

Empirically, religion and magic are often mixed together, though they are analytically distinct beliefs and practices. We need to define them separately, and then study their mixtures as part of a religious-magical complex found in real societies.

The patterns of mixture varies widely among societies. Both are non-empirical, based on beliefs in processes and powers that lie beyond empirical observation and validation. They differ from each other in their primary goals and attitudes.

Religion is general, fundamental, while Magic is specific, oriented to concrete problems. Religion revolves around themes of prayer and sacrifice. Magic revolves around themes of manipulation and control. Religion follows a calendar, is largely a scheduled system. Magic is a response to practical problems as they arise, following no calendar. Religion is communal, magic is individual. They are found together, often closely intermingled in a society. Almost all religion has magical elements. The line between the two is vague, but real.

Early anthropologists saw magic as primitive pseudo-science (Frazer and Tylor). Their progressive, evolutionary framework, portrayed science as a refined out-growth of magic and religion, hence magic and religion were inferior to science. Magic presumably came first, then religion, then science.

Today, progressive evolutionism is no longer credible. Upon closer examination, magic, religion, and science are fundamentally different from each other, and can not be placed on a single line of development. However, it is important to recognize that magic, religion, and science interact with each other, sometimes developing in a parallel fashion, borrowing from each other.

In science, anomalies trigger changes in theories. In magic, anomalies are a sign of counter-magic, or simply of error. The “theories” of magic are not challenged by anomalies.

Science is public, concerned with enhancing the power of society. Magic is occult, and secret, concerned with gaining personal power. It is tied to groups only in the context of deviant, secret cults that have withdrawn from society, often profoundly antagonistic to society.

Contrary to early research, we now know that primitive people differentiate between magic and technology. Natural causes and supernatural causes are both thought to exist. Magic is used to control things that technology can't control or explain. It is not used to control things about which people have reliable, empirical knowledge and control.

Skepticism toward magic is a modern development, an aspect of the competition between magic and science for status. Science won the day in modern societies, but magic has not disappeared entirely. Interestingly, if you want to get scientific technology accepted in primitive societies, dressing it up in pseudo-magical terms is an almost essential strategy. Also, if you want to get magic accepted in modern societies, dressing it up in pseudo-scientific terms is an almost essential strategy.

The Functions of Magic

Why has magic persisted for so long, in spite of the fact that it doesn't work the way people think it does? In nature, things that don't work are weeded out through natural selection. The process of biological evolution is directly connected with reproductive success. Why does false knowledge persist in the face of failure? Why doesn't nature weed out false beliefs the way it weeds out ineffective biological characteristics.

Say you are a psychologist, observing rats dancing in a circle before pressing a bar to get food—superstitious behavior, from your viewpoint, because the food reward is not related to the dancing, only to the bar-pressing. The rat doesn't know this. Give the rat enough time and it will learn that its dancing is unnecessary. In nature, superfluous behavior tends to be eliminated, because individuals, for the most part, live on the margin of subsistence. But in the realm of human social beliefs and institutions, there is an additional ingredient.

Social evolution is not directly connected with success and practicality. Technology has given us a buffer-zone, a wider latitude of action that, in a sense, cuts us some slack, behaviorally. We develop and cling to many impractical practices, escaping natural selection of certain specific traits and behavior. Beliefs and activities can be psychologically satisfying, or socially useful, in spite of their empirical inaccuracies.

In the eyes of believers, magic works! Is that sufficient reason for magic to persist? How can belief itself occupy such an important place in our lives? The functional approach to explaining the persistence of magic does not accept the idea that beliefs and practices can persist purely on their own inertia. When a collective practice persists, functionalism assumes it has some useful consequences for society. Presumably, practices that are entirely superfluous pass out of existence. This is an assumption which can not be proven. It has the effect of widening our search for the social consequences of institutions, instead of casually rejecting them because they are based on invalid knowledge.

Malinowsky, based on his studies of the Trobriand Islanders, concluded that magic functions as an anxiety management mechanism—a method of dealing with disruptive emotions that result from human helplessness in the face of fearful situations. For example, the Trobriand Islanders are open-sea fishermen. This is a very uncertain, dangerous business. They use magical practices in conjunction with fishing and boating technology to overcome their fear and uncertainty. Radcliffe-Brown argued that magic eases groups through difficult situations, channeling disruptive aggression, allowing the verbalization of anxiety in a framework that mimics practical action.

