

# “Through the Trapdoor with Bob Neale”: Nine Session Exploring Thirteen Themes in Selected Works by Robert Neale



Hosted by  
Michael Smith and Geoff Grimes

# Session 5: *The Magic of Celebrating Wonder*

---

## The Index— Identification of the 13 “themes”

Play

The Trickster Spirit

Paul Pruyser’s Three World Perspective

The Imagination

Wonder

**Illusions**

Magic

The Magician(s)

Off-Stage/On-Stage Magic

Performance

Psychological Classification of Magic

The Ethical Heart of Spiritual Illusions: “The Four Falls”

Life and Death and . . .

THE 2018 MAGIC & MEANING CONFERENCE

## The Robert E. Neale Index

---

A Resource for the Study of Robert E. Neale’s  
Trilogy of Magic

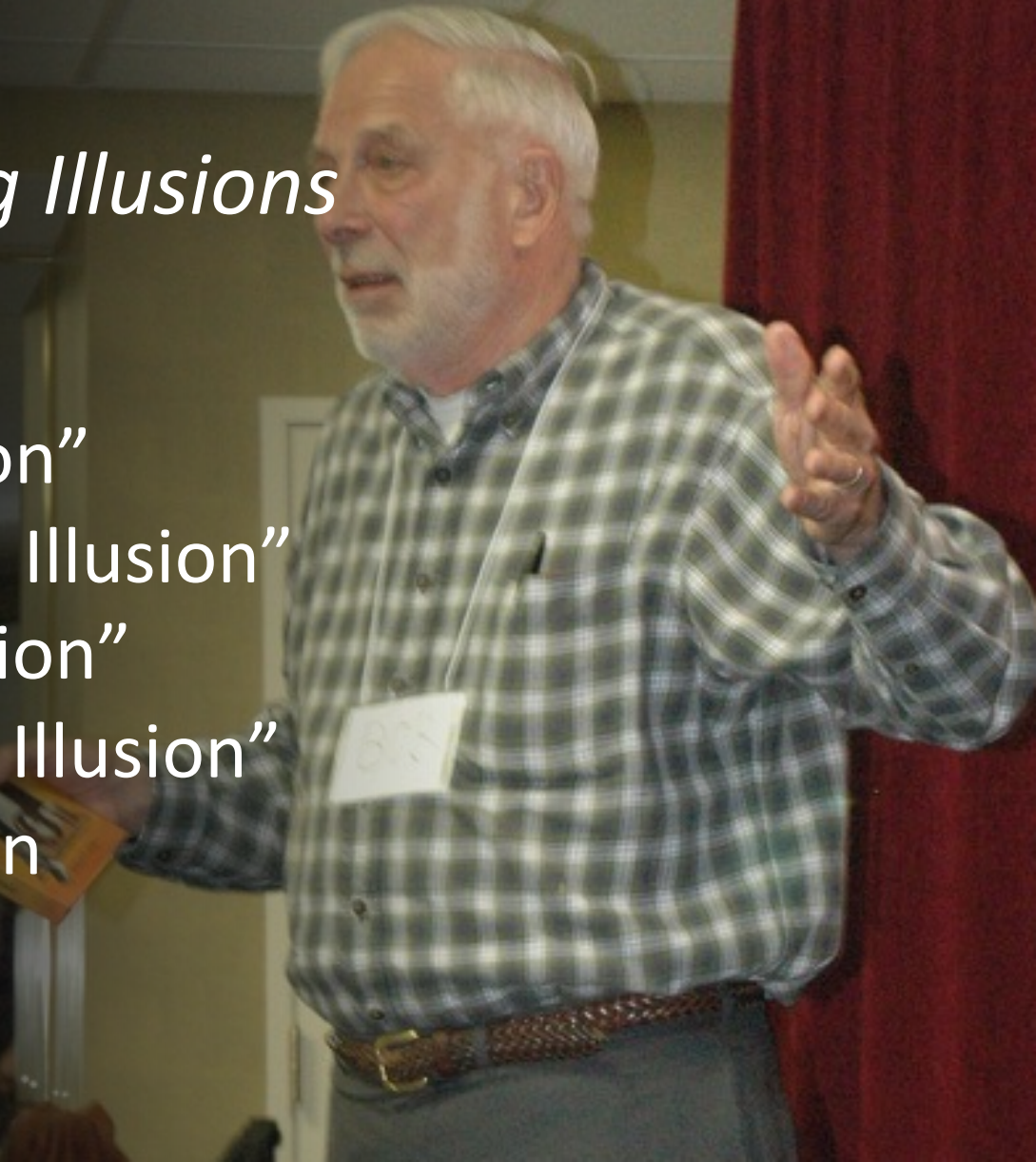
Prepared by Michael Smith and Geoffrey Grimes  
9/5/2018

---

## Session 5: *The Magic of Celebrating Illusions*

---

- 1) Introduction of the *Trilogy*
- 2) Chapter 1: “The Grand Optical Illusion”
- 3) Chapter 2: “The Grand Psychological Illusion”
- 4) Chapter 3: “The Grand Spiritual Illusion”
- 5) Chapter 4: “The Grand Performance Illusion”
- 6) Open Mic – Questions and Discussion



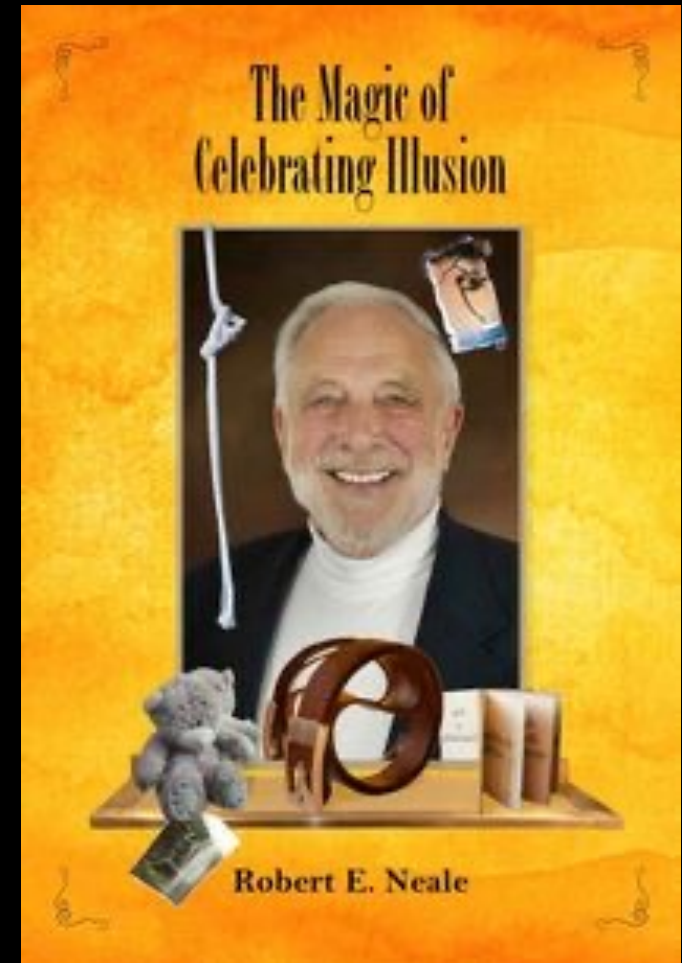
# *The Magic of Celebrating Illusion*

---

From the Introduction (Hass)

Arenas for inquiry:  
*Metaphysics & Epistemology*

“Issues relating to the nature of reality  
and the limits of belief and knowledge”



# *The Magic of Celebrating Illusion*

---

From the Introduction (Hass)

Additional arenas for inquiry:  
*Ethics & Aesthetics*

“... the hunger to embrace illusion while denying that it’s an illusion, leading to dogmatic, intolerant, totalitarian, and even violent ways of thinking and acting”



# *The Magic of Celebrating Illusion*

---

From the Introduction (Hass)

“Magical artists have an essential role to play in helping people celebrate their illusions rather than deny or fear them.”



