

---

8-29-1997

## Born Under a Bad Sign: The Millennium, Magic, and the Politics of the Spirit World

IBPP Editor  
bloomr@erau.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp>



Part of the [Other Political Science Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Editor, IBPP (1997) "Born Under a Bad Sign: The Millennium, Magic, and the Politics of the Spirit World," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*. Vol. 3 : Iss. 5 , Article 1.  
Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol3/iss5/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Scholarly Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in International Bulletin of Political Psychology by an authorized administrator of Scholarly Commons. For more information, please contact [commons@erau.edu](mailto:commons@erau.edu).

Title: Born Under a Bad Sign: The Millennium, Magic, and the Politics of the Spirit World

Editor: Editor

Volume: 3

Issue: 5

Date: 1997-08-29

Keywords: Decisionmaking, Magic, Shakespeare

Abstract. This article describes some of the more common rationales for beliefs in the spirit world and how these beliefs inform politics.

There are many historical accounts of political and military leaders (1) consulting oracles and soothsayers; (2) placing political significance in falling stars, eclipses, and natural disasters; and (3) viewing the most seemingly inconsequential happening as a political portent. These leaders--often so tough-minded, ruthless, and Machiavellian in the seeking and maintaining of political power--may make choices that literally change the course of history based on what most modern-day political commentators would consider "soft" thinking.

There are a number of ways to address this phenomenon. (1) We today are doing the same thing. We're just too close to our "soft" thinking to realize it's soft. (2) The "soft" thinking is not soft. There is a spirit world operative regardless of one's being open or closed to it that is accessible to those open to it. (3) "Soft" thinking is no longer going on. We have evolved to solely appreciate the material world as reality.

The third possibility may be dismissed out of hand for most people. Surveys of causal attributions would support this dismissal. As to the first two possibilities--regardless of their validity--one can infer the role belief in the spiritual world plays in the political world. In general, this role is a way to obtain order and meaning out of what otherwise might be chaos. A look at the comments of Horatio and Marcellus on the Ghost in Shakespeare's Hamlet (Act I, Scene I) illustrates this role.

"Stay, illusion...Speak to me" (ll. 130; 132). By having Horatio entreat an illusion to speak, Shakespeare may be depicting the ambivalence, the lack of certainty, and the lay psychologist role of attributer that typifies most people much of the time. Horatio says, "If there be any good thing to be done That may to thee do ease...Speak to me" (ll. 133-135). These words suggest that by appeasing unknowable powers one might obtain control over what otherwise may be uncontrollable. Horatio also says, "If thou art privy to thy country's fate, Which, happily, foreknowing may avoid, O speak" (ll. 136-138). These words suggest that one might possibly know the otherwise unknowable--the future--and prevent future tragedy through access to the spirit world. And Horatio says, "Or if thou hast uphoarded in thy life Extorted treasure in the womb of earth, For which they say your spirits oft walk in death, Speak of it" (ll. 139-142). These words suggest that there may be an afterlife in which one may experience the consequences of one's life and that, therefore, can serve as a guide on how to live one's life. Marcellus says, "We do it wrong, being so majestical, To offer it the show of violence, For it is...invulnerable And our vain blows malicious mockery" (ll. 148-151). These words suggest that the spirit world is powerful and that there is an etiquette in dealing with it that must be followed or an egregious penalty may result. Marcellus then says, "This bird of dawning singeth all night long; And then, they say, no spirit dare stir abroad,...No fairy takes, nor witch hath power to charm" (ll. 165-166; 168). These words suggest that even the awesome spirit world is at least somewhat constrained by more earthly phenomena--a comforting thought to humans terrified by the unfathomable powers that be.

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Part of the cognitive system supporting political decisionmaking and behavior comprises variants of beliefs in the spirit world. From formal religious ideologies through the anthropomorphizing of inanimate objects to the hypostatization of reason and the consensual use of hypothetical constructs, we engage in magical thinking. This magic is often without the usual foundations of rationality and logic but is often with unusual amounts of excitement and feelings of being alive.

Many observers have foretold that beliefs in the spirit world and attributions to the spirit world will increase as the coming of the Millennium approaches. More likely, these beliefs already have had a long existence. As more attention is paid to them, will these beliefs vanish as "no spirit dare stir abroad" (l. 166) "ever 'gainst that season comes Wherein our Saviour's birth is celebrated" (l. 164)? Or will they lead to the very chaos that they may have been striving mightily to ward off? (See Brugger, P., & Graves, R. E. (1997.) Right hemispatial inattention and magical ideation. *European Archives of Psychiatry & Clinical Neuroscience*, 247, 55-57; Chandler, M.J., & Lalonde, C.E. (1994.) Surprising, magical and miraculous turns of events: Children's reactions to violations of their early theories of mind and matter. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 12, 83-95; Cunningham, N.W. (1994.) Dancing with the spirit: Personal transformations of self-other-God images. *Dissertation Abstracts International: Section A: The Humanities and Social Sciences*, 55(6-A), 1506; Jenkins, H. (1994.) (Ed.) *The Arden Shakespeare: Hamlet*. NY: Routledge. (Original work published c. 1600); Thalbourne, M.A., & French, C.C. (1995.) Paranormal belief, manic-depressiveness, and magical ideation: A replication. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 18, 291-292.) (Keywords: Decisionmaking, Magic, Shakespeare.)