

# “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 8: *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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

Play

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THE 2018 MAGIC & MEANING CONFERENCE

### The Robert E. Neale Index

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

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

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## Session 8: *Psychological Classifications*

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- 1) Being
- 2) Doing
- 3) Relating



# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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Sources:

*The Magic Mirror*, Robert E. Neale with David Parr, 2002, pp. 66-73.

*An Essay on Magic*, Robert E. Neale, 2015, pp. 174-209.





# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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Bob's definition of magic:

“Magic is the performance of imaginative mastery which grants symbolic power over life and death by means of ritual control over change in the artful play of impossible effects of *being, doing, and relating.*”



# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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Existential theologian Paul Tillich (1886-1965) had “a powerful and lasting influence” on Bob, first as a student and later as a faculty colleague at Union Seminary.

One of Tillich’s theological constructs is “polarities of human existence.” These polarities are found in Neale’s classification system.



# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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Summary of Bob's Existential/Psychological Classification:

Being:

- Existing and not existing
- Characteristics changing and not changing
- Holding together and falling apart



# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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Summary of Bob's Existential/Psychological Classification:

Doing:

- Moving or not moving in space
- Moving or not moving in time
- Function according to one's nature or not





# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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Summary of Bob's Existential/Psychological Classification:

Relating:

- Attracting or repelling
- Agreeing or disagreeing
- Union or disunion



# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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## Basic Meaning of Tricks

### Being:

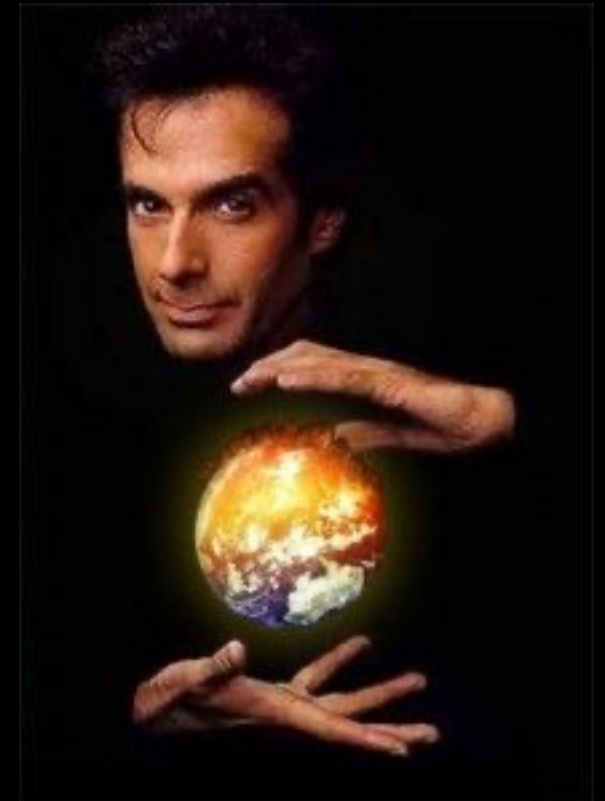
*Integrity overcoming disintegration, granting awe and faith*

