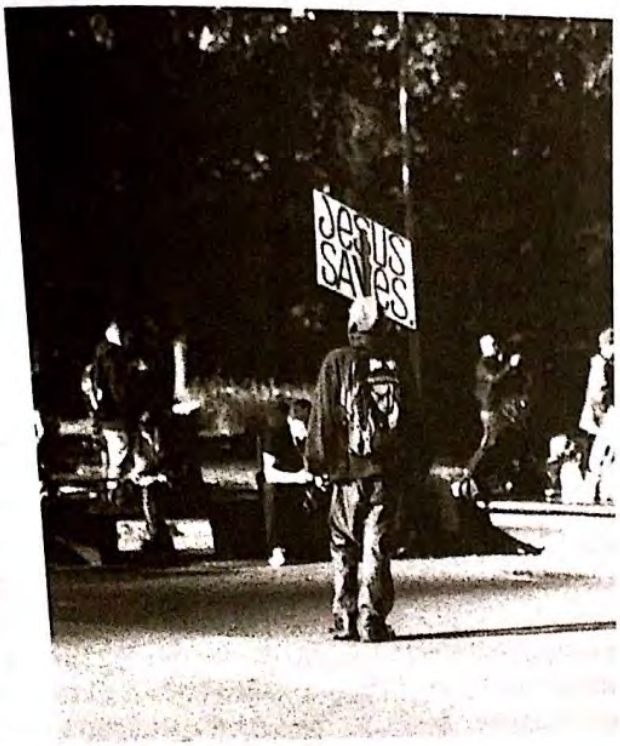
CHAPTER

10

Unconventional Beliefs



Source: Erich Goode

PICTURE THE INQUISITION, when authorities tortured and killed people for holding beliefs that were considered anathema to the Church. Consider the Renaissance era, when the establishment in numerous Protestant regimes drowned or burned witches at the stake on charges involving all manner of heresy, real or invented. In the past, holding unconventional beliefs was a serious form of deviance indeed. Today, in Western countries, we no longer imprison or execute cognitive deviants, but, as recently as the 1950s, the American criminal justice system deported, jailed, or otherwise punished communists as a threat to our very existence. Deviance textbooks tend to focus on behavioral violations of norms, but holding and expressing deviant *beliefs* can get the individual in trouble as readily as engaging in widely disliked, unacceptable, or wrongful acts. Hence, what's referred to as "cognitive deviance" or "unconventional beliefs" is as important as behavioral deviance (Perrin, 2015). Not all expressions of belief lead to specific reactions, but even the mere

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expression of those beliefs *may* result in negative reactions from audiences. Is atheism deviant? Indeed it is! In the United States, year after year, polls indicate that roughly 80 percent of the population believes in God, and a substantial proportion of theists feel that someone who doesn't believe in God is not a moral person and "might not be fully trustworthy"; hence, these audiences—the voters—might not vote for a self-admitted atheistic political candidate, for instance, for president. The news polls deliver to our non-believing presidential aspirant is not encouraging. In a Pew Research Center poll conducted in 2014, 53 percent of the respondents said that they would be less likely to vote for a presidential candidate if he or she is an atheist. Among all the categories the poll asked about, respondents were *least* supportive of the atheist; the "gay or lesbian" candidate drew only a 27 percent "less likely" vote; someone who once used marijuana, a 22 percent less likely; and a candidate who had had an extramarital affair, 35 percent. White evangelicals said they were 82 percent less likely to support a candidate if he or she does not believe in God; among the religiously unaffiliated, only 24 percent said this—and, for the latter, 64 percent said it "wouldn't matter." As we've seen, beliefs and notions of right and wrong vary by social category and historical time period. And political ideas make up a major sector of our belief system. The long and short of it is that, in the United States, among mainstream voters, a professed atheist has very little chance of winning a presidential election, and, other things being equal, atheism has very little moral traction with believers.

Cognitive deviance often reveals cultural differences so vast that, when revealed and reactions play themselves out, historically, people on one side of a divide have denounced those on the other, and some have even killed them; relations between and among nations, based partly on clashes in belief systems, are stretched to the breaking point; international trade is terminated, and millions of dollars of revenue are lost to one or the other side of the dispute; major institutions are undermined or dismantled; and riots break out in the street, angry crowds smash windows, burn buildings, and hang figures in effigy. Such unbridgeable differences between contending parties speak eloquently of the relativity of deviance, of cultural and subcultural *definitions* of deviance, of divergent and clashing norms about what views can and cannot, and should and should not, be expressed, and what the appropriate reaction is when such norms are violated. Beliefs are every bit as much the meat and potatoes of the fare of the sociologist of deviance as behavior is; they should not be ignored by sociologists of deviance. Cognitive or "intellectual" deviance often generates enormous hostility and punitive official reaction, and the exercise of power, or the manifestation of powerless, on one side or the other.

A striking example of *mutual deviantization* or mutual vilification may be seen on the Internet under the category "deviant beliefs." Googling that phrase reveals that, in enormous profusion, leaders and followers of one branch or wing of Islam post denunciations of the tenets of another, insisting that their rivals and enemies are intellectually, cognitively, and spiritually misguided, with each side purporting to affirm the "true" expression of Islam. These sites are given titles such as "Deviant Sects You Should Beware of," "A Refutation of the Deviant Beliefs of," "Spreading Deviant Beliefs of the Almighty," "The Deviant Beliefs that Drive the Followers of," "The Deviant Nature of Preacher Exposed," and so on. For the non-Muslim, this thicket of charges and counter-charges is bewildering, impossible to untangle, but the struggle to establish the hegemony of one interpretation and the falsity or illegitimacy of the others is endless.

Of course, in hierarchical power contexts, more hegemonic structures are able to effectively define certain beliefs as false—and, hence, *deviant*—in ways that scattered, powerless, and marginal individuals cannot. In Iran, China, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia, government censors block access to certain websites; in China alone, the government employs tens of thousands of censors. Sites offer software that allows users to evade government censors; hundreds of thousands of Iranians surf the uncensored web (Markoff, 2009, p. 1).

In Rome, Richard Williamson, an excommunicated Catholic bishop who had earlier made a speech denying the existence of Nazi gas chambers and the extent, even the very fact, of the Holocaust, under pressure from the Vatican, apologized

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for having made such schismatic statements. His statements did not, however, address the issue of whether he still thought his statements were truthful. Still, observers wondered whether such a rapid recantation was enough to stop the erosion of the Church's moral authority caused by his original statement.