# *The Magic of Celebrating Illusion*

---

From the “Preface”

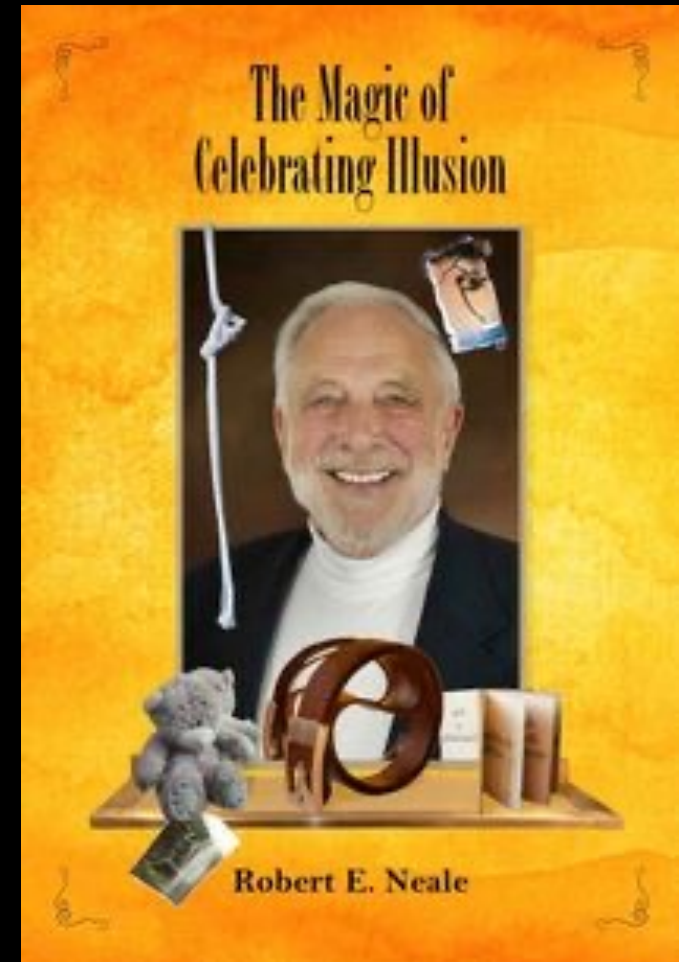
“But more amazing is the equal extent to which we are captured by, and indebted to, our psychological and spiritual illusions. Still more awesome is the ease of our innocence about these.”



# Chapter 1: The Grand Optical Illusion

---

*The Grand Optical Illusion –  
“the most common and most  
inexplicable illusion of all”*



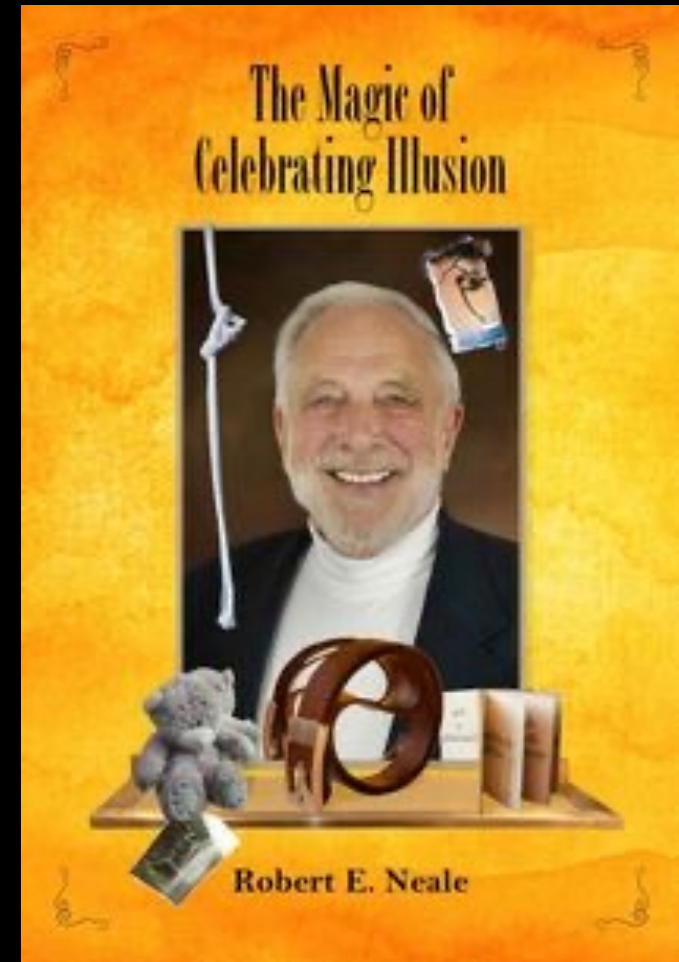


# Chapter 1: The Grand Optical Illusion

---

Key claim:

*“What we see is the Grand Optical Illusion! Perhaps it is so grand that we cannot see it, but we are experiencing an optical illusion. And it is grand!”*



# Chapter 1: The Grand Optical Illusion

---

Key insight:

“Our Grand Optical Illusion is that what we see is what is there.

We affirm: *what we see is.*”

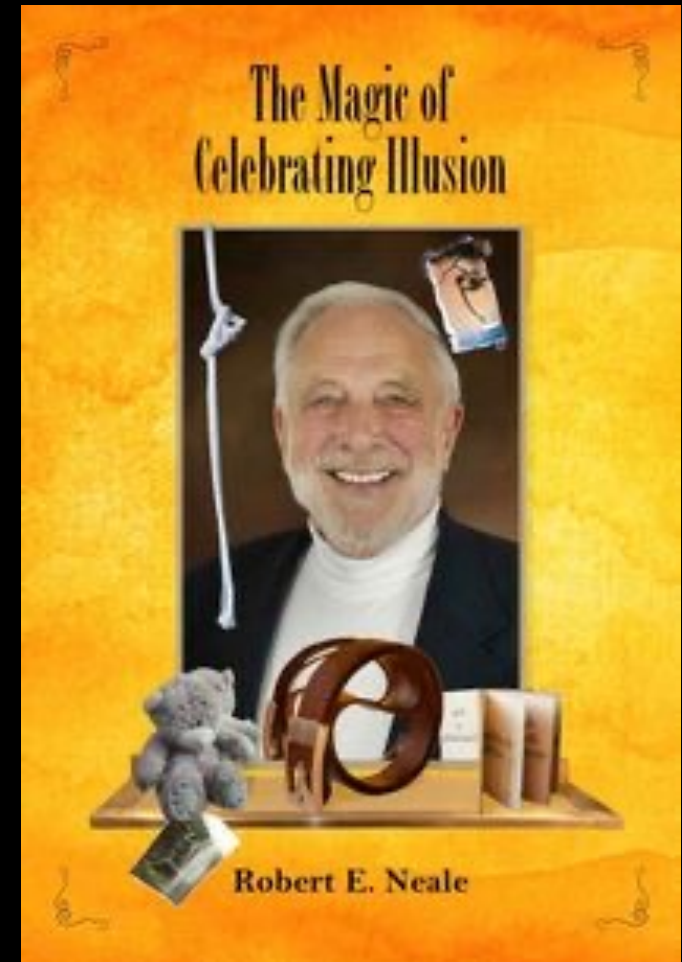


# Chapter 1: The Grand Optical Illusion

---

Some experiments:

