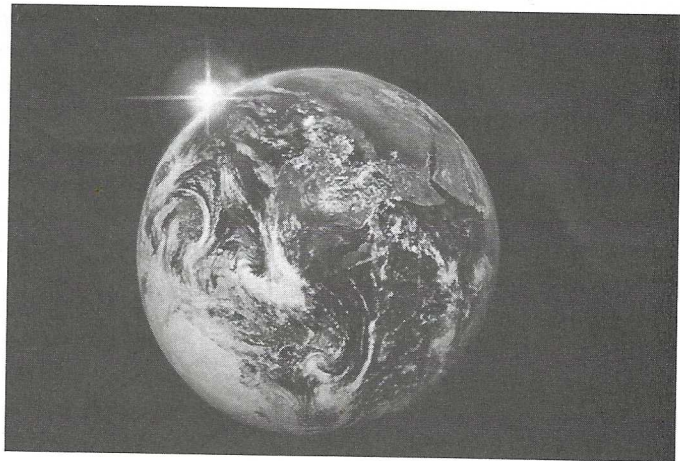


after day and see the sun (or moon) rise and set in close to the same place, it appears that these celestial bodies are revolving around the Earth, especially considering the fact that we don't feel the world around us moving. Furthermore, calendars predicting the change of seasons, as well as the location and phases of these celestial bodies (such as the moon), were quite accurate. However, although the experts were able to predict the movements of celestial objects quite well and develop extremely accurate calendars, they had absolutely no understanding of what was actually happening. Later, when some individuals tried to convince the majority that they were wrong, specifically that the Earth was not the center of the universe, they were condemned as heretics and persecuted, even though their theoretical models were correct.

The same type of argument could be made about the Earth being flat; at one time, observations and all existing models seemed to claim it as proven and true. Some disagreed and decided to test their own predictions, which is how America was discovered by European explorers. Still, many who believed the Earth was round were persecuted or cast out of mainstream society in Europe at the time.

Two things should be clear: Theories can be erroneous, and accurate predictions can be made (e.g., early calendars and moon and star charts) using them, even though there is no true understanding of what is actually happening. One way to address both of these issues is to base knowledge and theories on scientific observation and testing. All respected theories of crime in the modern era are based on science; thus, we try to avoid buying into and applying theories that are inaccurate, and we continuously refine and improve our theories (based on findings from scientific testing) to gain a better understanding of what causes people to commit crime. Criminology, as a science, always allows and even welcomes criticism of its existing theoretical models. There is no emphasis on authority but rather on the scientific method and the quality of the observations that take place in testing the predictions. All scientific theories can be improved, and they are improved only through observation and empirical testing.



▲ **Image 1.1** Theories of the Earth as the center of the universe were dominant for many centuries, and scientists who proposed that the Earth was not the center of the universe were often persecuted. Over time, the theory was proved false.

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What Is Crime?

Definitions of crime vary drastically. For example, some take a **legalistic approach** to defining crime, including only acts that are specifically prohibited in the legal codes of a given jurisdiction. The problem with such a definition is that what is a crime in one jurisdiction is not necessarily a crime in other jurisdictions. To clarify, some acts, such as murder and armed robbery, are against the law in virtually all countries and all regions of the United States, across time and culture. These are known as acts of ***mala in se***, literally meaning *evil in itself*.² Typically, these crimes involve serious violence and shock the society in which they occur.

Other crimes are known as acts of ***mala prohibita***, which has the literal meaning of *evil because prohibited*. This term acknowledges that these crimes are not inherently evil acts; they are bad only because the law says so.³ A good example is prostitution, which is illegal in most of the United States but is quite legal and even licensed in most

²Ibid.

³Ibid.