Did NASA land astronauts on the moon, on six occasions? Or was the moon mission a hoax, a conspiracy perpetrated by nefarious politicians and their agents to bolster the sagging morale of an increasingly pessimistic public during dark times? Polls indicate that about 6 percent of the American population believes that the moon landings never happened, that they were staged on a secret movie set somewhere in the desert for political purposes. Bart Sibrel, a filmmaker and director of "A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Moon," has made a career of moon-landing denial. He even pestered astronaut Buzz Aldrin by waving a Bible in his face and calling him "a coward, and a liar, and a thief." Mr. Aldrin became exasperated to the point where he punched Sibrel in the face; law enforcement refused to charge the astronaut with a crime. "I have suffered only persecution and financial loss," Sibrel told a reporter. "I've lost visitation with my son. I've been expelled from churches. All because I believe the Moon landings are fraudulent" (Schwartz, 2009).

Cognitive or intellectual deviance is the expression of beliefs that are contrary to the views of specific audiences, one being, of course, the mainstream. Such expressions of belief are deviant *in context*, so that criticisms of Mormon theology —which are themselves deviant to the majority of Americans—would be deviant *among Mormons*. Some beliefs expressed are hostile to established interests, the ruling elite, the regime in power; some are hostile to the views of the majority of the public; and some, to those of particular sectors or social circles within the society.

It might seem controversial to argue that beliefs and their expression make up a form of deviance. After all, isn't it true that, though you can get arrested for enacting certain *behavior*, you can't get arrested for holding, or even expressing, a certain *belief*? How can holding unconventional beliefs be a form of deviance? Doesn't everyone have a right to believe whatever they please? Isn't what you believe "nobody's business but your own"?

Well, ideally, but not in practice. First of all, you *can* be arrested for expressing a belief. Not in contemporary Western society, but in past centuries, yes, one could be arrested for expressing many beliefs. In Europe, a few hundred years ago, the air was rank from the burning flesh of heretics and blasphemers, or supposed heretics and blasphemers. And over the centuries, even in the West, religious wars have led to the slaughter of millions of Catholics, Protestants, unbelievers, Muslims, and Jews. And people are still arrested elsewhere—Iran, China, Saudi Arabia, parts of Africa, and so on—for expressing certain views. Even more important for our purposes, *informal* reactions to definitions of right and wrong verify that expressing certain beliefs is deviant. Cognitive deviance may not be an appropriate subject for a *criminology* course, but it is for a *deviance* course.

Many audiences *do* react negatively to the expression of certain beliefs. Certain audiences do *not* feel that beliefs and their expression are "nobody's business but your own." In the West, even if people aren't arrested for expressing unconventional views today, they can be criticized, denounced, and lose their jobs. Almost as many—and, in some eras of history, even more—people have been punished, stigmatized, and condemned for expressing their beliefs as for engaging in a certain type of behavior. One of Erving Goffman's types of stigma concerns "blemishes of individual character," a major category of which includes "treacherous and rigid beliefs" (1963, p. 4). And a belief that one person regards as "treacherous and rigid," another sees as just and righteous, and vice versa. So, *of course*, holding beliefs that wander off the beaten path is a form of deviance. William Newman identified three minority groups: behavioral, cognitive, and physical. "Behavioral" minorities varied from the norm in conduct; an example: homosexuals. "Cognitive" minorities vary from the norm with respect to their beliefs. An example: members of religious sects and cults. And "physical" minorities varied from the norm in appearance: for example, the handicapped (Newman, 1973, p. 35). Holding unconventional beliefs is an *important* form of deviance.

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Cognition refers to knowing—that is, what one believes to be true. It encompasses "beliefs, disbeliefs, guesses, suspicions, judgments, and so forth" (Douglas and Waksler, 1982, p. 364). When sociologists refer to "knowing," we do not imply that these views are empirically correct (or that they are wrong). What we mean is that people *think* that they are true. Cognition refers to the belief that a given assertion or claim is valid. Cognitive deviance refers to holding beliefs that are unconventional and non-normative, which, in some social circles, causes their believers to be shunned, isolated, marginalized, rendered powerless, criticized, condemned, or punished. And it is the *expression* of beliefs that gets the believer in trouble. After all, the belief has to be *known* to disapproving audiences.

With respect to the central analytic features of deviance—what makes something *deviant*—in principle, deviant beliefs are identical to deviant acts. The same basic principles apply: Someone, or a category of persons, is regarded by the members of one or more audiences as violating a rule or norm, and the members of those audiences are likely to condemn or punish them. The content of the belief is less important than the fact that that belief is deemed normatively and even morally unacceptable. Thus, being an atheist violates a rule that says one must believe in God; belief in creationism violates the principles of scientific reasoning; belief in evolution violates a literal reading of the Bible; belief in alien spaceships violates a law that says that objects cannot travel faster than the speed of light; and so on. Because specific audiences hold certain beliefs to be non-normative, unconventional, unacceptable, scandalous, heretical, vulgar, unseemly, improper, and/or just plain wrong, they isolate, stigmatize, condemn, and/or punish the persons who hold them. Of course, precisely the beliefs that *one* audience finds unconventional *another* may accept as normatively correct. In these respects, holding unconventional beliefs is no different from engaging in unconventional behavior. Both result in stigma and condemnation. In other words, social rules apply, "not only to how one behaves but also *how and what one thinks*" (Douglas and Waksler, 1982, p. 366). And to the extent that audiences treat others negatively—for instance, that they believe them to be immoral, unpatriotic, and, let's say, refuse to vote for them if they are a political candidate—"how one thinks" is a form of deviance.

It is not always a simple matter to separate beliefs from behavior. Often, unacceptable beliefs *translate into* or *become a basis for* unacceptable behavior. Someone who holds a certain belief announces to the world that he or she has the potential to act in a certain way. In other words, the *believer* can become an *actor*.

The belief that Jews are parasites who are organized into an international conspiracy to enslave the rest of the world (Webman, 2011) is far more than a "mere" belief: Some members of organized groups who hold such beliefs have committed overt violence against Jews. In the 1950s and 1960s, many politically mainstream Americans feared and stigmatized communists, not solely because of their unconventional political ideology, but also because they sincerely believed that communism was actively dedicated to the destruction of everything they valued: religion, spiritual values, the conventional family, democratic elections, the work ethic, a free market economy, a free press—in other words, that which defined the "American way of life." Hence, audiences may label or condemn people who hold unconventional beliefs because they fear that these believers pose a clear and present danger to the way of life—perhaps the very physical existence—of right-thinking people everywhere. Hence, many cognitive belief systems are not deviant *merely* because they violate mainstream notions of what's true. Their proponents are *also* regarded as deviants because of the behavior those beliefs could potentially call forth. The deviant nature of terrorists is not that they criticize the U.S. government; it is that they are likely to commit violence against innocent victims. Still, *independent of behavior*, the mere expression of unconventional beliefs is a form of deviance.