Witches are controllable. Magical beliefs claim that the uncontrollable is controllable. Magic can also be a form of psychological and social therapy, a response to destructive feelings and relationships. Magicians often play a shamanistic, therapeutic role in their communities.

Hans Sebald's Contemporary Study

Sebald studied the remnants of witchcraft in an isolated peasant community in rural Switzerland. He found traditional witchcraft to be a product of conditions conducive to magical beliefs:

1. harsh environment
2. poverty
3. poor sanitation, leading to disease
4. malnutrition, also leading to disease
5. primitive technology, relying on animals as beasts of burden, and generally a low-level of scientific knowledge

He found that traditional witchcraft explains random threatening events as due to evil intentions. Science can't prevent this attitude, because science doesn't answer the question "why." Sebald also confirmed Evans-Pritchard's social control theory of magic. Magic functions as a social sanction system that reinforces social norms.

Magic as a Social Sanction System

Witchcraft is available to anyone. Magic can be used to harm people who offend you, who are "wrong-doers" in your eyes. People fear the use of witchcraft against them, because a witch can reach out and harm anyone. The weak can affect the powerful. Elite's are not in control of magical power.

Within this belief system, people take special precautions to avoid offending members of their community, often accepting mild offenses from others for fear of triggering witchcraft against them. Individuals are more courteous and generous, as tradition stipulates.

Traditional witchcraft also reduces competition for leadership, as leaders are often the focus of magic retribution. An individual must feel overwhelming approval and acceptance in a group before accepting such a risk.

This gives rise to a more stable, peaceful community, as people go to great pains to avoid manifestations of conflict and hostility. Magic is more effective than religion in inducing fear of punishment because its results are immediate, instead of remote or in the distant future.

When troubles are believed to be magically induced, this triggers a witch-hunt. Witch-hunts usually focus on low-status members of a community who can not easily defend themselves. They usually have few or no family, or are members of a weak family. In societies where women attain power primarily through marriage to men, single women, unmarried or widowed, and no longer living with parents or siblings, are often victimized because they can safely be disposed of without fear of family retribution.

Witch-hunts channel aggression in a community, through their scapegoat function. Killing a witch breaks a hex. Executions were the only Church-approved method of dealing with witchcraft in the middle-ages. The Church outlawed counter-magic as a solution to hexes. The Church also profited greatly from witch persecution. Witch's property was confiscated by the Church

In these ways, traditional witchcraft beliefs function as cultural boundary maintenance mechanisms, separating good from bad behavior, reducing non-conformity through labeling deviants as witches and making individuals afraid of witches. Witches are important scapegoats. Every society needs some form of scapegoat to drain off hostility that otherwise might disrupt social order.

Individuals who become traditional witches seek power, not necessarily evil power. Women tended to become witches when they failed to achieve or maintain the conventional female role in peasant society, or when they grow older, and gain gratification in inducting new witches, and in helping people with their illnesses and personal problems.

The breakdown of witchcraft beliefs was gradual, as western society evolved more powerful technology, alternative mechanisms of social control, a more complex division of labor, and institutions devoted to charity and public welfare. Witch accusations and persecutions declined. It became increasingly obvious that although they reduced anxiety, witchcraft beliefs also created much anxiety. Decline in these beliefs was part of the more general decline in supernaturalism that began in the late middle-ages, and continued through the renaissance, reformation, the enlightenment.

Magical Beliefs in Modern Society

In modern societies, the use of magic varies inversely with people's scientific knowledge. Educated modern people believe that magic is discredited, deviant behavior. They believe in technology, instead. However, much modern action is ritualistic, based on incorrect knowledge, clung to because it reduces anxiety rather than solves problems (e.g., much medicine, criminal justice practices, dietary fads, etc.), or based on ritualized behavior that simply seems to "work." Nevertheless, the supernatural element is missing from these ritualized responses to problems. Supernaturalism is a deviant belief system in modern society, though that has not resulted in its demise or suppression.