- 1) “Plain as the Nose”
- 2) “Dismemberment”
- 3) “Heads Down”
- 4) “Hot Dog”
- 5) “The Animated Cartoon”



# Chapter 1: The Grand Optical Illusion

---

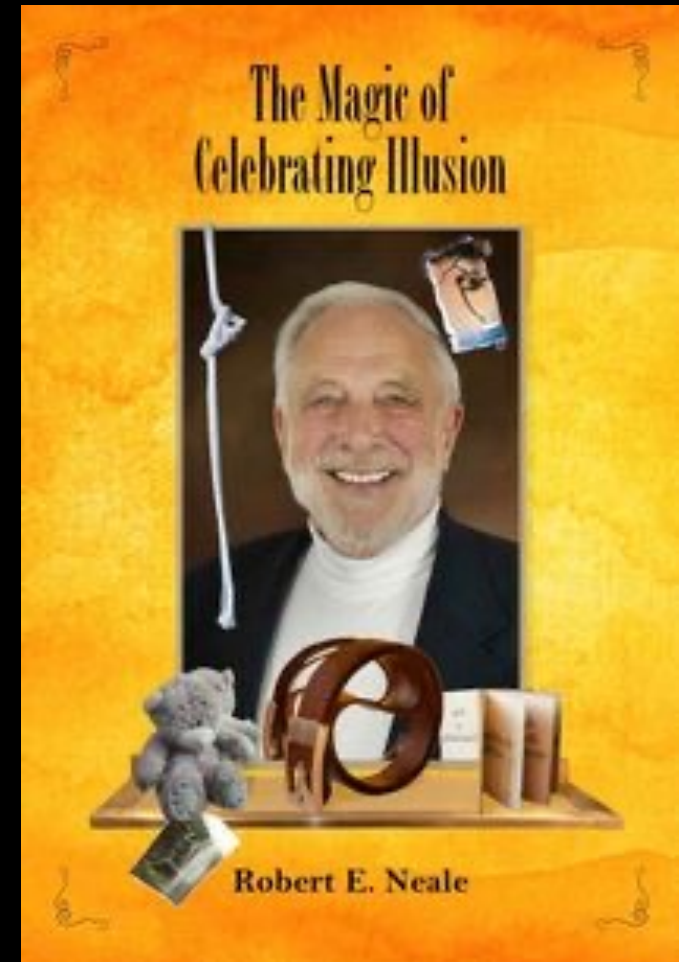
## The “I-Con”

“I am a magician . . . and so are you. We are all magicians—*illusionists*—who survive, take pleasure, and find meaning in life by means of the illusions we create” . . . “Magic runs rampant, and that is a good thing.”



## Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion

---

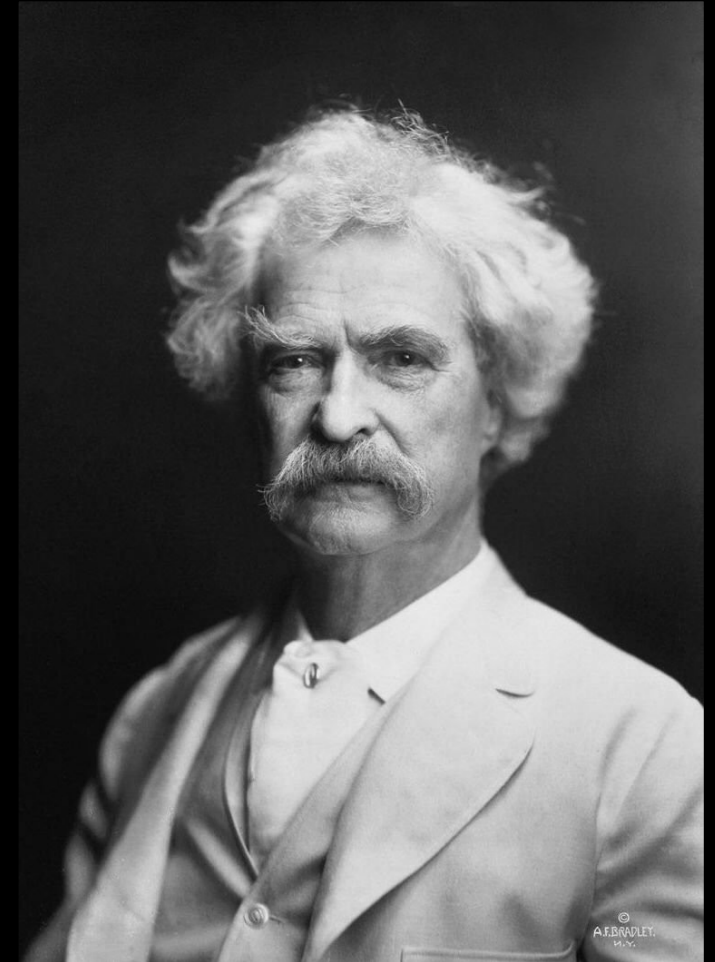


## *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

---

Famed American skeptic Mark Twain once proclaimed,

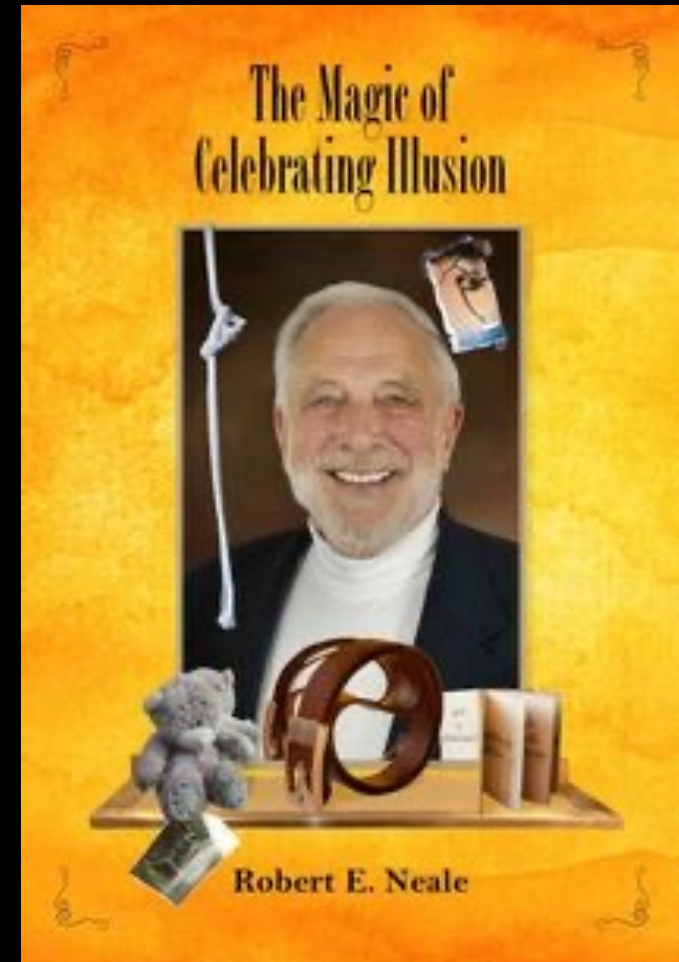
“Don’t part with your illusions. When they are gone you may still exist, but you have ceased to live.”