### Doing:

*Movement overcoming stasis, granting passion and hope*

### Relating:

*Connection overcoming separation, granting vision and love*

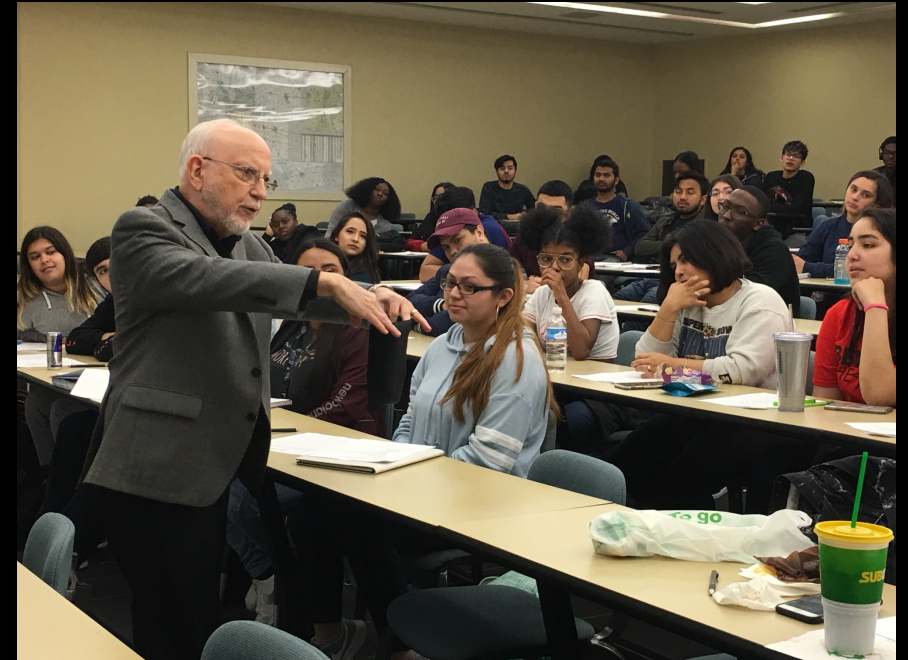


# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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“Our performances in this spirit communicate our faith, hope, and love. This spirit is a blessing offered to the audience.

The onstage magician is the one whose performances are blessings offered to all the off-stage magicians. Neither the performer nor the audience has to be conscious of the gift, but it needs to occur.”



# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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## Being:

### Examples of Magical Effects

- Existing and not existing –
  - 1) Productions
  - 2) Vanishes
  - 3) Control



# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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## Being:

### Examples of Magical Effects

- Changing and not changing –
  - 1) Transformation
  - 2) Penetration
  - 3) Physical anomaly
  - 4) Control





# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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## Being:

### Examples of Magical Effects

- Holding together and falling apart –
  - 1) Restoration
  - 2) Invulnerability
  - 3) Control



# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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## Doing:

### Examples of Magical Effects

- Moving or not moving in space –
  - 1) Transposition (change in location)
  - 2) Identification (specific discovery)
  - 3) Anti-gravity (levitation and change in weight)
  - 4) Extra-sensory perception (unusual perception, other than mind)
  - 5) (Sharpe) clairvoyance
  - 6) Thought reading (mental perception, mind reading)



# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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## Doing:

### Examples of Magical Effects

- Moving or not moving in time –
  - 1) Prediction (foretelling the future)
  - 2) Extra-sensory perception (unusual perception, other than mind)
  - 3) (Sharpe) rapid germination



# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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## Doing:

### Examples of Magical Effects

- Functioning according to one's nature or not –
  - 1) Animation (movement imparted to the inanimate)
  - 2) Anti-gravity (levitation and change in weight)
  - 3) Control (mind over the inanimate)
  - 4) Extra-sensory perception (unusual perception, other than mind)