There is usually no known causal connection between magical or ritualized practices and the events that rituals attempt to influence. Rituals we believe in give us a sense of confidence, competence, and control that may result in more effective, practical responses to situations. Rituals, magical or otherwise, are typically used to augment practical efforts, rather than simply to substitute for practical efforts. Modern, "rational" people often resort to rituals in stressful situations. For example, consider baseball:

1. Pitchers are not in control of hitters, and hitters are not in control of pitchers. Both of these roles are riddled with ritual, magic-like practices.
2. Pitchers rituals are usually more elaborate than hitters. Most spectators don't realize how important it is to a pitcher, and can't easily identify pitchers' rituals.
3. Uniform numbers are important. So are how you put on the uniform, food eaten or not eaten before a game, sex or avoidance of sex before games, and observation and failure to observe taboos lead to bad luck.
4. Taboos grow out of experiences of especially poor performance, or long strings of bad luck. Some taboos become institutionalized among many players, rather than individualized practices.

The Occult Establishment

In the United States, interest in occult ideas grew rapidly during the 1970's. Nineteen-seventy was a watershed year in for popularity of the occult in America. Recent times have witnessed an upsurge in the advertising of occult literature and groups. In the past, the occult was underground, heresy, frightening and deviant.

Occultism asks "Are there unseen powers? Do we possess hidden, inner powers? Can we tap these powers to improve our lives?"

Most occult groups are visible, established organizations that do not reject society. Satanism is, of course, an exception to this. Satanists tend to be anti-social, though some of them would claim exception to this rule.

Much of the occult is preoccupied with sex, drugs, and oriental philosophies. Astrology, theosophy, telepathy, reincarnation, healing, and clairvoyance are the staple concerns of the occult establishment.

Astrology portrays human life as determined by astronomical objects, within and beyond the solar system. Theosophy is a quasi-religious system based on belief in direct mystical contact

with the divine spirit. Telepathy is an occult, deviant scientific belief in direct mental communication between individuals. Reincarnation is concerned with the unreality of death, with the soul or spirit of individuals living more than one life, sometimes other human lives, sometimes lives as other species. Healing, a preoccupation of certain religious traditions, also has an occult form concerned with healing through the manipulation of hidden power by occult science. Clairvoyance is concerned with overcoming limitations of time and space, and empowering human consciousness with the ability to see things not present to the physical senses, things occurring in other times and places.

In general, occult groups are made up of individuals who are disenchanted with conventional religion, but who have retained their religious inclinations toward supernatural powers, preferring a different approach to the supernatural, more manipulative, similar in many respects to magic, because the occult is concerned with personal power rather than sacrifice or morality.

Satanism and Witchcraft

Modern, urban witchcraft has roots in the 17th century, in black magic dabbled in by educated middle class and upper class individuals. Today, witches and Satan worshipers come from all social backgrounds, with ideologies ranging from far right to far left. Many are interested in sexual deviation, such as homosexuality, sadomasochism, transvestitism, and sexual sacrifice.

Psychologically, they tend to be anxious individuals with low self-esteem and feelings of inadequacy stemming from intense personal conflicts during childhood. Eighty percent of them come from broken homes, alcoholic parents, etc. Most have failed to achieve in work or in establishing meaningful family lives. They are struggling to give meaning to their lives.

Witchcraft and Satanism have ceremonial rituals that are emotionally intense, and regularly scheduled, as opposed to manipulative magic that is episodic. They exploit individuals' weaknesses in order to influence them. Satanic theology is based on opposition to Christian teaching mirror image where Christian sins of greed, pride, envy, anger, gluttony, lust, and sloth are transformed into satanic virtues, seen as natural to man, and religion has alienated us from our true nature. Satanists claim that envy and greed are simply motivation for success. Lust preserves the species. Anger and gluttony are aspects of self-preservation.

Satanics affirm and glorify human nature in the raw, turning these preoccupations into a quest for power. Black is their sacred color. Their power is seen as coming from the earth, not the sky. They want to return to a pagan consciousness and culture, focused on the mystical forces of the earth. Many joiners are drawn to these groups because of the deviant sexual practices that are incorporated into their rituals. Satanic cults, especially, accept and promotes them. High-ranking members tend to be well-dressed, exude confidence, and are socially aggressive.