## *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

---

Illusion- from Latin, meaning “in play,”  
“serious play,’ or “playing hard at”



## Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion

---

The major psychological illusion is that *I am in control.*

i.e. - William Ernest Henley-  
“I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.”

### INVICTUS

(unconquerable)

Out of the night that covers me,  
Black as the pit from pole to pole,  
I thank whatever gods may be  
For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance  
I have not winced nor cried aloud.  
Under the bludgeonings of chance  
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears  
Looms but the Horror of the shade,  
And yet the menace of the years  
Finds, and shall find me, unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,  
How charged with punishments the scroll,  
I am the master of my fate:  
I am the captain of my soul.

*William E. Henley*

Written 1875 © 2010 Deodorata Gallery®



## *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

---

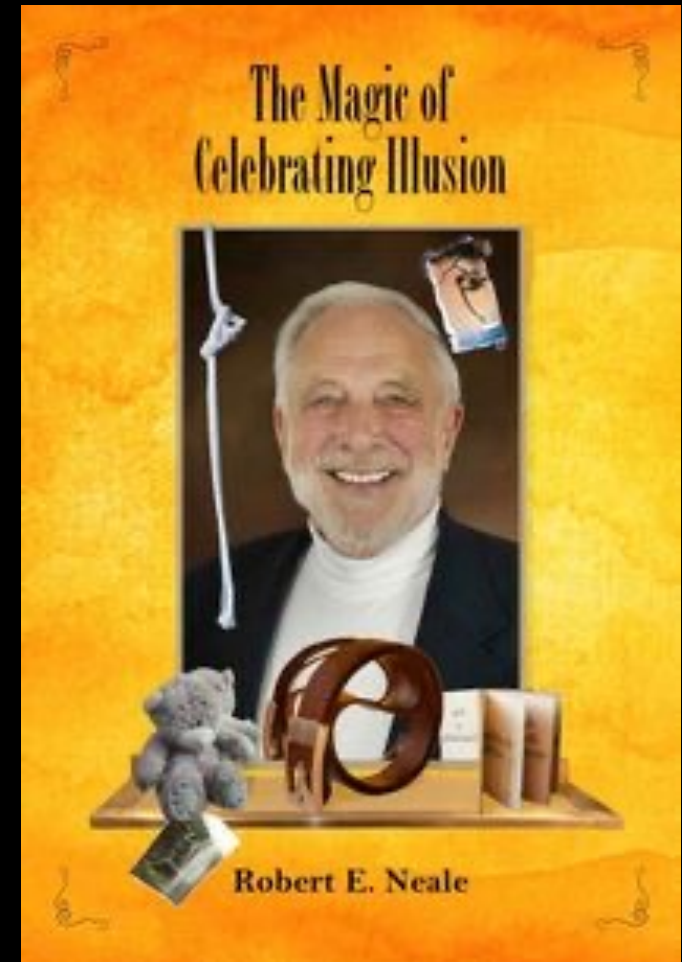
Neuroscience shows (The Finger Wiggle) that this is not always true. The unconscious urge is first, followed by consciousness, followed by action. But the illusion can be positive.



# *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

---

## **ILLUSIONS ABOUT OURSELVES**



## *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

---

### **ILLUSIONS ABOUT OURSELVES**

“With regard to illusions about ourselves, we live in Garrison Keillor’s Lake Wobegon, ‘where all the men are good-looking, all the women are strong, and all the children are above average.’”



## *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

---

### **ILLUSIONS ABOUT OURSELVES**

**1) Self-enhancement—**  
the perception of ourselves,  
our past behavior, and  
our continuing attributes as more  
positive than is actually the case.



## *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

---

### **ILLUSIONS ABOUT OURSELVES**

**2) Control—**  
the perception that we can bring about positive outcomes rather than negative ones.



## *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

---

### **ILLUSIONS ABOUT OURSELVES**

**3) Unrealistic optimism—**  
the perception that our future holds a quite unlikely bounty or opportunities and an amazing absence of adverse events.



## *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

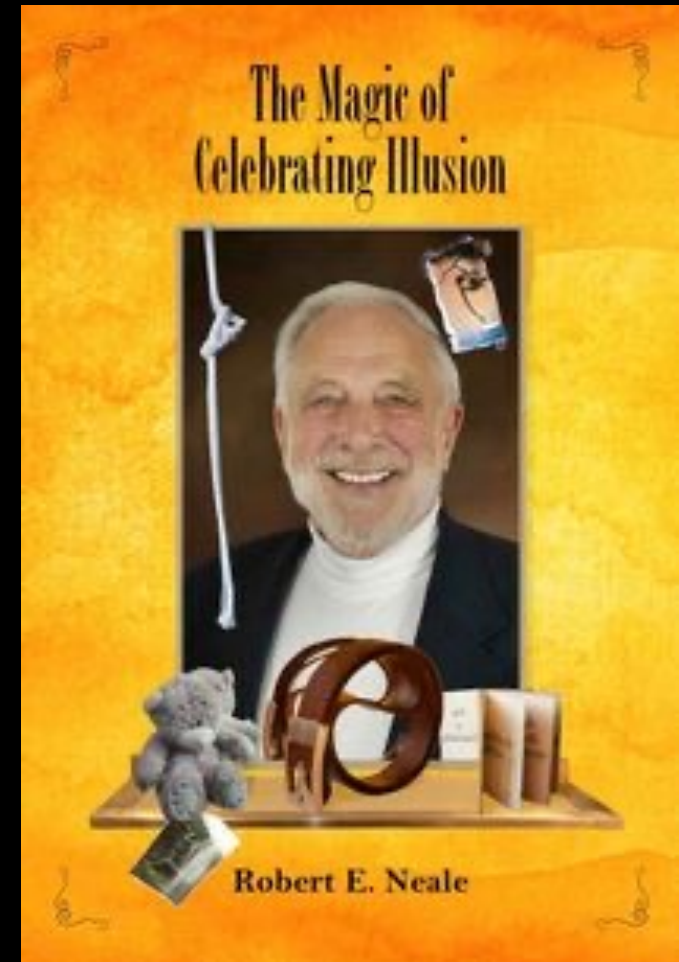
---

### **THE TEDDY BEAR ILLUSION**

Blind belief and blind disbelief are destructive.

And so if we are not to believe and not believe, what's left??

Answer- "The Teddy Illusion"



## *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

---

### **THE TEDDY BEAR ILLUSION**

For the child the Teddy Bear offers:

- 1) Security
- 2) The first possession
- 3) Accepts without challenge all the child's projections
- 4) A transitional object

For the child the teddy bear is sacred.