Cognitive deviance overlaps with mental disorder. Psychiatrists and clinical psychologists regard the expression of certain beliefs as a manifestation or an indicator of a pathological psychic condition. For instance, schizophrenics are said to suffer from *delusions* and *hallucinations*. One man describes a transmitter that has been implanted in his teeth that receives signals from a distant galaxy commanding him to deliver a message to everyone

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on Earth about a coming catastrophe. A woman believes that her thoughts have been sucked out of her mind by a "phrenological vacuum extractor" (Kring et al., 2014). A man believes that X-rays have entered his body through his neck, passed down to his waist, and settled in his genitals, preventing him from getting an erection. A woman claims that she is "just a puppet who is manipulated by cosmic strings. When the strings are pulled my body moves and I cannot prevent it." Clearly, then, people who are diagnosed as having a mental disorder often hold deviant beliefs.

Just as there are parallels between mental disorder and cognitive deviance, however, there are differences as well. Schizophrenia is nearly always accompanied by a number of other disturbances, in addition to cognitive delusions and hallucinations. Some of these include flat or inappropriate emotions, bizarre motor activity, and the use of jumbled words ("word salad") and thoughts. Clinical depression, too, is marked by inappropriate beliefs, but in addition, it is a *mood* disorder characterized by feelings of sadness, dread, apprehension, worthlessness, guilt, and anhedonia, or an inability to take pleasure in life.

In contrast, *by itself*, cognitive deviance, or holding unconventional beliefs, is not necessarily linked with any psychiatric disorder. Mental disorder and cognitive deviance are *empirically* related but *definitionally* separate and distinct. In other words, although mental health professionals would classify many cognitive deviants as mentally disordered, and many of the persons they classify as mentally disordered would also be regarded as cognitive deviants, neither category demands or necessitates the other. Most people who hold empirically and cognitively erroneous beliefs are, from a psychiatric point of view, psychiatrically normal. Moreover, many beliefs are not even empirically verifiable one way or another; hence, *on what grounds* does the skeptic judge a given belief outside the scientific realm as a sign of abnormality?

Beliefs are not deviant simply because of their content. No belief, however bizarre it might seem to us, is *inherently* or *objectively* deviant. A belief is deviant in two ways—one, normatively, and two, reactively. In other words, one, because it violates the normative tenets of the dominant belief system, or simply a different belief system, and two, because its adherents are likely to be condemned or punished by the members of the society at large or specific subgroups within that society, that is, a given "audience." A belief is deviant both because it is *considered* wrong and because its believers are *treated* as socially unacceptable—*in* a given society or collectivity.

The fact that, at one point in time, societies have regarded as heretical or deviant certain ideas, yet later *come to accept them* as true or valid, is readily revealed by a look at the history of religion and science. In 1633, the Catholic Inquisition imposed the penalty of house arrest on Galileo because he argued that the Earth revolved around the sun, an assertion that was contrary at that time to Catholic dogma, which held that the Earth is the center of the universe. In 1854, Viennese physicians ridiculed Ignaz Semmelweis for asserting that physicians could transmit disease to patients after they dissected rotting cadavers; *in* the 1850s, the medical establishment regarded Semmelweis as a deviant. Today, any physician asserting that physicians should *not* wash their hands before thrusting them into patients' bodies would be regarded as the deviant, not to mention medically irresponsible and very possibly criminally liable. Beginning in 1915, and in revisions throughout the 1920s, a German astrophysicist, Alfred Wenger, proposed the theory that, 300 million years ago, the Earth's crust formed one giant continent, Pangaea, which broke apart over time into the continents we know today. They are still drifting and will continue to do so for as long as the Earth exists. For nearly a half-century, Wenger's theory met with scathing criticism, derision, almost uniform hostility; it was not until the 1960s that virtually all geologists accepted continental drift and plate tectonics as a valid description of geological processes.

Because of his astronomical statements, *to* the hierarchy of the Catholic Church, *in* the 1600s, Galileo was a cognitive deviant; *because* of his medical claim, *to* physicians, *in* the 1800s, Ignaz Semmelweis was a cognitive deviant; *because* of the publication of his books espousing the theory of continental drift, *to* geologists between 1915 and the 1950s, Alfred Wenger was a cognitive deviant (Ben-Yehuda, 1985). The fact that these theories have proven to be valid is *irrelevant* to the fact that,

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at one time, *to* a certain audience, these theories *were* heretical, and, hence, their creator *was* condemned and punished—and, hence, deviant.

To repeat a point I've made throughout this book: Deviance makes sense *only* with reference to the beliefs and reactions of certain audiences. Beliefs that are regarded as wrong, unacceptable, and deviant in one social circle may be considered right, good, proper, and true in another. In social circles of political radicals, conservatism is unacceptable, objectionable, wrongful—in a word, deviant. Contrarily, among conservatives, radicals are on the hot seat. To the fundamentalist Christian, the atheist is the spawn of Satan, most decidedly a deviant. Turn the picture around: To the atheist, fundamentalist Christians are ignorant, narrow-minded fools. Here, we encounter the process of "mutual deviantization" (Aho, 1994, p. 62).

But let's be clear about this: Deviance is never a *solely* a matter of the word of the members of one social category against the word of another. There are no definitive criteria to settle the matter as to what's "really, truly" deviant. *There is no much thing*. Our basis for determining what's deviant is what Audience A says about Audience B—*and* what Audience B says about Audience A. Yes, we live in a society that is an assemblage of different and mutually antagonistic belief systems. But society is as much a ladder or a hierarchy as a mosaic. This means that some beliefs are more *dominant* or *hegemonic* than others; their adherents have more power and credibility and, hence, can legitimate their beliefs and discredit those of their opponents. To the extent that a particular belief is taught as true in the educational system, it is dominant, legitimate, and credible; to the extent that, when a belief is expressed in schools, its proponents tend to be *disparaged*, that belief is deviant. To the extent that holding a certain belief is a criterion among a majority of the electorate to vote for a given political candidate, it is a dominant belief. To the extent that a substantial segment of the electorate *refuses* to vote for a political candidate because he or she is known to hold a certain view, that view is deviant. To the extent that a given belief is taken for granted as true in the mainstream media, it is dominant; to the extent that holders of a given belief are scorned, rebuked, and ridiculed—that belief is deviant.

In each of society's major institutions, we can locate beliefs that are mainstream, "inside the lines," conventional, dominant, or hegemonic; and we can locate those beliefs that are nonmainstream, outside the lines, beyond the pale, unconventional—in a word, from the societal point of view, *deviant*.

THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF BELIEF SYSTEMS

Are beliefs just beliefs? To put the matter even more emphatically, are beliefs *ever* just beliefs? How does the sociologist approach deviant beliefs? More generally, how do *we*, as students of the sociology of deviance, approach beliefs? As Berger and Luckmann say, the task of sociologists who study beliefs is not to look at beliefs for their own sake, to take them as "just" beliefs, and attempt to prove them right—or, on the other hand, debunk or prove them wrong. Instead, sociologists attempt to understand the social conditions that *generate* or *encourage* them (1966, p. 12). The basic insight of sociology is that beliefs serve social functions that *transcend* their uniqueness *and* their empirical validity or truth value. We argue that the way humans think is rooted in the material and social world. Beliefs usually grow out of real-world conditions and tend to have real-world consequences.