The head of the most well-known satanic cult in America today —Anton LaVey—calls himself The Prince of Darkness. He is a powerfully built man with a shaven head. In his photos he is surrounded by books and implements of magic. He claims to be a warlock. He preaches that there is a secret power and success that can be learned, called black magic. The Satanist is taught to be natural, to revel in pleasure and self-gratification, to emphasize power and indulgences in "this life."

Opposition to Christianity among Satanists and witches is widespread. Blasphemy and destructive invocations are common. The black mass is characterized by blasphemy, profanation of the crucifix, laughter, nudity, and sexual acts on a mock-religious altar. Curses are uttered, usually aimed at foes of Satanists. Black masses are performed at midnight, accompanied by satanic rituals.

Witchcraft and Satanism had a revival in the 1970's, along with interest in the occult, generally. This revival spread throughout the U.S. and Western Europe. Some think it was the result of a general increase in anxiety in world politics, and a spin-off of the millenarianism of the 1960's.

Satanic groups often offer help in business, sexual problems, and social skills. They teach how to achieve power and identity. They are secret because society does not tolerate them.

Contemporary Paganism

There are a variety of pagan belief systems similar mainly in their rejection of patriarchy and materialism, and their common appreciation of the earth. One of the most visible and popular forms of paganism is Wicca, a wishful revival of witchcraft that is more religious than magical, in terms of the sociological distinctions between the two. Wicca is also a religious expression of feminist values.

An Englishman, Gerald Gardner, single-handedly created Wicca with the publication of his book *Witchcraft Today* in 1954, after the repeal of antiquated English laws against Witchcraft. Wiccans believe they are practicing an ancient religion. However, the roots of Wicca can not be traced reliably backwards to antiquity. The philosophical underpinnings of modern Wicca are based on what Gardner believed to be true about the religious practices of Paleolithic peoples. He based his theories on flawed 19th century anthropological sources dealing with folk beliefs, and various literary works of a more speculative nature. Wiccans, however, accept Gardner's characterization of Wicca as a true, ancient religion. Of course, Wiccans are not unique in this respect. All religious groups proclaim a mythical story of their origins in order to valorize and sanctify their belief systems.

Wicca comes close to being a form of nature worship. Wiccans hold ceremonies celebrating their goddess during full moons. The goddess has two aspects: the Bright Mother through which people are born, and the Dark Mother through which people are reborn. She represents the processes of life, which of necessity include death. To renew she must destroy.

Wiccans believe that goddess worship was the first religion, a worship of the earth as mother. However, there is no evidence beyond a loose interpretation of certain myths that earth worship is primal. It is much more likely that the earliest form of religion is totemism. Claiming that a religion is first is a means of asserting its truth, or supremacy, in an inversion of the contemporary doctrine of progress that would make the most recent beliefs supreme.

Wiccans can and do practice witchcraft, but one of their fundamental moral principles regarding the use of magic is "harm none." They feel it is immoral to use magic to force someone into anything, and most of them feel that accepting payment for magical services is immoral, also. Stereotypes of witches and black magic are not at all relevant to Wicca, something Wiccan's understandably agonize over.

Wiccan magic involves the manipulation of certain "natural" energies to accomplish its purposes. It is important to understand that in this case, the term natural is used in an occult sense. They are not referring to the natural energies used in physics and chemistry to explain physical phenomenon. Branding the energies of their magic with the term natural is another means of enhancing the perceived value of their belief system because of the positive associations the term has in recent times.

Wiccans are keenly aware of the historic persecution of witches by the Christian Church. They are moderately contemptuous of Christianity, partly for this reason. It is likely that lacking persecution Wicca and other forms of paganism would cease identifying with each other, and break up into many distinct sects.

Inspirational Literature—from *Inspirational Literature: From Manifest to Latent Function of Religion*, 1957

A new form of literature developed in the 20th century, religiously inspirational, using religious ideas as a basis of a positive psychology, promising a form of salvation in *this world*. The new literature is a significant shift in perspective compared to traditional religion. Religion is revealed truth. Psycho-magical religion is practical. We are encouraged to believe it because it *works*. A notable example is Norman Vincent Peale's *The Power of Positive Thinking*.

