

Magicians of the Twenty-First Century: An Attempt at Dimensioning the Magician's Personality.

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Abstract

This article presents findings of a field study of contemporary magicians representing a large spectrum of magical disciplines. Eleven interviews were conducted in German-speaking countries, focusing on biographical embedding, experiential aspects, and world views. From this data, an attempt is made to describe the magician's personality. Five approaches and motivational structures guiding magical practice are identified, and five typified aspects of the magician are distinguished: the magician as artist, the magician as social utopian, the magician as scientist, the magician as "fully functioning person," and the magician as seeker of wisdom.

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An Attempt at Dimensioning the Magician's Personality

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INTRODUCTION

Magic always has been a fascinating subject of research, but one mostly studied against the background of perceived "false" or atavistic thinking—historically or culturally distant in primitive cultures. The lines of tradition within theories on magic that are still influential, such as those begun by Edward B. Tylor and James Frazer (evolutionary), Marcel Mauss and Émile Durkheim (functionalist), and Lucien Lévy-Bruhl (participatory), are based on this distance.¹ It was not until more recent approaches that interpret magic within the framework of the history of ideas as an element of an esoteric field of discourse that the perspective widened and became more unprejudiced.² Nevertheless, these developments did not result in a widely accepted academic definition. The problems of determining the relationship of magic to religion, science, and other fields of social action still persist. One reason may be that such definitions often depend on the individual worldviews and the cultural

1. Edward Burnett Tylor, *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Language, Art and Custom* (New York: Harper, 1958); James Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, abridged ed. (London: Macmillan, 1959); Marcel Mauss, *A General Theory of Magic*, trans. Robert Brain (London: Routledge, 1972); Émile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen Fields (London: Allen and Unwin, 1976); Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, *Les fonctions mentales dans les sociétés inférieures* (Paris: Alcan, 1928). See Wouter J. Hanegraaff, "Magic I: Introduction," in *Dictionary of Gnosis and Western Esotericism*, ed. Hanegraaff (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 716–19, for a concise introduction to the subject; also Graham Cunningham, *Religion and Magic: Approaches and Theories* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

2. Kocku von Stuckrad, *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge* (London: Equinox, 2005), 6–11.



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