uncontrollable; and a longing for wonder in our otherwise highly routinized daily lives. Still, he concedes, superstition is not necessarily a psychopathology, but rather a "natural product of human learning and

cognition… and of daily life."[11] More, it is capable of providing personal satisfaction, and has even been shown to improve performance in some instances. "Under certain conditions," he writes,

> superstitious behavior can be rational. The actor who performs a simple ritual before going onstage may recognize that it has no truly magical effect, but it may make him feel better. It costs him little, and it may calm his nerves and help him through the worrisome moments before the performance begins.[12]

The problem with magical thinking and behaviors is said to reside primarily on the societal level. Our twenty-first century world is too complex and ever changing, requiring a well-educated and disciplined citizenry, to support large percentages entertaining delusional worldviews. Given the many factors that bring about a superstitious public, Vyse sees public education reform as the most promising means of reform, from the teaching of critical thinking skills, the promotion of math and science, to improving the image of scientists generally.

Secondly, the magical landscape metaphor, as it has been deployed over the previous chapters, prompts scholars to think in new and interesting ways about the contemporary cultural landscape. This plays out with respect to two distinct ways of understanding the contemporary magical landscape, both of which emerge in previous chapters. Given the economic realities of post-1980 America, chapter six argues, contemporary Americans (like Trobriander deep-sea fishermen, soldiers under battlefield conditions, gamblers, professional athletes, and undergraduate students faced with high-stakes exams) have come to look to magical ways of thinking and practice as a means of securing the material symbols of the American Dream, since the ordinary methods of so doing have proven increasingly unreliable. This major cultural turn to the magical as a means of bridging an economic and existential gap has brought with it all manner of

magical expressions, only some of which specifically have to do with economics, but all of which supports and encourages a magical worldview. This is one way of explaining the ubiquity of magical production on the contemporary scene.

Another way is implied by chapter three's discussion of contemporary mind-body medicine. For, the wealth of clinical, peer-reviewed evidence offered in support of the paranormal abilities this chapter discusses (e.g., distant healing, telepathy, telekinesis, clairvoyance, precognition, etc.) said to be largely latent within but nonetheless accessible to ordinary human beings, approaches prevailing standards for scientific knowledge in ways that data from others chapters does not. Simply put, it may turn out that something like Jeff Kripal's seemingly outlandish proposition–that contemporary Americans are preoccupied with the magical precisely because it will become the stuff of daily experience and common knowledge in the coming years–is essentially the case. These two hypotheses, of course, are not mutually exclusive: it could be the case that contemporary Americans have turned collectively to the magical because they both (i) need to imagine a way of bridging a major economic and existential gap for which ordinary means are no longer reliable, and (ii) are beginning to realize that human potential includes abilities and powers which have typically been described as magical.[13]

Thirdly, the magical landscape metaphor provides a framework for identifying and contextualizing novel cultural expressions into the foreseeable future. Otherwise mundane social practices continue to be re-imagined along magical lines, that is, as capable of unleashing transformative powers. Marie Kondo's recent and best-selling book, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up*, for example, imagines domestic tasks such as household cleaning and straightening, decluttering, reorganizing, and

redecorating, as accessing a power which will transform one's inner and outer life in amazing ways.[14] Elizabeth Gilbert, well-known author of *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006), makes a similar claim regarding the development of personal virtues such as courage, persistence, trust, and belief in one's own divinity, namely, that so doing activates a kind of "magical enchantment," which in turn begins to order the events of one's daily life in subtle but fundamentally positive ways, creating professional opportunities, healing relationships, bringing physical health and vitality, and so forth.[15] Still others have re-imagined the following of one's intuitive hunches, an unyielding faith in basic new age principles (e.g., that each person creates their own reality), or the arrival of one's "midlife" years, in essentially magical ways, as offering "a path of initiation," access to "the age of miracles," and a means to so thoroughly transcend a rational view of the world as to physically "defy gravity."[16]

NOTES

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[7] Rick Warren, *God's Power to Change Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 38-9.

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[18] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 66.