For thousands of years, theorists, philosophers, intellectuals, academics, social scientists, and other observers of social reality have commented on the relationship between the *ideational* world—the world of thoughts, beliefs, and ideas—and the *material* world, such as how people make a living, where they live, and what social categories they belong to and participate in. Theories have been proposed to account for the relationship between the material and the ideational worlds. The central thrust of these writings is that beliefs spring from social conditions, they serve social functions, and they have social consequences.

Most of us think that what we believe comes from our own special, unique individuality. We convince ourselves that our beliefs would be the same, even if we had been subject to very different social influences. Sociologist Joel Charon asks the question, "Why do we believe what we believe?"

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To answer it, he invites the reader to ask the following questions: "If my life had been different, if I had been born at a different time or place, would I still believe in God? Would my beliefs about God be the same as they are now?" (1995, p. 99). Do you really think your beliefs would be the same if you had grown up in a different time and place? If you had grown up two centuries ago, the child of a white slave owner, would you have believed that slavery is evil? If you had been a gentile child in Nazi Germany, would you have believed that Jews are good, decent people who deserve the same rights as everyone else? If you had been born a thousand years ago in the New Guinea highlands, would you have had the same religious beliefs you have now? Or, had you been born on a Polynesian island half a millennium ago, would you have thought that public nudity was immoral? Do you really believe that, in a different society in a different time period, you would have had exactly the same notions of right and wrong and true and false that you have now? "Can you think of *any* idea you believe that does not have primarily a *social* foundation? Is there anything we believe that has not arisen primarily though *interaction* with others?" (p. 99). The first and more or less universally accepted sociological principle of beliefs is that they arise through social interaction with others. In short, *human consciousness is determined by social existence* (Berger and Luckmann, 1966, pp. 5–6).

Karl Marx, a nineteenth-century German intellectual who, for more than a century and a half, had a profound impact on sociology, philosophy, history, and economics, argued that the way we think at a particular time and place is a *reflection* of the economic arrangements of the society in which we live. "Morality, religion, metaphysics, all the rest of ideology and their corresponding forms of consciousness," Marx wrote, "thus no longer retain the semblance of independence. . . . Life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" (Marx and Engels, 1846/1947, pp. 14, 15). And, by "life," Marx meant *economic* life. It is the nature of the economy that determines the nature of a society's art, politics, religion, science, system of justice—in short, the ideational world, the world of beliefs and ideas. Moreover, in any society, it is the dominant social class whose ideas tend to be most influential. "The class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production. . . . The individuals composing the ruling class . . . rule also as thinkers, as producers of ideas, and regulate the production and distribution of the ideas of their age: thus their ideas are the ruling ideas of the epoch" (p. 39).

The influence of Marx's theories has declined considerably during the past generation or so, and in some respects he was dead wrong in a number of his assertions. And today, most social scientists and intellectuals see a much more complex and less deterministic relationship between the economy and beliefs than he did. They argue that ideas can influence the economy as much as the economy can influence ideas and see the many institutions, including art, religion, and politics, as "codeterminate," or equally capable of influencing one another. For instance, Max Weber argued that religious beliefs influence the economic life of a society as much as the other way around. It was ascetic, rationalistic seventeenth-century Protestantism, he said, that stimulated industrial capitalism—a case of ideas generating material conditions rather than the reverse. The Industrial Revolution could not have emerged in a society dominated by religions such as Hinduism and Buddhism, because they denied rationality and the central importance of the material world.

As we've seen, Max Weber wrote of the *elective affinity* people have for certain ideas and beliefs (1946, pp. 62–63, 284–285), that is, the social and material conditions in which they live influence the likelihood that they will be receptive to certain ideas. They do not directly choose (or "elect") their beliefs—they do so indirectly, through their social and material conditions. The privileged classes tend to be attracted to religions that assure them that their status is justified and legitimate. For the poorer strata, religious beliefs (or, alternatively, political beliefs) will be appealing to the extent that these beliefs offer a salvation of compensation, that is, righting the wrongs they feel have been inflicted upon them, whether in this world or the next. The prophecy of seventh-century Islam was especially appealing to warriors. The religious expression that middle-class urban dwellers during early Protestantism found compatible with their way of life was

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practical, rational, based on a mastery of nature and relations with others. Members of the bureaucratic class—whether in ancient Rome or in the contemporary West—have found irrational, ecstatic, or completely otherworldly religious expression unappealing, but are comfortable with a religion that offered ways of controlling the masses (Weber, 1922/1963, pp. 89, 107, 108, 265). Weber sees much more diversity in the ideas of the many social classes in the society than did Marx—who only pictured two social classes. Weber neither sees the ruling class so overwhelmingly dominant that their ideas are the "ruling" ideas of the era, nor sees liberation as the only function of the ideas of oppressed peoples. Ideas and beliefs may serve many functions, aside from their economic interests.

In other words, unlike Marx, Max Weber saw a *two-way street* between the ideational world—the world of beliefs and ideas—and the material conditions of people's lives. People are attracted to beliefs because they are compatible with the way they live. But, "the way they live" is much more than economic circumstances alone. It includes the many and myriad facets of our existence. And ideas and beliefs, in turn, can act back on material conditions. For instance, a religion can generate ideas that either stimulate or inhibit a certain kind of economic system. Buddhism, practiced in Tibet and Bhutan, rejects materialism—and, therefore, the very basis of industrial capitalism. Weber argued that the beliefs of seventeenth-century Protestantism actively encouraged the Industrial Revolution. So, to Weber, there is reciprocity here. In contrast, to Marx, it was more of a one-way relationship—economic circumstances cause beliefs. On this issue, most contemporary theorists prefer Weber's way of thinking to that of Marx.

The functions that deviant belief systems serve can be looked at from two different approaches—one, the functions they serve for the believer and, two, the functions that *opposing* unconventional beliefs and the *condemnation* of their believers serve, for the society at large or, more specifically, their condemners.

Each of the belief systems discussed in this chapter functions in one way or another for certain strata or social circles or segments of the society. Each affirms the believer's way of life or upholds a certain vision of the way things are. Each is supported by a specific epistemology or "way of knowing," and each points to a way of looking at things, a belief system that it rejects or that rejects theirs. Some are backed up by a *demonology*—the designation of an immoral, fiendish wrongdoer who represents evil in the flesh—whereas others merely point out the errors perpetrated by persons who fail to see things the way they see them. Beliefs respond or correspond to issues that are a vital part of the way their believers live their lives; all answer questions and provide solutions to problems that make them believable or credible to some of the members of a society rather than others.

