

# Magic and mischief

Text and Practices  
in Philosophy, Theology, and the  
Sciences

**Hybrid Conference**

**31 Aug - 2 September 2022**

**Andrew Murray Centre for Spirituality  
Wellington**



**hugenote kollege**

Waar Christenwees grondvat in opleiding



**hugenoote kollege**  
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## **Magic and Mischief:**

### **Text and Practices in Philosophy, Theology, and the Sciences**

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Call for papers

Genealogies of “the secular” are now a significant topic of academic discussion. While there is much debate, what seems clear is that secularisation has changed the way religion is practised and conceived. After secularity, one aspect that is curiously persistent is the realm of the esoteric. The *long duree* of religious “disenchantment” has not in fact suppressed the magical. Magical thinking is present everywhere. Such religiosity is expressed in different forms. “Superstitious” practices precipitate in popular culture; books, film, and television have a high rate of productions concerned with magic, the mystical, and the supernatural. The question lingers as to whether the popularity of these shows indicates a need for escapism, imaginative expansion, or an alternative religiosity. In Africa, magical discourse continues to be produced by modernism and incorporated within contemporary deployments of political power. This of course raises the question as to what kind of secularity and modernity we actually inhabit. For since James Frazer’s influential work *The Golden Bough*, the relation between religion, magic, and the sciences has been conceived under this regime of secularity. Frazer had argued that magical thinking was a prototypical variety of scientific endeavour, and it is with Frazer’s comparative mythology that the so-called “myth of disenchantment” has its proximate origin. However, historical research has shown that this “myth” is but one more myth we tell ourselves and is not the only account of modernity available. Studies of the history of the sciences and philosophy show that the development of these disciplines have been deeply entwined with esoteric and magical thinking. For example, in the ancient world, there was a belief that human beings were subjected to powers and beings outside of their control. These powers exerted influence on the physical world but also could in turn be influenced. One may see this in Neoplatonist theurgy which combined metaphysical speculation with religious practice. Such a hermetic lineage continues through the medieval period in the likes of Paracelsus and Giordano Bruno and has a subterranean influence on modern and postmodern thought, from Ludwig Klages to Gilles Deleuze.

This conference invites papers to investigate how these spiritual and esoteric agencies have been configured in philosophy, theology, the sciences, as well as in popular culture. We invite all disciplines from theology, philosophy, and other sciences to partake in this conference. Paper proposals should include an abstract of ±200 words, the name of the author; the institutional affiliation of the presenter, and email address. Abstracts should be sent to Dr Annette Potgieter at [stbl@hugenoote.com](mailto:stbl@hugenoote.com) before **30 June 2022**.

Topics of interest for this and the planned conference volume will be:

- \* traditions of magic and mischief from an ancient perspective
- \* the influence of esoteric thought on philosophy, theology, and science
- \* the theology and science debate
- \* the presence of magical thinking in popular culture
- \* magic discourse in Africa