## *Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion*

---

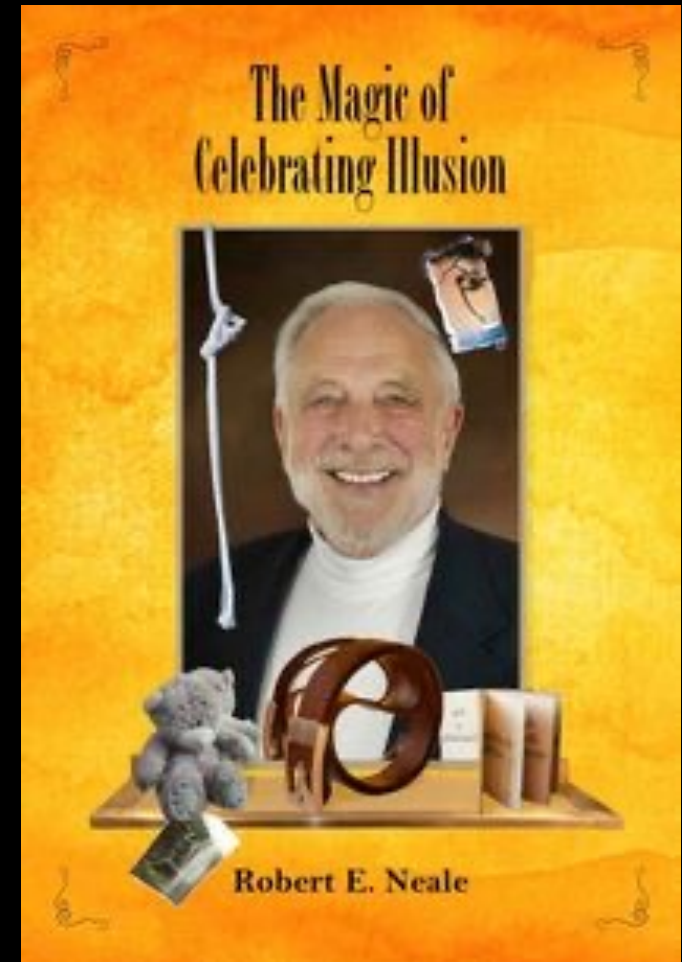
The proper context for our psychological illusions is play.



# Chapter 2: The Grand Psychological Illusion

---

## Pruyser's Three World Perspective



# Paul Pruyser – Psychologist and Psychoanalyst

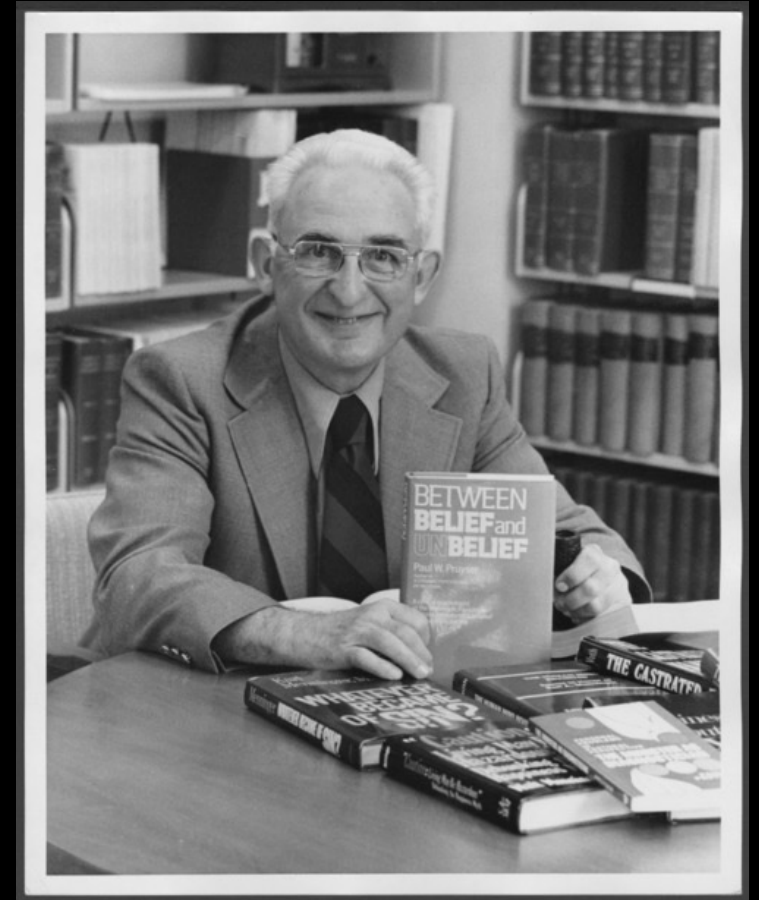
---

Pruyser's "Three World Perspectives":

- 1) The "Realistic"
- 2) The "Illusionistic"
- 3) The "Autistic"

Source:

*The Play of the Imagination:  
Toward a Psychoanalysis of Culture (1983)*



## *Chapter 3: The Grand Spiritual Illusion*

---

“Spirituality is telling tales. Tall tales and whoppers! And it is my assumptions, at least is that we cannot live well without them.”



## Chapter 3: The Grand Spiritual Illusion

---

“The Grand Spiritual Illusion involves making up ultimate meanings and considering them true.”



## *Chapter 3: The Grand Spiritual Illusion*

---

“I am one of the odd ones  
preoccupied with ultimate meaning.  
... I am greedy for meaning.”



## *Chapter 3: The Grand Spiritual Illusion*

---

“Both disbelievers and believers are dismayed by the very notion of ‘spiritual illusion’ because they assume that ultimate meanings can be only true or false.”



## *Chapter 3: The Grand Spiritual Illusion*

---

For Neale the other alternative to belief and disbelief is *make belief*.