Thus, in cognitive deviance, there are usually two sets of deviants—to each side of the controversy, the *other* side. To Martin Luther, Catholicism was deviant—indeed, evil. To the pope, Martin Luther and his Protestant followers were deviant, representatives of the devil. To the person who believes that unidentified flying objects (UFOs) are spaceships from another planet, anyone who denies that belief is wrong, cognitively in error—or part of the cover-up to hide the fact that aliens are all around us. Looked at from the opposite end of the controversy, the parties who are wedded to the mainstream institutions, UFO believers are wrong, silly, irrational, and most decidedly deviant. In this sense, we are talking about looking at definitions of deviance in horizontal terms—from one group, category, or social circle to another.

But, there's another dimension, the vertical dimension: What is central in any controversy is which side has the influence to legitimate and validate its own special view of right or wrong and true or false. *Whose* notion of right and wrong are we talking about here? It is true that *in* creationist circles and *to* creationist audiences, evolutionists are considered deviant. But it's also true that, with respect to power, influence, legitimacy, and credibility, creationists are *marginalized*; their views are *not* mainstream in the society at large. This is what makes creationism a deviant belief system—not because it is empirically wrong. (That is a separate issue.) Evolution, not creationism, is taught in the dominant institutions, promulgated in the dominant media, believed among the best-educated strata, taught in the public school system, enshrined in the mainstream textbooks, legitimated in the main-

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stream or "old line" churches. In the event that the mainstream institutions were to legitimate creationism and stigmatize and marginalize evolutionist thinking, then it would be the other way around, it would be the evolutionist whom the sociologist would designate as the cognitive deviant.

The same applies to the belief that UFOs are real. The belief that UFOs are alien spaceships is held by just under half of all Americans; the belief that they are not is held by roughly the same proportion. So what then makes the belief, "UFOs are real," deviant? The belief in extraterrestrials on or around Earth is deviant *societally* because it does not have hierarchical legitimacy. The most influential media (the news divisions of the television networks, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, etc.), the relevant departments in major universities, and the major, mainstream churches do not accept the belief as true. If a political candidate were to announce the belief in a speech—or to urge that its truth be adopted by educational curricula—he or she would be ridiculed by the media. When John Mack, a Harvard professor, published a book asserting his belief that people had been kidnapped by aliens (1995), a shockwave of horror rumbled through the university community. When Minister Farrakhan announced that he had visited an extraterrestrial spaceship, observers denounced him as a crackpot (Brackman, 1996). Again, charges of deviance can more easily be legitimated by influential representatives of social institutions than by those who are weaker and more marginal. But, once again, *within* those weaker, more marginal sectors of the society, the dominant definitions of right and wrong may nonetheless be regarded as deviant. To repeat, as students of deviance, we need to think in terms of *both* the vertical *and* the horizontal dimensions of deviance.

RELIGIOUS SECTS AND CULTS

An "ecumenical" denomination or church is one that promotes cooperation and mutual tolerance among all churches and denominations. The Episcopal, Congregational, Presbyterian, Methodist, Lutheran, and, today, Catholic churches tend to be ecumenical. Most mainstream, old-line American religious denominations tend to be moderate, ecumenical, and comfortable with secular society. But the cost of adapting to secular society is promoting a lukewarm, unemotional, unenthusiastic, and unzealous form of religious expression. In other words, the more tolerant a religious body is toward the faith of other religious bodies, the more cooperative it is toward those other faiths, and the more accepting it is with the compromises the material world has wrought on the faith of its followers, the more reserved, the more tepid, and the less "muscular" its members' faith is likely to be. The Barna Poll consistently reveals an extremely strong correlation between evangelism and church attendance, and evangelism and orthodoxy of religious belief. ("Evangelism" is a fervent, zealous belief in heavenly salvation through Christian faith, especially in the Gospel, that is, the first four books of the New Testament, and the impulse to spread the "good news" of the Gospel to others.) All religious bodies, including the mainline ecumenical churches, harbor members with evangelical tendencies, but the largest religious bodies that are evangelical as a rule include the Southern Baptist, Pentecostalism, and Assemblies of God churches. These churches are somewhat less mainstream and less influential, somewhat more marginal in the scheme of things, than the mainline ones. For instance, their membership is more likely to believe in creationism, whereas those of the mainline churches are more likely to accept evolution as a fact.

Members of the old-line, ecumenical denominations attend church services less frequently than members of the strong evangelical faiths. In Barna Polls, a very small minority of the members of mainstream, ecumenical churches (such as Episcopalian) attend weekly, but a strong majority of Baptists, Pentecostalists, Assemblies of God, and other evangelicals do so. Only about one in ten Episcopalians say they must tell their faith to others, whereas, again, a majority of evangelicals feel this way. Satan is materially real? Only one in five Episcopalians agree, but a third of Baptists, half of Pentecostalists, and almost nine in ten of Assemblies of God do so. In short, mainline denominations offer a *weaker, milder* version of Christianity, whereas the evangelical sects offer a *stronger and more intense*, more *zealous* version.

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In contrast with the mainline denominations, members of the more fervent and muscular evangelical faiths are much more likely to accept articles of orthodox Christian dogma and to believe that they must vigorously proselytize their faith in the Gospel to others.

In addition, *social* and *political* ideology is strongly related to *religious* beliefs and practices. Polls indicate that political conservatives are significantly more likely than liberals to hold stronger religious views; engage in regular religious practices, such as church attendance, prayer, reading the Bible; believe that the Bible is the literally accurate word of God; live a spirituality-centered life; and believe that they have a "personal responsibility to share their religious beliefs with others." Liberals, in turn, are more likely to live a secular life, believe that religious faith is not a basic "moral guide" to their lives, and reject the notion that they have a responsibility to share their religious beliefs with others. Liberals are also more likely to have discovered their own religious beliefs instead of embracing those promulgated by an organized church or religion and are more open to "accepting different moral views" than the ones they currently hold. Conservatives and evangelicals tend to hold and express a "stronger" version of religiosity, whereas that of liberals is typically "weaker."

Weak denominations do not answer the need of the more fervent parishioners who long for a strong expression of their faith. Hence, they tend to stimulate "new, more vigorous religions to replace them" (Stark and Bainbridge, 1996, p. 103). Two types of religious body contrast with established, mainstream bodies. The first is the *sect*, a religious group that breaks off from the mainstream religion and is "within the conventional religious tradition(s) of a society, but one that imposes stricter demands on its adherents than do mainstream groups" (pp. 103–104). Such groups are only "moderately deviant." And what *makes* them deviant is that they are "*too* religious" (p.104).

Even more deviant is the *cult*. As with "deviant," the term "cult" has become such a pejorative word that it seems to connote a religion that is "kooky," "bizarre," "pathological," "creepy," and "strange," in other words, it is an "insult to stir up fear and oppression" (Stark and Bainbridge, 1996, p. 104). In a straightforward definitional sense, however, cults are simply religious groups that are "outside the conventional religious tradition(s) in a society" (p. 104). They differ less with respect to the intensity of their members' religiosity than to their *difference from* the mainstream religious body. They are not a *variation on* the usual theme; they are *outside* the usual theme altogether. Some cults are imported from a cultural tradition foreign to a specific country's religions, whereas most arise "because someone creates or discovers [a] new religious culture and successfully attracts a group of followers" (p. 104). In the United States, examples of domestic cults include The Church of the Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) in the nineteenth century, Christian Science in the 1920s and today or in the recent past, and the Church of Scientology; imported cults include Hare Krishna, the Divine Light Mission, and the Unification Church (or "Moonies"). Cults "engender far more concern, antagonism, and repressive efforts than do sects" (p. 104). Whereas sects are *moderately* deviant to the mainstream, cults tend to be *very* deviant.