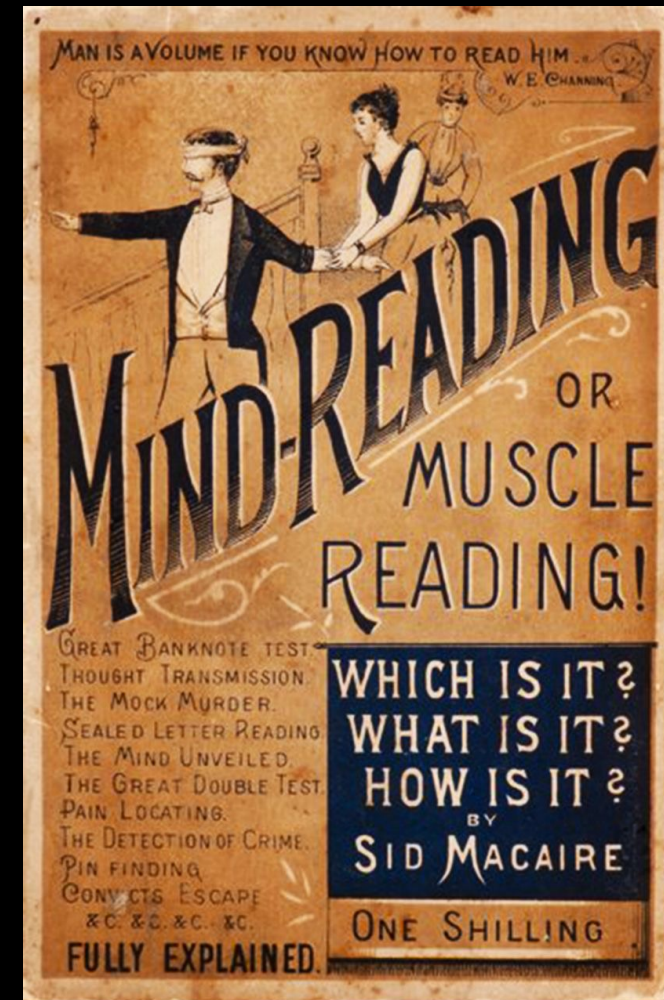
# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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## Relating:

### Examples of Magical Effects

- Attracting or repelling –
  1. Attraction
  2. Thought transmission
  3. Spectator failure
- Agreeing or disagreeing –
  - 1) Sympathetic reaction
  - 2) Union or disunion





# *Psychological Classifications of Magic*

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“At the very least, a psychological classification of magic effects urges us to consider and discuss the underlying symbolic themes of stage magic.

Symbolism, in my opinion, is the key to understanding the hidden charms of stage magic, and its enduring allure and appeal . . . It is ceremonial theater of a most impressive kind, in which actor and audience mutually agree to create the semblance of power over life and death.”