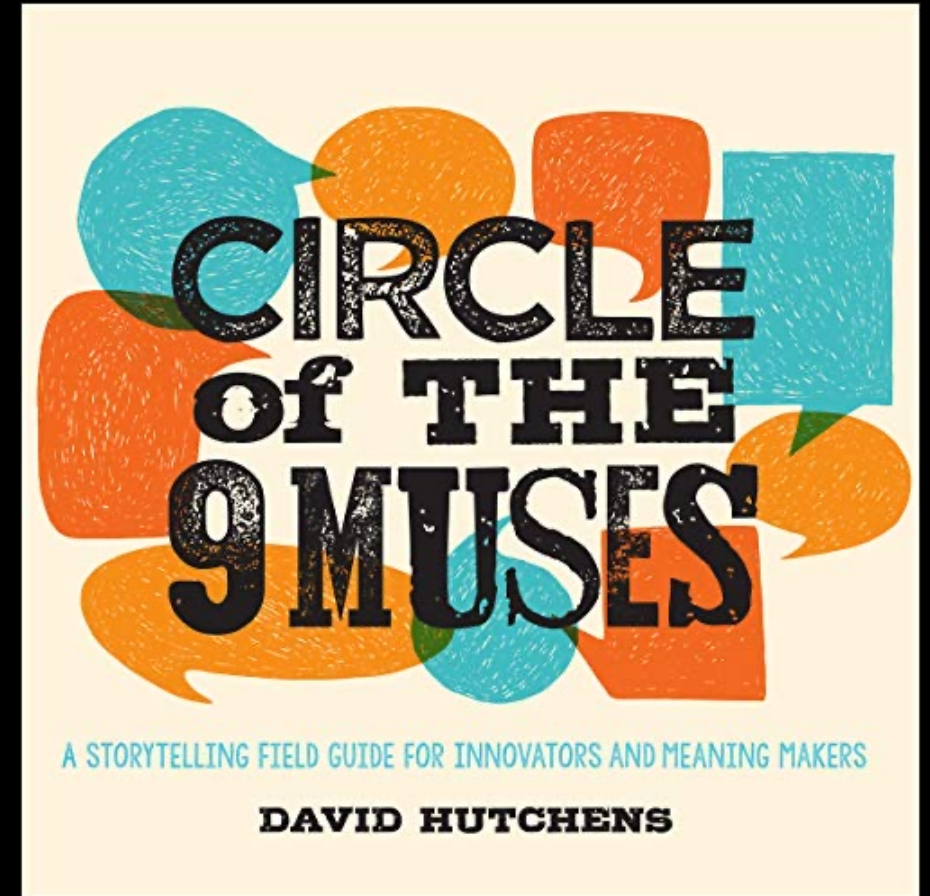


## *Chapter 3: The Grand Spiritual Illusion*

---

### **THE FOUR FALLS**

1) We forget that stories are created out of our imagination.



# *Chapter 3: The Grand Spiritual Illusion*

---

## **THE FOUR FALLS**

2) We believe in only one specific revelation.

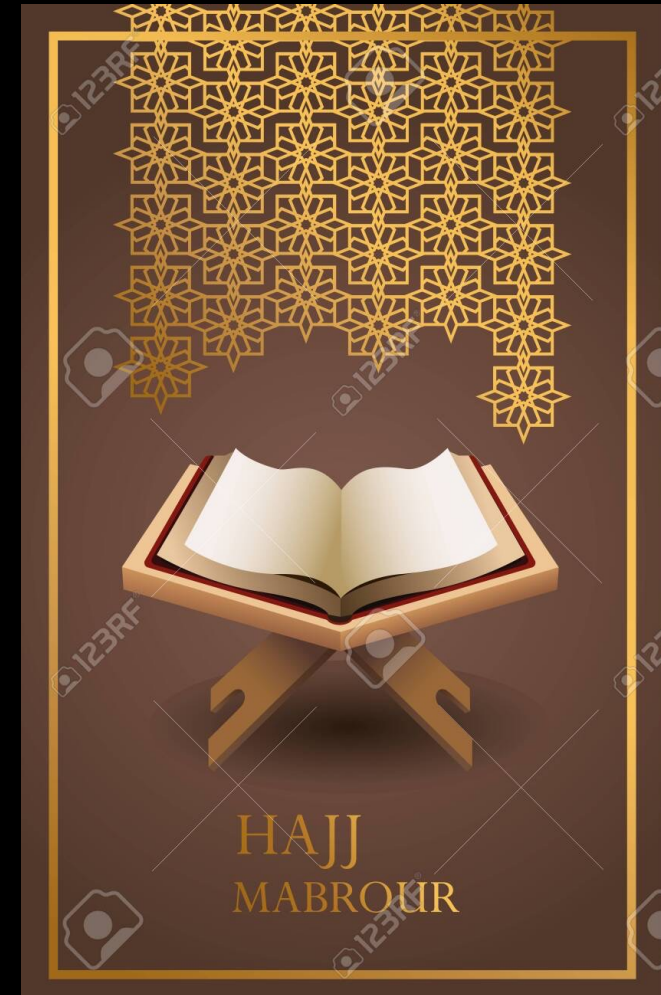


# *Chapter 3: The Grand Spiritual Illusion*

---

## **THE FOUR FALLS**

3) We believe that the revelation must be fixed.



# *Chapter 3: The Grand Spiritual Illusion*

---

## **THE FOUR FALLS**

4) We do all we can to protect that single revealed, final truth from attack by leading us into “bureaucratic terrorism” of belief and disbelief. Our imagination gets waylaid (but not defeated).



## *Chapter 3: The Grand Spiritual Illusion*

---

### **THE FOUR FALLS**

The major world religions have parables that take the prevailing myths (beliefs) and turn them upside down.

“For me, faithful imagination is an excess in imagination . . . being flexible is make-belief.”



## Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

### *Illusions about Illusions*

“I am a magician . . . And so are you. We are all magicians—illusionists—who survive, take pleasure, and find meaning in life, by means of the illusions we create. I am writing to persuade you that such magic runs rampant in our lives and that is a good thing.”



## Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

“But this is totally counter to the usual statement implied by the behavior of the magician on stage, “I am a magician, and you are *not*.”



## Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

“The *Grand Performance Illusion* is that what I perform is *exceptional*.”



Copyright CSA Images

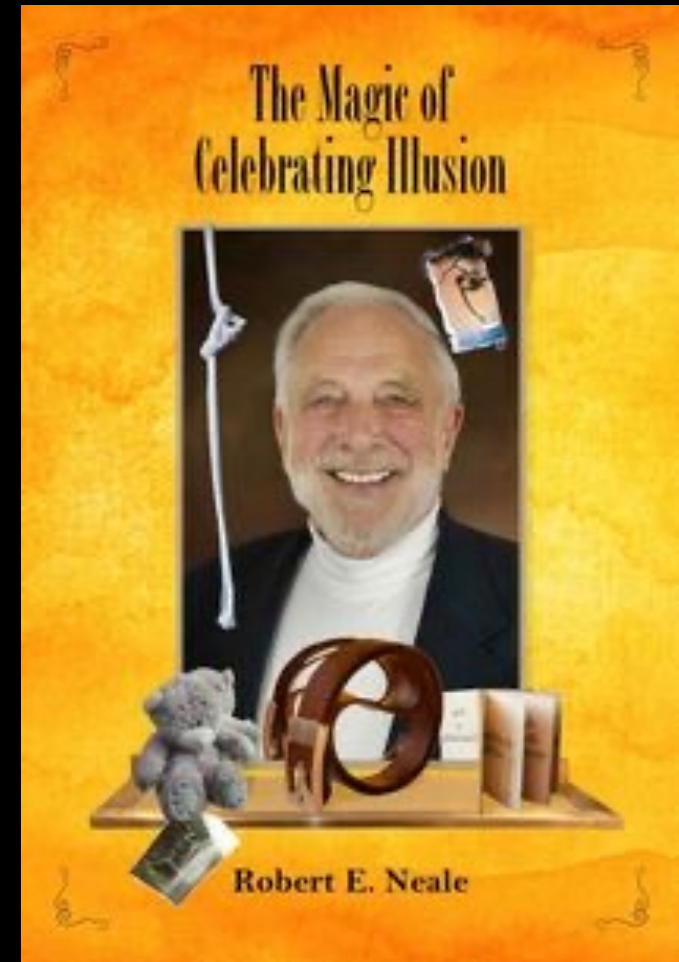


# *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

## Four Approaches to Magic:

- 1) Playing the role of a magician
- 2) Suspending disbelief in the supernatural
- 3) Treating novelty by suspending familiarity
- 4) Exposing the abuse of magic by criminals in daily life



## Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

### 1) Playing the role of a magician

But *what* role?

“Merlin, Faust, early indigenous shamans, western occult or ceremonial practitioners?”

[To do so seems “pandering” to special groups considered “childish” or “primitive.”]



## Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

2) Suspending disbelief in the supernatural

But disbelief in *what*?

