

**On the motivational powers of belief and imagination.
Wise Pens, Evil Cardigans, Powerful Reptiles, and Other Strange Things**

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I discuss a class of actions very pervasive in our lives, which I take to reveal something important on the nature and powers of the imagination. I call them ‘superstitious actions’, using this label in a somewhat stipulative way, which includes not only traditional superstitions – like crossing fingers or knocking on wood, but also a variety of more idiosyncratic practices – like the propitiatory rituals of athletes or gamblers, the compulsive actions of some OCD-sufferers, so-called ‘expressive behaviours’, and even some forms of conspiracy-hunting. Actions of these sorts are generally accounted for in doxastic terms: we commonly ascribe to each other superstitious ‘beliefs’, obsessive ‘beliefs’, ‘beliefs’ in conspiracy theories, and so on. However, recent psychological research provides grounds to challenge these ascriptions, showing that superstitious attitudes lack such key features of belief as sensitivity to evidence and holistic inferential integration, and are therefore best understood non-doxastically. In particular, the influential ‘dual-system account of magical thinking’ defended by Risen (2016) – according to which superstitions are formed via the motivationally biased heuristics of System 1, and subsequently maintained by the ‘deliberate acquiescence’ of System 2 – reveals striking functional similarities between superstitious attitudes and imagination. On this basis, and having discounted alternative explanations in terms of novel states like ‘aliefs’ or ‘credences’, I argue that most superstitious actions are best understood in terms of directly motivating imaginings: that is, as cases where we attempt to satisfy our *real* desires in *imaginative* ways. I conclude by considering the implications of this account for our characterisation of imagination’s motivational power, as well as its normative implications for our assessment of superstitions’ rationality.