This literature differs from the earlier literature on the "love of God." That literature had concentrated on the beneficial side-effects of loving God. Loving God was defined as intrinsically good, a commandment. The new literature encourages loving God, not as a commandment, but as a means of achieving a better life in this world. Five main qualities of this new literature are:

1. It assumes the validity, in general, of the Judeo-Christian tradition, but avoids messy moral issues.
2. It aims to inspire the reader by offering hope of salvation in this world, a better life on earth, quite literally.
3. It recommends quasi-magical techniques to elicit the *Power of God*. For example, "Imagine that Jesus is here with you."
4. It ignores insoluble social and economic problems, instead focusing on wealth, health, and personal problems of individuals.
5. It is similar in appeal and market structure to Romance Novels.

Differences between old and new inspirational literature are:

1. Suffering was once portrayed as good, it ennobled and instructed the individual. Now suffering is avoidable.
2. God was once a real being, but now God is an abstraction.
3. Science was suspect because it is Godless, but now science is embraced and used to support religion where possible, through careful selection of scientific ideas and evidence.
4. People used to be told to believe in religion because it is true, but now they are told to believe because it works, it is helpful.
5. Prayer used to be a form of worship, but now it becomes an effective form of self-help.
6. Spiritual principles were transformed into manipulative magic.
7. Practical benefits of religion were once considered a side-effect, an additional incentive for the believer. Now they are

portrayed as the main effect, the primary motive. The following schematics illustrate the differences between them.

Traditional Religion

Faith → *Action* → *Results*

Inspirational Religion

Anticipated Results → *Action* → *Faith*

In general, people who turn to inspirational literature to solve their problems drift from one text to another, in a restless search for hope, propelled by disappointments of first one, then another self-help system. In the end, they usually grow out of their pre-occupations rather than solving their problems through the prescribed techniques.

A premise of inspirational literature is that people can, in effect, *will* themselves new feelings, *will* belief, *will* themselves a new life. Sometimes ideas do change people's personal lives, but usually not, and almost never as a result of simply studying a system and having the feeling that some truth has been revealed to them by the system. Revelations are a common experience in most people's lives, yet they rarely result in changing lives. This is because revelations, in themselves, are not a form of personal power. The power to act on a revelation is distinct from the knowledge itself.

Three implications of inspirational literature:

1. The casual dismissal of the question as to whether God exists implies a decline in the ontological status of religious ideas.
2. The shift in perspective from religion as sacred truth to religion as practical magic implies a decline in the social importance of religion.
3. The personalistic, magical focus of this literature makes it irrelevant to the integrative, moral function of religion, suggesting that morals are on the decline and self-interest is on the rise, part of the inexorable rise in the cult of the individual in modern society.

The Use of Religion to Cure Deviant behavior

The use of religion to cure deviant behavior is the societal counterpart to the use of religion to solve personal problems. In the United States, parents and the courts often prescribe church attendance or other forms of religious participation as a cure for deviant behavior ranging from various delinquencies such as stealing and vandalism, to such intensely emotional and personal deviance as the many forms of sexual deviance, including prostitution, homosexuality, masturbation, and others. Such use of religion treats it like some sort of medicine, a "cure" for bad attitudes and bad character.

Large, state-run prisons, once called "penitentiaries," were founded by the Quakers in Pennsylvania and New York State during the early 19th century as a device to "cure" crime by rehabilitating criminals. The name is based on the word penance. Penitentiaries were created as an environment in which prisoners

would become penitents, people who would seriously reconsider the meaning of their immoral actions.

The penitentiary system was quickly copied by other states in a rush to embrace the new technology of rehabilitation. The penitentiary system was portrayed as a significant reform in our treatment of criminals—a humane, Christian response full of promise and hope. No longer would society take vengeance on its criminals. Instead, society would express an understanding concern for the criminal, which in practice would help society by reducing the number of criminals in its midst.

In the atmosphere of increasing equality, the punishment of criminals as a form of collective vengeance was seen by many as barbaric and unproductive. The penitentiaries were designed to force discipline and contemplation on prisoners, thereby giving them what was presumably absent from their childhood lives, a stable, religion-centered family life. Each prisoner was to have his own cell. He was required to be quiet for most of the day. He was to be given a bible and told to study it, and to dwell on the nature of his crimes.

The penitentiary system was based on nothing less than a general theory of deviance that located the cause of crime in early moral training and a stable family life. Disorder in society was seen as caused by disorder in individuals' minds, which was in turn seen as caused by a disorderly childhood.