Fairies, elves, monsters, demons, and angels, even gods and whatever other supernatural beings lurk about in our imagination? Only 'bizarrists' might be interested."



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

3) Treating novelty by suspending familiarity

Charles Beaumont's 'old magician':  
"Just open your eyes. There's magic in the air. Show me a tree, I'll show you a trick no magician alive could ever do."



# Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

## 4) Exposing the magic of criminals in daily life

- Phony spiritualists
- Crooked healers



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### 4) Exposing the magic of criminals in daily life

“On stage, illusion is theater, a space and time for conscious agreement between performers and audiences for illusion to occur.”

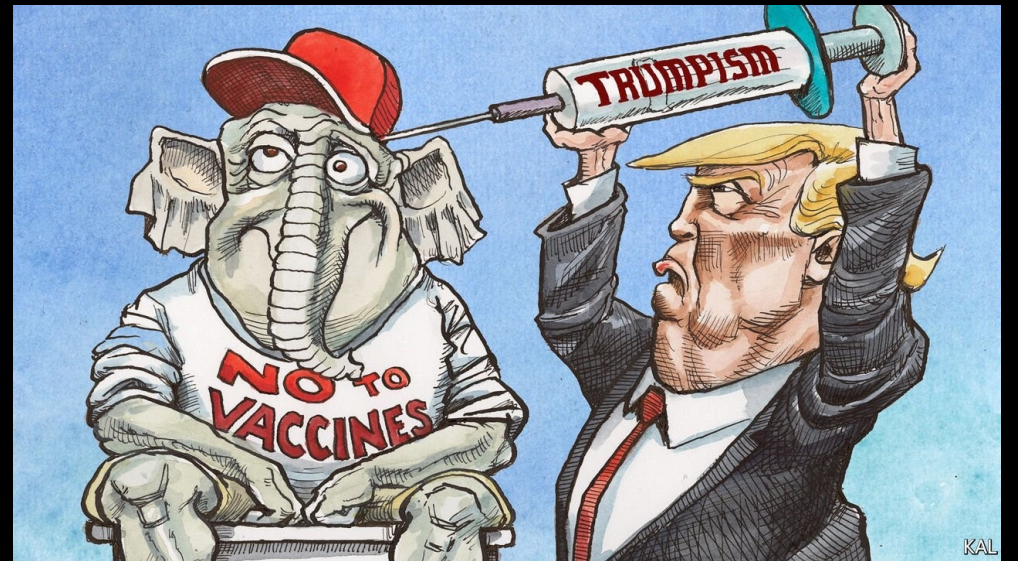


## Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

4) Exposing the magic of criminals in daily life

“Illusion on stage is safe, whereas the illusions created by swindlers to steal our money and self-respect and the illusions created by fools who believe in anti-scientific nonsense is dangerous and destructive.”



## Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

4) Exposing the magic of criminals in daily life

“Some stage magicians . . . have gained great notoriety and even made a living by duplicating and exposing on stage the illusions created wittingly or unwittingly by others off stage.”





## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

4) Exposing the magic of criminals in daily life

“These exposé magicians do bridge the gap between on stage and off stage magic, but . . . it is by seeing their expertise as exceptional.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

4) Exposing the magic of criminals in daily life

Critique of the “exposé magicians”:

- 1) They ignore other kinds of illusions in everyday life.
- 2) Delight in exposing “non-scientific thinking”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

Bob's redefinition of the role and purpose of the magician:

“The stage magician is an actor playing the part of audience magicians . . . He is a mirror that reflects the magic performed daily by everyone.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

Bob's redefinition of the role and purpose of the magician:

“What is exceptional to me is the stage magician who understands and performs as if we are all magicians—illusionists—who survive, take pleasure, and find meaning in life, by means of the illusions we create.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

Bob's redefinition of the role and purpose of the magician:

“What is truly exceptional is the one who performs in order to persuade us that such magic runs rampant in our lives and that this is a good thing.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

The Monkey Movement:  
Between Illusion and Disillusion

## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

Imagine a spider monkey hanging by one hand from a tree over a pool of water, a bright full moon in the sky overhead.



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

The monkey vacillates, reaching hesitantly toward the pond to touch the reflection of the moon, and then in doubt, withdrawing his hand, seeking once more the security of the branch.





## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

In a final gesture, the monkey touches the water, destroying the reflection of the moon.



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

The Monkey Movement:  
Between Illusion and Disillusion

“Monkey movement” occurs in many  
manifestations of human behavior.



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

“For me, ideally, spirituality is precisely this action, the perpetual movement between illusion and disillusion.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

“The illusion is the religious perspective of ultimate meaning. The disillusion is common sense reality.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

“Our habit is to get stuck in one segment of the movement or the other, in reaching for the reflection or in the refusal to reach.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

“As the illusioned, we work hard to believe and sustain our beliefs. In all that we do, we are determined to convince ourselves that our religious belief is not a lie and that we are sincere.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

“Or as the disillusioned, we work to disbelieve and to sustain our disbeliefs. All that we do is for the sake of convincing ourselves, and others, that religion is a lie and that religious believers are insincere.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

The Monkey Movement:  
Between Illusion and Disillusion

“As either the illusioned or disillusioned,  
we are constantly teased and tempted.”





## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

“Some of us end up letting go of the branch and diving into the water and drowning in meaning.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

“Others of us end up hanging onto the branch with both hands and dying from thirst for meaning.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

“For me, spirituality is a perpetual movement between illusion and disillusion. . . . Truth lies in creating fiction.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

### The Monkey Movement: Between Illusion and Disillusion

“One truth is found by creating fiction.  
Another truth deceives by creating  
fiction. . . . Truth is a back-and-forth  
dynamic process, not an outcome of  
some sort. . . . Process is our most  
important product.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

The Three Magicians: The Mother, the Child,  
and the Father

The “Mother Magician” is the giver  
of life, the nurturer, who provides  
the child its first illusions.



# Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

## The Three Tasks of the "Mother Magician":

- 1) Providing opportunities for illusion
- 2) Providing opportunities for disillusion
- 3) Enabling the "Teddy Bear Illusion"



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

The Task of the “Father Magician”:  
The Initiation of the Child

- 1) Playing tricks to deceive
- 2) Exposing tricks to disillusion to stimulate the child’s initial “monkey movement” between illusion and disillusion



# Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

The Role of the Stage Magician:  
To offer three types of illusions –

- 1) Neutral illusions to provide distractions for the audience
- 2) Abnormal (destructive) illusions to satisfy the performer at the expense of the audience
- 3) Creative illusions to provoke wonder in the audience





## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

The Role of the Stage Magician:  
To offer three types of illusions –

In creative illusions, the exceptional Stage Magician functions as both the “mother/father” magicians to create illusion as well as disillusion that invites the audience to recognize the conditions of magical thinking in their own experiences.



## Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

The Consequence of a Parental Magic Show:

- 1) The celebration of illusion
- 2) The celebration of disillusion, and the movement between them.

“The members of the audience experience this on the stage and recall their experience of it off stage. It is a theater of wonder about the nature of our humanity.”



## Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion

---

A closing literary allusion from Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*:

Tom:

“I have tricks in my pockets. I have things up my sleeves. But I am the opposite of a stage magician. He gives you illusion that has the appearance of truth. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion.”