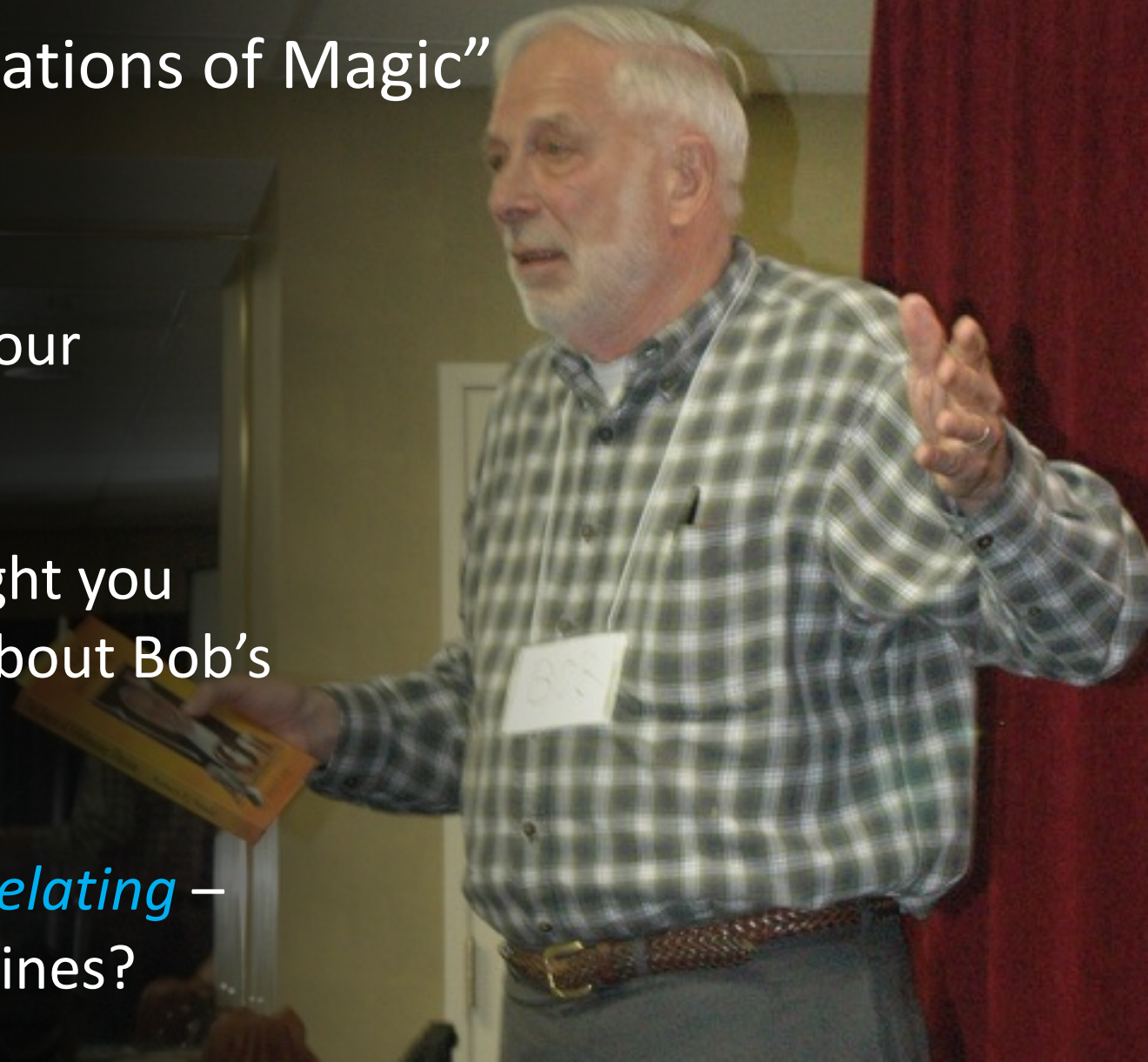
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## Session 8: “Psychological Classifications of Magic”

Questions for discussion:

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1. What classification of tricks do your audiences find most appealing?
2. What changes in your shows might you consider making after thinking about Bob’s classifications?
3. Which category – *being*, *doing*, *relating* – guides you in selecting your routines?



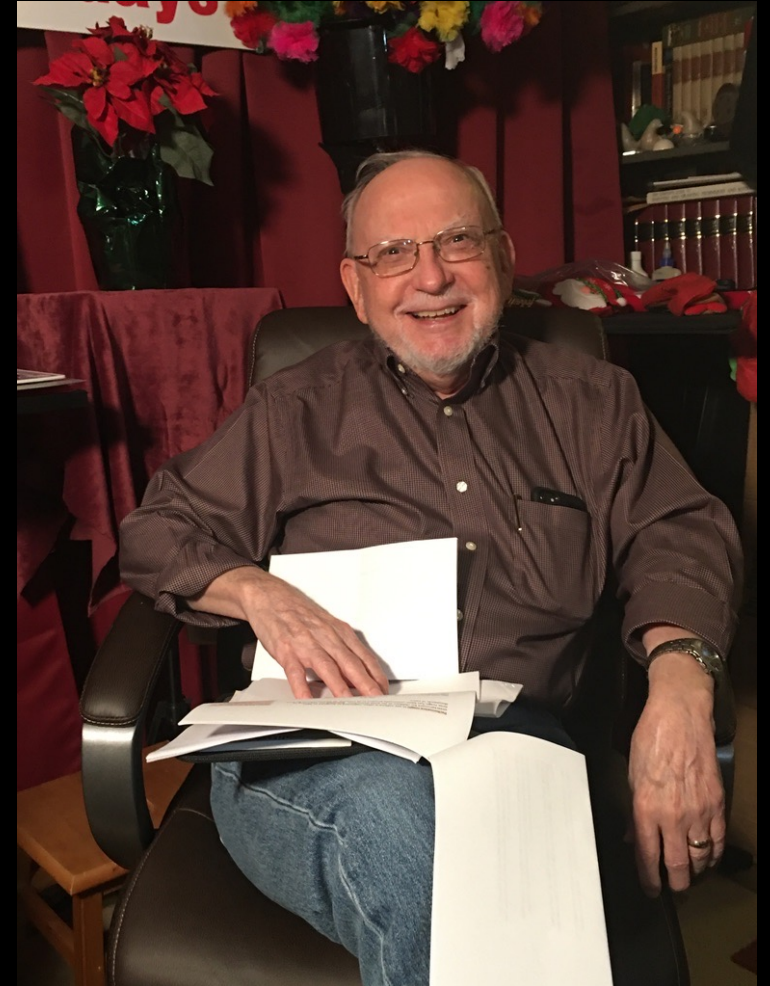
## Session 9: Looking ahead . . . (Mike)