[19] Sharpe, *Comparative Religion…* 73.

[20] Pals, *Eight Theories of Religion*, 95.

[21] Cunningham, *Religion and Magic…,* 44.

[22] Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 36-41.

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[1] For scholarly imaginings of the category "new age," see: Nevill Drury, *The New Age: The History of a Movement* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2004); Eugene V. Gallagher, *The New Religious Movements Experience in America* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2004), 72-101; Wouter J. Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1998); Catherine Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 394-507. For scholarly constructions of "spirituality," see: Courtney Bender, *The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Catherine Albanese, *Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 513-516; Jeremy Carrette and Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Wade Clark Roof *, Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Robert Wuthnow, *After Heaven: Spirituality in America Since the 1950s* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).

[2] William Gerald McLaughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977 (*Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[3] Roger Finke and Rodney Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776-1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New York: Rutgers University Press, 1992).

[4] Barry Hankins, *American Evangelicals: A Contemporary History of a Mainstream Movement* (Lanham: Rowan and Littlefield, 2008); Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); John Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

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[6] Jason C. Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Conservative Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 236; See also: Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); Chris Hedges, *American Fascists: The Religious Right and the War on America* (New York: Free Press, 2006); Michelle Goldberg, *Kingdom Coming: The Rise of Christian Nationalism* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2007); Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christin Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).

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[8] "Online Extra: Meet the Prosperity Teacher," in *Bloomberg Businessweek Magazine*, accessed August 13, 2015, http://www.businessweek.com/stories/2005-05-22/online-extra-meet-the-prosperity-preacher.

[9] Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sintiere, *Holy Mavericks…,* 20-6.

[10] "Online Extra: Meet the Prosperity Teacher," *Bloomberg Businessweek Magazine*, May 22, 2005.

[11] Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sintiere, *Holy Mavericks…,* 32.

[12] This is, of course, a theology and the official teachings of Lakewood Church.

[13] Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sintiere, *Holy Mavericks…,* 39.

[14] Ibid, 39-51.

[15] Osteen's most recent book, *Break Out: 5 Keys to Go Beyond Your Barriers and Live an Extraordinary Life* (2013), returns to the earlier so-many-steps-to-success format.

[16] Joel Osteen, *It's Your Time: Activate Your Faith, Achieve Your Dreams, and Increase in God's Favor* (New York: Free Press, 2011), xi-xii.

[17] Shayne Lee and Phillip Luke Sintiere, *Holy Mavericks…,* 39-51.

[18] Osteen, *It's Your Time…,* 45.

[19] Ibid, 45.

[20] Ibid, 47.

[21] Ibid, 52.

[22] For Robertson's own account of his "spiritual journey," see his official website, accessed August 19, 2015, http://www.patrobertson.com/SpiritualJourney/SomethingMissing.asp.

[23] For an overview of his controversial predictions and explanation with respect to horrific events, see: John Mark Reynolds, "Pat Robertson on Disasters: Consistently Wrong," in *First Things*, accessed August 19, 2015, http://www.patrobertson.com/SpiritualJourney/SomethingMissing.asp.

[24] This quotation comes directly from the CBN website, accessed August 19, 2015 http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/CBNTeachingSheets/Giving_And_Tithing.aspx, though very similar passages may be found in: Pat Robertson, *The Secret Kingdom: Your Path to Peace, Love, and Financial Security* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1992), 114-5.

[25] Pat Robertson, *The Secret Kingdom: Your Path to Peace, Love, and Financial Security*, 114-5.

[26] Ibid, 116-7.

[27] Ibid, 117-8.

[28] This quote also comes directly from the CBN site, accessed August 19, 2015, http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/CBNTeachingSheets/Giving_And_Tithing.aspx, though it is implied in the text. See: Robertson, *The Secret Kingdom…,* 117-8.

[29] "The 25 Most Influential Evangelicals in America," in *TIME*, accessed August 19, 2015,

http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1993235_1993243,00.html.

[30] Warren, *God's Power to Change Your Life*, 9-10.

[31] Ibid, 38-9.

[32] Ibid, 160-2, 167-169.