## *Chapter 4: The Grand Performance Illusion*

---

The “Final Truth”:

“The final belief is to believe in a fiction, which you know to be a fiction, there being nothing else. The exquisite truth is to know that it is a fiction and that you believe it willingly.” . . . “And to know that it is fiction, that there is nothing else, and that one believes in it openly and willingly is a glorious wonder.”

---

## Session 6: “Magic & the Magicians”

---

- 1) An Introduction to Magic - Mike
- 2) An Introduction to the Magicians – Geoff

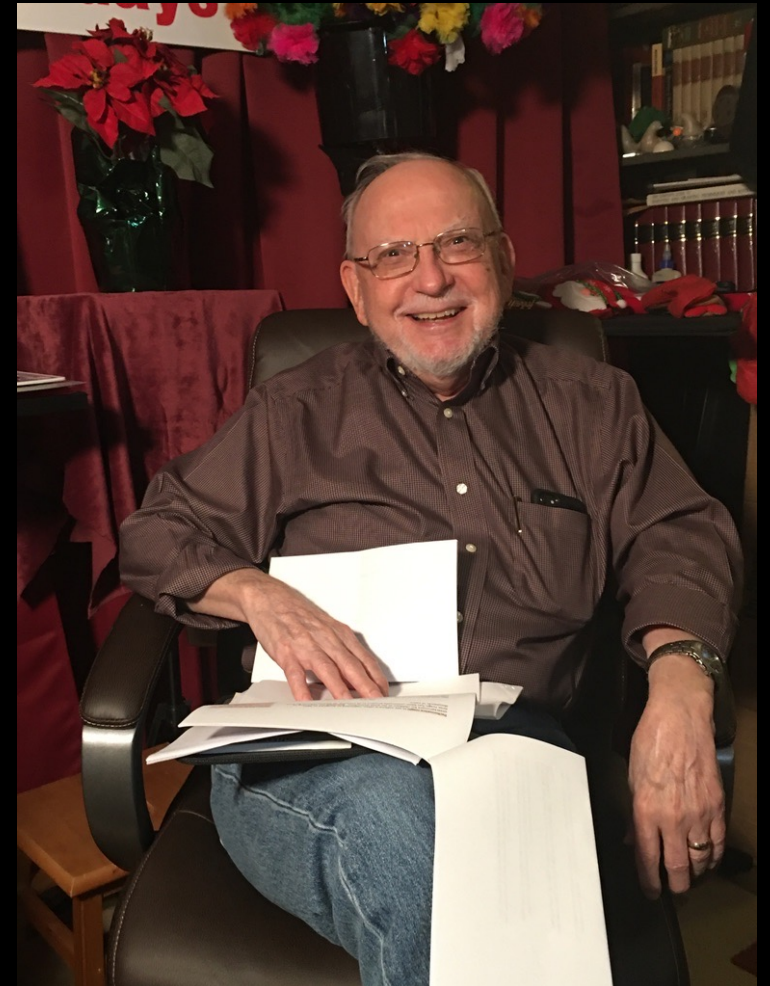


# Session 3: Looking ahead . . . (Mike)

---

Homework:

Chapter 3: Meaningful impossibility  
155-209



# The Backstory for this Workshop:

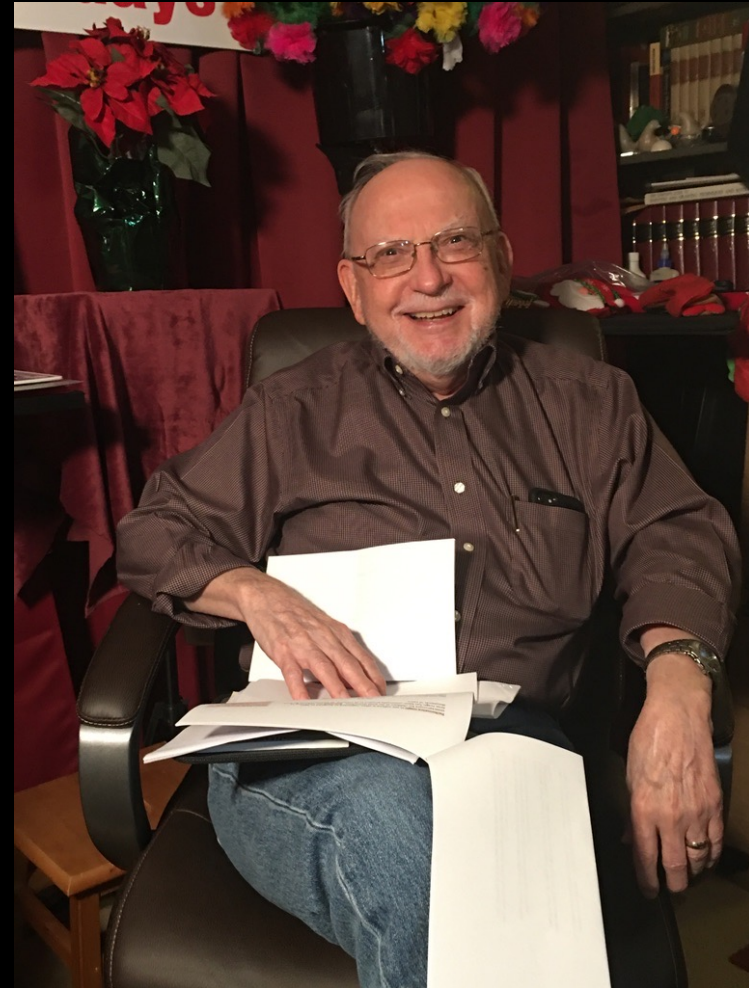
---

Personal discussions in DeSoto

Identification of “themes”

Magic & Meaning Conferences,  
*McBride Magic & Mystery School*  
Las Vegas

PEPTalk Presentations



# The Backstory for this Workshop:

---

## The Index— Identification of the 13 “themes”

Play

The Trickster Spirit

Paul Pruyser’s Three World Perspective

The Imagination

Wonder

Illusions

**Magic**

**The Magician(s)**

Off-Stage/On-Stage Magic

Performance

Psychological Classification of Magic

The Ethical Heart of Spiritual Illusions: “The Four Falls”

Life and Death and . . .

THE 2018 MAGIC & MEANING CONFERENCE

## The Robert E. Neale Index

---

A Resource for the Study of Robert E. Neale’s  
Trilogy of Magic

Prepared by Michael Smith and Geoffrey Grimes  
9/5/2018



Check us out:

---

The Website —

“Celebrating Illusions”

A Website Dedicated to the  
Magic of Robert E. Neale

[www.nealemagic.info](http://www.nealemagic.info)



Special thanks to Jeff and Abigail McBride for their inspiration for our study of Bob Neale and to Larry Hass, Bob's editor and publisher -

Consider becoming a member of what the BBC has described as "the world's most prestigious magic school."

Go to:

[www.magicalwisdom.com](http://www.magicalwisdom.com) and click on "Become a member"!



A very special thanks to

Dr. Robert “Bob” and Gail Neale for their encouragement and blessing for this workshop

Dr. Larry Hass, Dean, The McBride Magic and Mystery School, Publisher, *Theory and Art of Magic Press*, host of the “Index” and for all his support and encouragement.

David-Reed Brown, Instructor, The McBride Magic and Mystery School, whose inspiration and support has made this seminar series possible

And the friends of Bob Neale who have contributed to the recording and transmission of Bob’s work over the years.