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Doctor Mike's questions for homework:

In *Magic: Inside Out*, Bob includes his dark, Viet Nam war –related routine, “Zippo Lighter.”

1. Can you imagine working a theme relating to death into your magical performances?
2. Can you see themes of life and rebirth in your magical performances?





# The Backstory for this Workshop:

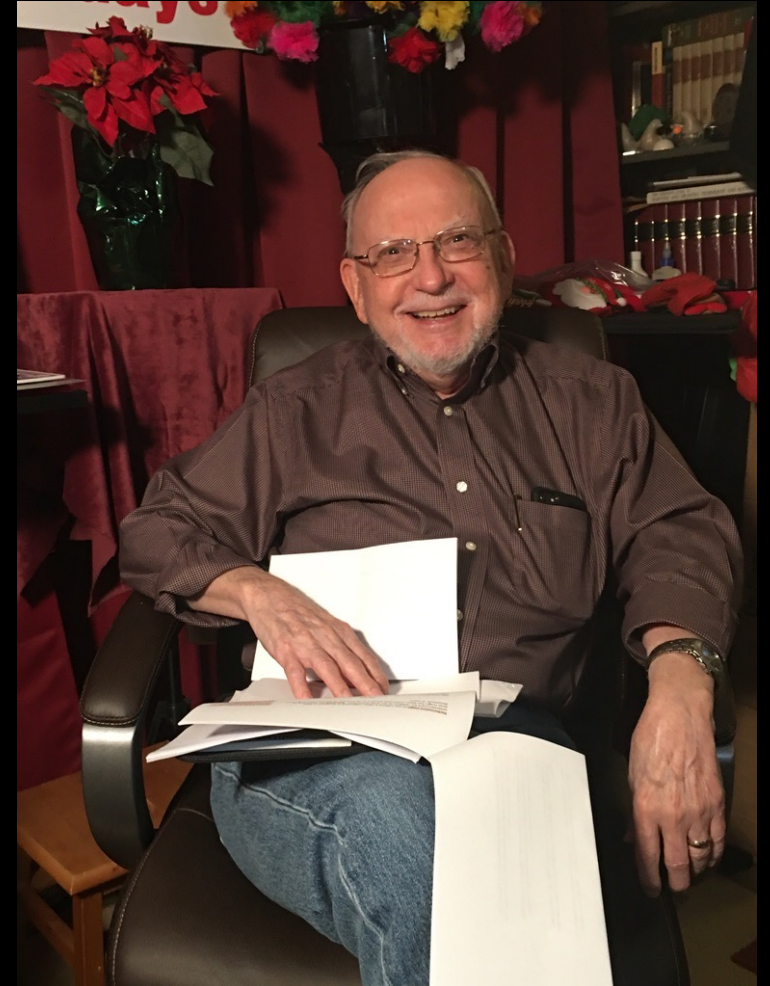
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Personal discussions in DeSoto

Identification of “themes”

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

PEPTalk Presentations



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# Check us out:

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## 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

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