Many conventional religionists adopt the "absolutist" perspective I spelled out earlier; they argue that cults are *not like* traditional or conventional religious bodies, believing them to be evil, sinister, or, at the very least, strange. Their leaders are said to engage in "manipulative mind control" to seduce, capture, and "brainwash" their young acolytes. These leaders are up to no good and they must be stopped from engaging in their nefarious practices. "Cults are groups that often exploit members psychologically and/or financially, typically by making members comply with leadership's demands through certain types of psychological manipulation and through the inculcation of deep-seated anxious dependency on the group and its leaders" (Chambers et al., 1994, p. 90).

To the absolutist, the evil nature of cults must have a sinister origin, cause, or dynamic. "No rational or sane person would choose to join a cult. Given such assumptions, how does one explain cult involvement?" (Perrin, 2008). The absolutist responds by invoking such mechanisms as "brainwashing," by arguing that clever but malicious leaders trap, seduce, manipulate, and hypnotize innocent parties into their spider's web of deceit (Singer and Lalich, 1995). Note that the absolutist

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perspective demands that a truly anomalous, aberrant phenomenon such as cult membership demands an explanation that invokes anomalous, aberrant causes. The proposition that cult members are recruited in much the same ways that members of mainstream churches are is unacceptable. This is what experts who study the logical structure of arguments call the "evil causes evil" fallacy: that something the observer doesn't like must have an origin that the observer also doesn't like. As some researchers have pointed out (Perrin, 2008), the "brainwashing" explanation for cult membership goes back to the 1950s, when the Chinese communists were said to "brainwash" American prisoners of the Korean War into betraying their country.

Perrin (2008) locates four interest groups whose members compete to define the nature of cults: the anti-cult movement, the media, the cults (or "new religious movements") themselves, and academics, including sociologists of religion, who study them from a social science perspective.

The anti-cult movement attempts to define cults as deviant and, in so doing, to drive them out of business. Most anti-cult organizations were started by parents who "lost" their children to cults, whose theology and religious practices these parents found puzzling, incomprehensible, troubling, very different from the conventional Christianity or Judaism these young people grew up with. Many parents, says Perrin, "were confused by their child's conversion and fanatical commitment, and were anxious to 'expose' the sinister cults and get their children back." Deprogrammers and "exit counselors," some health professionals, other Christian ministers or committed Christian laypeople, attempt to "unbrainwash" converts and to indoctrinate potential converts with the "evil" nature of cults. Some parents of cult members have even hired deprogrammers to kidnap their children from a cult setting and force deprogramming on them. Many anti-cult activists have been defectors, former cult members who became disillusioned and now "want the evil practices of the cult exposed" (2008, p. 16). Many Christian clergy and laypeople oppose cults because they "want to win the world for Jesus."

The media don't necessarily attempt to define cults as evil or deviant. "However, faced with time and space restrictions, and obviously drawn to sensationalistic and controversial topics, media accounts sometimes ignore the mundane and non-newsworthy elements of NRM [new religious movements, or cults], and thus contribute to a distorted perception of NRMs" (p. 16). Hence, by making sensationalistic and distorted claims, the media unwittingly serve the interests of the anti-cult movement in defining cults as deviant.

Jostling on this stage where interest groups attempt to define cults as deviant—or as legitimate religions—are the cults themselves. It is in the interests of cult participants to themselves define, and to convince others to define, cults as not only legitimate but also as altruistic, as dedicated to saving a corrupt world. Cult leaders also have a material interest as well: As a given cult organization grows, its leadership prospers.

Sociologists and other academics usually provide a more sober and balanced, if not necessarily "objective," view of cults. In their efforts to produce original, non-trite, and counterintuitive findings and conclusions, academics often find themselves defending cults. Moreover, as sociologists often attempt to understand social phenomena as their participants understand them, they may present cult members' views of reality as one version of acceptable and believable truth. Outsiders, especially those with an anti-cult agenda, often see such efforts as a defense of cults. However, psychologists, who are more interested in the special means by which cults convince their members of the truth of their vision, are more likely to see the dark side of these new religious movements. For instance, *Cultic Studies Review*, "an internet journal of research, news and opinion," is dedicated to disseminating "information on cults, psychological manipulation, psychological abuse, spiritual abuse, brainwashing, mind control, thought reform, abusive churches, extremism, totalistic groups, authoritarian groups, new religious movements, exit counseling, recovery, and practical suggestions." Clearly, this journal focuses mainly on the negative, deviant side of cults.

Conflicts between cults and mainstream society were depicted prominently in the news in the 1970s and early 1980s. But, into the 1980s and the 1990s, cult membership declined, and defections increased (Perrin, 2008). Twenty or 30 years ago, Hare Krishna members danced in the street

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and begged in airports. Since that time, events, media reports, and defectors have exposed many cults as anything but "normal," legitimate, or altruistic. In 1978, Jim Jones, a charismatic but mentally unstable leader of his own self-created new religious movement, exhorted his flock to commit mass suicide. By the end of the day, nearly a thousand of his followers lay dead in the jungle compound. A book entitled *Monkey on a Stick* revealed that a Hare Krishna organization was deeply involved in stealing, the rape and beating of members, murder, drug smuggling, and building an arsenal of weapons that would equip a small army (Hubner and Gruson, 1989). These and countless other revelations hurt the cause of the new religious movements, convinced nonmembers that they were right to denounce and attack these movements, and contributed to the movements' demise.

CREATIONISM, INTELLIGENT DESIGN, AND EVOLUTION

In December 2005, a federal district court judge rejected the suit brought by the school board of the Dover, PA, school district (by the time of the ruling, already voted out of office) to introduce intelligent design into the science curriculum. Intelligent design does not belong in the science classroom, the judge ruled, because it is a religiously motivated belief that violates the constitutional mandate of separation of church and state. The judge, John Jones III, a conservative and a Republican appointed by President George W. Bush, went further; he lashed out at school board members for lying under oath and for being guilty of "breathtaking inanity" in their attempt to infuse religion into science courses. Intelligent design, declared Judge Jones, "relies on the unprovable existence of a Christian God and therefore is not science" (Powell, 2005, p. A1).