[33] Ibid, 9-12.

[34] For claims as to the book's rankings, See *Google Books*, accessed January 1, 2016, http://books.google.com/books/about/The_Purpose_Driven_Life.html?id=m3XJ3x0cFsYC; for Warren's status as a "top-earning author," see "Top Earning Authors" in *Forbes*, accessed January 1, 2016, http://www.forbes.com/2006/12/08/top-earning-authors-tech-media_cz_lg_books06_1208authors.html.

[35] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 17.

[36] Ibid, 172-3.

[37] Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, 174-5.

[38] Valerie Wigglesworth, "Elevate Life Church of Frisco Plans to Build 10-Story Cathedral," in *Dallas Morning News*, accessed August 19, 2015, http://www.dallasnews.com/incoming/20100530-Elevate-Life-Church-of-Frisco-plans-3475.ece.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Keith Craft, *Your Divine Fingerprint: The Force That Makes You Unstoppable* (New York: harper One, 2013), 3-4.

[42] Ibid. 9.

[43] Ibid. 6-9.

[44] Ibid. 39-41.

[45] Ibid. 241-250.

[46] Frank Bruni, "Trumpward, Christian Soldiers?" in *New York Times,* accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/26/opinion/frank-bruni-trump-ward-christian-soldiers.html.

[47] Russell B. Moore, "Have Evangelicals Who Support Trump Lost Their Values?", in *New York Times,* accessed June 1, 2016, http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/17/opinion/have-evangelicals-who-support-trump-lost-their-values.html.

NOTES TO CHAPTER SIX

[1] See: "Magic," in *OED Online* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014); see also: "Magus, n.," in *OED Online*.

[2] Albert De Jong, "Magnus," in *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Lindsay Jones, ed., Vol. 8, second edition (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 5559-5562.

[3] De Jong appears to working along lines suggested by Jonathan Z. Smith, who has famously argued that locating religious phenomena in their proper historical contexts requires that scholars privilege the ordinary and mundane dimensions of religious and social phenomena over the extraordinary and fantastic, and thus scholarship in the history of religions becomes "drudgery divine." Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990).

[4] Allison P. Coudert, *Religion, Magic, and Science in Early Modern Europe and America* (Santa Barbara: Praeger, 2011).

[5] See for instance, Carol Barner-Barry, *Contemporary Paganism: Minority Religions in a Majoritarian America* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 59-67; Sarah Pike, *New Age and Neo-Pagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 160-64; Sarah Pike, *Earthly Bodies, Magical Selves: Contemporary Pagans and the Search for Community* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 87-122.

[6] Yvonne P. Chireau, *Black Magic: Religion and the African Conjuring Tradition* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 152-3.

[7] Styers, *Making Magic…,* 214-7.

[8] See, for instance, the unfortunate ways in which the Fox News network framed a discussion of Wiccan and Neo-Pagan traditions, accessed October 1, 2015, http://wildhunt.org/2013/02/pagan-community-responds-to-inflammatory-fox-news-comments.html.

[9] A number of scholars, working from varied intellectual disciplines, have offered rich and detailed studies of magic in American religious and cultural history, but which do not employ Malinowskian theory. See, for instance: Catherine Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale

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[10] Samuel A. Stouffer, et al., *The American Soldier: Combat and Its Aftermath*, Vol. II (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949-50), 88.

[11] Ibid, 191.

[12] James M. Henslin, "Craps and Magic," in *American Journal of Sociology*, 73, no. 3 (1967), 318.

[13] For a study of early-modern Europe and England which draws from Frazier and Mauss rather than Malinowski, see: Stephen Wilson, *The Magical Universe: Everyday Ritual and Magic in Pre-Modern Europe* (New York: Hambleton and London, 2000).

[14] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 3-24.

[15] George Gmelch, "Baseball Magic," in Douglas Harper and Helene M. Lawson and Patricia A. Adler and Howard S. Becker, eds., *The Cultural Study of Work* (New York: Rowan and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 189-9.

[16] Danial Albas and Cheryl Albas, "Modern Magic: The Case of Examinations," in *Sociological Quarterly*, 30, no. 4 (1987), 603.

