

Magic

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What do we think of when we hear the word ‘magic’? Today, magic is often an object of ridicule: we think of it as a relic of the past, superstition on the part of those who don’t know better, a refusal to deal with science and reason. However, this wasn’t always the case: what we think of as magic was vital for the development of knowledge; in past ages, the ‘magician’ – in the form of astrologer, alchemist, priest, witch, etc. – was simply someone who understood the forces of the world. This course traces the development of magic, from its contributions to science and philosophy in the ancient world, to its slow separation from more recognized forms of knowledge in the early modern period, to its status as a curiosity and the question of its survival in the modern age. Along the way, we will pose the question: in what ways is magic still with us? Readings from: Hermes Trismegistus, Al-Kindi, Christopher Marlowe, Giordano Bruno, Kepler, Frances Yates, Borges, Freud, David Lynch, Bolaño, etc.

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