From our point of view, the decision raised the issue of whether and to what extent the struggle between supporters of intelligent design and advocates of evolution to define reality illuminates an aspect of cognitive deviance. The position of most scientists is that both creationism and intelligent design are *deviant* or wrongful explanations for the origin of the universe and the origin of the species. It is their intention to rule these theories invalid and inappropriate for inclusion in the science curriculum. They are not scientific, most scientists argue, and have no more place in the teaching of science than Zulu, Navajo, or Australian Aborigine explanations of the origins of the universe and the species. On their behalf, fundamentalist Christians wish to relegate evolution to the nether world of error, untruth, falseness, and Godlessness. In short, the creationism–evolution controversy is a classic case of *mutual deviantization* (Aho, 1994, p. 62).

This controversy is fraught with conceptual and theoretical confusion and misunderstanding, which I'd like to dispel. To begin with, Charles Darwin was not the first to advocate the evolution of the species. Dozens of scientists before him thought of the same thing; the truth of evolution was widely accepted in scientific communities in the middle of the nineteenth century. One or another form of evolutionary thinking had been accepted as valid by many scientists and intellectuals for more than a half-century before Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1859. Darwin was the first to have thought of the *mechanism* that drove or caused evolution. (More on this momentarily.) Actually, to be more precise, Darwin and Alfred Russel Wallace published a summary of their ideas simultaneously. In addition, it's not clear why creationists focus specifically on evolutionary theory in biology as subverting Biblical literalism, as the findings of astrophysics, paleontology, genetics, and geology also contradict a literal interpretation of the Bible. Biology is just one of a number of fields whose findings contradict Genesis as a scientific tract.

In addition, in spite of their equation in the media, creationism is not the same thing as intelligent design. In fact, these two perspectives disagree on most of their claims and agree on only one point. There are many versions of creationism, but classic, "new Earth" or Biblical creationism holds that the universe, Earth, and all species on Earth were created by God in six 24-hour days, less than 10,000 years ago. In sharp contrast, intelligent design accepts the fact that the universe and the Earth are billions of years old, and that the process of evolution produced all the species on Earth. Where intelligent design parts company with the scientific view of evolution is that it argues that the

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hand of God *guided* the process of evolution and designed and created all species on Earth, including humans. Hence, intelligent design and evolution have a great deal in common.

Much of this confusion is caused by the designation of evolution as a "theory." Most laypeople think that "theory" means "speculation" or "an unproven hypothesis." This is wrong. The scientific definition of theory is an *explanation*, a cause-and-effect account of a general class of phenomena or observations. When people say, "evolution is just a theory," what they mean is it hasn't yet been shown to be true. But, scientifically, what the phrase really means is that evolution is an *explanation* for something. But what?

People who refer to evolution as a theory confuse *the fact* of evolution—that is, whether the species evolved over millions, even billions, of years—with *the mechanism* of evolution. Intelligent design theorists accept the *fact* of evolution but reject a materialist mechanism or *explanation* of the process. Their theory is that "God did it," the "it" being the actual causal mechanism of evolution itself. In contrast, the scientific explanation of evolution holds that the explanation, cause, or mechanism for the process is *natural selection*, that is, genetic variation, the adaptation of organisms to a particular environment, and differential survival and, hence, differential productive success. Hence, the "theory" that is referred to in the phrase "the theory of evolution" is not a theory of evolution at all, but the theory of natural selection—that is, an explanation for *why* evolution occurred. Scientists take evolution as the observation or *fact*, and natural selection as the "theory" or explanation *for* the fact of evolution. Intelligent design advocates accept the fact of evolution but reject the mechanism of natural selection. And most scientists believe that the concept, "guided by the hand of God," is an unprovable, supernatural explanation. It cannot be tested with the tools of natural science, they say.

In spite of the fact that intelligent design and creationism are almost totally contradictory theories on the fact of evolution, the point they agree on is that God plays a causal role in observable material reality. In contrast, the scientific version of evolution, and all natural phenomena, is that material reality has material causes; the observer need not invoke the hand of God in these processes. So important is the role of God here that most observers believe that intelligent design is a "foot in the door" or a "wedge" for creationism to enter into the biology curriculum. Grant intelligent design in the public schools, say its opponents, and creationism will follow. Hence, their strong opposition.

Polls have been conducted yearly on the public's attitude on creationism, intelligent design, and evolution, and the results are fairly consistent. According to a May 2014 Gallup poll, about one in five in the U.S. population (19%) believes that humans evolved, and "God had no part in this process." About a third believe that humans evolved, "but God guided this process." And four in ten (42%) believe that, "God created human beings pretty much in their present form at one time within the last 10,000 years or so." Some form of belief in evolution, according to a 2013 Pew poll, is acceptable by roughly 60 percent of American adults—only 27 percent of evangelical Protestants, 44 percent of black Protestants, and 78 percent of white mainline Protestants. In this poll, a quarter of all adults (24%) believe that a supreme being "guided evolution," and a third (32%) believe that evolution is "due to natural processes." In the Pew poll, political affiliation was strongly related to belief in evolution; 43 percent of Republicans accepted some form of human evolution, whereas 67 percent of Democrats did. Men were more likely to accept evolution (65%) than women (55%), and the young, 18–29, more (68%) than the old, age 65 and older (49%). Education was strongly related to believing in evolution, with college graduates more likely to do so (72%) than respondents with only a high school education (51%).

In 1987, *Newsweek* magazine estimated that, of the nearly half a million life and Earth scientists (mainly biologists and geologists) in the world, less than 1 percent believe in some form of creationism. Another estimate has it that 99 percent of scientists take the strictly naturalistic view of evolution (Shermer, 1997, p. 156). Here, we have a belief that 99 percent of scientists hold (depending on the year the question is asked and the wording of the question), but, according to the latest Gallup poll, conducted in 2014, only 19 percent of the public believe. Says one observer: "It would be hard to

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imagine any other belief for which there is such a wide disparity between the person on the street and the expert in the ivory tower" (Shermer, 1997, p. 156). Moreover, nearly all the dominant social institutions affirm that evolution took place: the educational system, especially higher education and, most especially, the most prestigious institutions of higher learning; the most influential media, such as network news, *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*; all the science magazines, such as *Smithsonian*, *The National Geographic*, *Scientific American*, and *Science*; every major science museum in the country; all its zoos and aquariums; and the mainstream, old-line, ecumenical churches, such as the Catholic, Episcopalian, Presbyterian, Methodist, Congregationalist, and Lutheran churches. For us, as students of deviance, the interesting questions become, first, why does such a discrepancy exist, second, what functions does such a belief serve for the social circles holding them, and, third, what does this discrepancy say about definitions of deviance in different audiences?

It might seem strange to refer to beliefs, such as creationism and intelligent design, held by nearly half of the population, as deviant. How could such common beliefs be deviant? The answer is that "deviant" cannot be equated with "different"; "conventional" cannot be equated with "common" or "usual." Many common actions, beliefs, and physical traits are deviant. Most of us—very possibly, nearly all of us—lie once or more in our lives, but lying is a deviant act; the people we lie to don't like it, resent us for doing it, and would punish us in one way or another if they knew we did it to them. A very high proportion of the population has taken something that's not theirs at least once, but that doesn't mean that stealing isn't deviant. But atypicality or being unusual does *not* define deviance; owning a house with five bathrooms, receiving 100 items of mail a day, and taking three showers a day is statistically unusual—but not deviant.