Similarly, the clergy of many churches often blame various forms of crime, delinquency, and immorality on a lack of religious commitment. Religious scholars, judges, elected officials, and others, likewise, often profess this belief. Since deviant behavior is at least amoral, if not outright immoral, religion should therefore cure it. After all, they argued, religion is moral training. Interestingly, this assertion is consistent with the typical, somewhat simplistic statements about religion found in functional theory in the social sciences.

In these theories, religion is seen as legitimating values and norms. Rituals reinforce commitment to religion. Internal, self-imposed sanctions of guilt or fear of sin operate as an important source of social control. These theories do not specify the exact connection between religion and the behavior of individuals. Inadvertently, they support a general faith in religion as a cure for a variety of deviant behaviors, a faith that is not justified by empirical research.

The penitentiary system was a failure, in terms of its original promises. It became a breeding ground for crime. Inside its walls, a vigorous sub-culture opposed to authority and conventional morality rapidly developed and became entrenched.

For financial reasons, prisoners have not usually been assigned their own private cells. The idea of penance quickly fell victim to the priorities of control and economy. Prison architects focused on the imperative to control violent, devious, unwilling prisoners. Designs emphasizing control and saving money were inconsistent with designs emphasizing rehabilitation and penance. Therefore, the use of imprisonment to induce penitence was quickly abandoned.

In addition, penitentiaries were quickly staffed with lower-class guards and caretakers who did not share the designers' values or dreams. Their treatment of prisoners was inconsistent with the goals of rehabilitation.

In more modern times, as psychologists and social workers have become regular fixtures inside prisons, they have to do their work in an atmosphere of resentment and oppression. Modern, large prisons attempt to accomplish two mutually exclusive goals: vengeance and rehabilitation. Vengeance, the negative side of prisons, overwhelms rehabilitation for most prisoners.

What about the use of religion outside of prisons? Studies of junior and high school students have challenged conventional wisdom about the power of religion to "cure" deviant behavior. Courts often sentence juvenile delinquents to church attendance. Studies of juvenile delinquents show that enforced church attendance do not influence their behavior significantly. As measured by self-reports, and by police records, delinquent behavior is not significantly reduced by church attendance, and is also not related to conventional measures of religiosity. Exposure to moral teachings and the acceptance of conventional moral values does not seem, by itself, to inhibit delinquency.

Edwin Sutherland, one of the most famous criminologists in the history of sociology, found that criminals are taught new definitions of crime. These definitions portray crime as morally neutral, or even sometimes morally positive. He argued that these changes in attitude toward criminal acts were a necessary aspect of learning to commit crimes.

You might think that church attendance would reduce the tendency of individuals to commit crimes. However, sociologists have become intensely suspicious of the idea that morality is essentially a personal characteristic of individuals. Sociologists see morality as an aspect of social relationships, culture, and social identity, not of individual personalities—a community affair, not merely personal belief. Nevertheless, most people believe that morality is a matter of education, that it is "acquired" by individuals, and once acquired, it controls their behavior.

The facts do not support this interpretation. Apparently, religion can not instill love for one's neighbors, respect for others, for their person or their property. Belief in a distant after-life as a reward for good behavior in this life can not compete with the immediate pleasures and pains of this life. Without community support, religious beliefs don't control individuals. The question remains: Why do we collectively cling to faith in the power of religion as a magical cure for deviance, in the face of repeated failure? Perhaps the answer to this question is similar to why individuals cling to a host of other concepts of magical power. Beliefs can be emotionally satisfying. Abandoning beliefs undermines our sense of the importance of religion. And belief in the power of religion is a manifestation of our cultural fixation on the autonomous power of the individual. "Individualism" is a mythical doctrine in our society, shored up by so many different beliefs and practices, that one finds it difficult to imagine any serious challenge to individualism taking root in America. Our institutions and our self-concepts would have to change greatly for an alternative perspective to be taken seriously.

Summary

Religion doesn't eliminate suffering. It shows how to suffer, and helps people cope with suffering without losing their sense of the meaning. Religion gives people belief, which is different from truth, as that term is philosophically defined in the modern era. Belief is intentional, whereas truth is a rational imperative. Religion does not result in the triumph of values. Instead, it affirms values in the face of an imperfect world.