[17] Ibid, 607-11.

[18] A.L. Kroeber, *Anthropology: Culture Patterns and Process* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, World, 1948), 117.

[19] Murray Wax and Rosalie Wax, "The Notion of Magic," in *Current Anthropology*, 4, no. 5 (1963), 498.

[20] Ibid, 498.

[21] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Bright-Sided: How Positive Thinking is Undermining America* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2009), 178-80.

[22] Robert B. Reich, *Aftershock: The Next Economy and America's Future* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2010), 4.

[23] Ibid, 20.

[24] Ibid, 42-50.

[25] Ibid, 54-5.

[26] Ibid, 59.

[27] While Reich does not deny the role of feminist social/political movements in opening up workplaces to women, he does argue that "the vast majority of women who migrated into paid work did so in order to prop up family incomes, as households were hit by stagnant or declining wages of male workers." See: Reich, *Aftershock…,* 63.

[28] Ibid, 60-4.

[29] Ibid, 64.

[30] Mitch Horowitz, *One Simple Idea: How Positive Thinking Reshaped Modern Life* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2014), 182.

[31] Reich, *Aftershock…,* 43.

[32] Scott A., Sandage, *Born Losers: A History of Failure in America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 15.

[33] Ibid, 265.

[34] Patrick Allitt, *Religion in America Since 1945: A History* (New York, Columbia University Press).

[35] Kate Bowler characterizes latter-twentieth century Neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic iterations of the "prosperity gospel" in precisely this way, as "guaranteeing a special form of Christian power," in this case "to reach into God's treasure trove and pull out a miracle." Kate Bowler, *Blessed: A History of the American Prosperity Gospel* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 7.

[36] See, Jonathan Z. Smith, *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982).

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[37] See, for example, Kathryn McClymond's reconstruction of the category of "sacrifice" along polythetic lines., Kathryn McClymond, *Beyond Sacred Violence: A Comparative Study of Sacrifice* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2008).

NOTES TO CONCLUSION

[1] Mark Quentin Gardiner and Steven Engler, "Charting the Map Metaphor in Theories of Religion," in *Religion*, 40, no. 1 (2010):1-13.

[2] Joan Didion, *My Year of Magical Thinking* (New York: Vintage International, 2005), 32.

[3] Ibid, 34-8.

[4] Ehrenreich, *Bright-Sided…,*.62-5.

[5] Examples of this genre also predate Ehrenreich's work. See, for instance, Julie K. Norem, *The Positive Power of Negative Thinking: Using Defensive Pessimism to Harness Anxiety and Perform at Your Peak* (New York: Basic Books, 2001).

[6] Oliver Burkeman, *The Antidote: Happiness for People Who Can't Stand Positive Thinking* (New York: Faber and Faber Inc., 2012).

[7] Paul A. Offit, *Do You Believe in Magic: The Sense and Nonsense of Alternative Medicine* (New York: Harper Collins, 2013), 249-51.

[8] Stuart Vyse, *Believing in Magic: The Psychology of Superstition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 6.

[9] Ibid, 18-20.

[10] Ibid, 23-8.

[11] Ibid, 245, 6.

[12] Ibid, 246.

[13] Just as there are numerous scholarly theories of magic not discussed in chapter one's historical overview, there exist other interpretive frameworks for understanding magical forms of thought and behavior. For a distinctly cognitive approach, for instance, see: Jason D. Slone, *Theological Incorrectness: Why Religious People Believe What They Shouldn't* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[14] Marie Kondo, *The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up* (Berkeley: Ten Speed Press, 2015).

[15] Elizabeth Gilbert, *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2015).

[16] See: Florence Scovel Shinn, *The Magic Path of Initiation* (New York: Hay House Inc., 2013); Marianne Williamson, *The Age of Miracles: Embracing the New Midlife* (New York: Hay House Inc., 2008); Caroline Myss, *Defy Gravity: Healing Beyond the Bounds of Reason* (New York: Hay House Inc., 2009).