What makes creationism and intelligent design deviant? What makes evolution deviant? Deviance is something that's "out of place," like a weed. It is that which is judged invalid or bad or silly or evil or reprehensible or wrongful, *by* a particular audience, *in* a particular context. Deviance is defined or *constituted by* the negative reactions it generates in certain audiences, in certain contexts. Evolutionists are emphatic in insisting that creationism, creation science, and intelligent design are *out of place*, and therefore deviant, in any science context, including the school and college classroom. Anyone who believes in them is, by definition, not a scientist and has no place in that context. Any attempt to teach science to students, whether at the elementary or the graduate school level, *cannot* include Biblical teachings on the subject. In contrast, among creationists, believing in evolution is evil, contrary to God's teachings, and certain to bring forth divine retribution; their attacks on proponents of evolution are powerful, denunciatory, and savage.

Make no mistake about it: The struggle between creationists and intelligent design advocates on one side and materialist evolutionists on the other is a battle to define a particular body of knowledge as valid and another as *deviant*.

Michael Dini, associate professor of biology at Texas Tech University, has a strict policy of never giving a recommendation to a student who does not accept what he refers to as "the most important theory in biology," that is, evolution. Michael Spradling, a senior at Texas Tech who needed a recommendation to medical school, enrolled in, then dropped, Dini's course when he found out about the professor's policy. Spradling transferred to Lubbock Christian University and enrolled in that same course so that he could obtain a recommendation from its instructor. Dini feels that believing in creationism is a simple case of looking at rock-solid evidence and being incapable of reaching conclusions, in a phrase, being incapable of reasoning scientifically. Denying evolution is no different from denying that gravity exists, he says. Most, although not all, of Dini's colleagues agree. Spradling appealed to the Department of Justice, arguing that Dini's policy is a case of discriminating against a student's religious beliefs (Brulliard, 2003; Madigan, 2003).

Commenting on one creationist's claim that evolutionary theory can be traced back to the early Greek atomists and before, to Babylonian philosophy—and was, perhaps, revealed by Satan himself—an evolutionist comments that he finds it "hard to believe that anybody . . . accepts this

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shaggy-dog story" (Kitcher, 1982, p. 193). After a scientific meeting, commenting on the efforts of creationists, one scientist declared, "*we've got to stop the bastards*" (my italics). This, comments a historian of creationism, is the "prevailing attitude" among scientists (Numbers, 1992, p. xvii). Says the guidebook of the Museum of the Earth in Ithaca, NY: "Essentially all available data and observations from the natural world support the hypothesis of evolution. No serious biologist or geologist today doubts whether evolution occurred" (Kates, 2005, p. A22). Clearly, scientists wish to define creationism as intellectually and cognitively unacceptable—in a word, deviant.

After the citizens of Dover, PA, voted for a school board whose members opposed intelligent design (and voted out of office a board whose members supported it), Pat Robertson, a religious broadcaster, announced that the "good citizens of Dover . . . voted God out of your city. . . . If there is a disaster in your area, don't turn to God. You just rejected Him from your city. . . . If they have future problems in Dover, I recommend they call Charles Darwin. Maybe he can help them." Robertson also called for the assassination of Hugo Chavez, a Venezuelan radical; recommended that the State Department be blown up with a nuclear device; and stated that feminists encourage women to "kill their children, practice witchcraft, destroy capitalism, and become lesbians" (Associated Press release, November 11, 2005).

In his well-known anti-evolutionist tract, *The Icons of Evolution*, Jonathan Wells writes that his prayers convinced him that he should devote his life to "destroying Darwinism." When the Reverend Sun Myung Moon "chose" him to enter a PhD program, he said, he "welcomed the opportunity to prepare" himself for battle (Wells, 2000). "Battle" is an accurate metaphor for the debate between creationists and evolutionists, as many of its participants believe that it is a struggle between good and evil, right and wrong, light and darkness.

During one Louisiana case, *Edwards v. Alluigard*, intended to bring "creation science" into the educational curriculum, creationists sent letters to the scientists testifying on behalf of evolution. One letter sent to Murray Gell-Mann, a Nobel Prize winner, read: "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Whosoever is not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire. The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. Ask Jesus Christ to save you now! The second law of thermodynamics proves evolution is impossible. [Actually, the Second Law of Thermodynamics states that energy cannot be increased in a closed energy system. As the Earth receives energy from the sun, it does not constitute a closed energy system.] Why are you so afraid of the truth of creation-science?" (Shermer, 1997, pp. 169–170). Says Henry M. Morris, a prolific creationist: "Evolution is the root of atheism, of communism, nazism, behaviorism, racism, economic imperialism, militarism, libertinism, anarchism, and all manner of anti-Christian systems of belief and practice" (1972, p. 75).

The elementary school superintendent of Marshall County, KY, Kenneth Shadowen, glued together two pages of his fifth and sixth graders' science textbooks dealing with the "big bang" 15 billion years ago—according to scientific theory, the origin of the universe—so that his students could not read them. Shadowen claimed he had done it because the text didn't present "alternatives" to the big bang theory (Shermer, 1997, p. 138). Governor Fob James of Alabama used the taxpayers' money to purchase and send a copy of a book supporting intelligent design and critical of evolutionary theory to all high school instructors of science courses (p. 139).

To repeat: It is the goal of creationists to depict evolutionary theory as cognitively, intellectually, theologically, and morally bankrupt, in error, and, hence, deviant; it is the goal of the evolutionists to do the same for creationism—except they leave morality and theology out of the picture.

What makes the conflict between creationists and evolutionists so particularly bitter and protracted? Why are the differences between them so quickly and readily translated into denunciation and reproach? And why is this conflict such an ideal example of cognitive deviance labeling?

Belief in creationism versus evolution is very strongly correlated with several key and basic factors, including education, urban–rural residence, and blue state–red state, or "metro" versus "retro" residence. (Liberal or "blue" states are located in the Northeast and mid-Atlantic, from Maryland to

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Maine, the upper Midwest, and the West Coast; conservative or "red" states are in the South, much of the Midwest, and the Rocky Mountains.) Creationists are more likely to be uneducated and politically conservative and reside in a less-populated area of a red or "retro" state. Believers in some form of evolution are more likely to be better educated and politically liberal and live in a more metropolitan area of a blue or "metro" state. (We can find many exceptions, of course, as we can for every valid generalization.) Hence, this controversy expresses not merely the merits of one or the other side, but also entire worldviews, ways of life as well. Both sides have a substantial investment in their positions, as well as a great deal invested in discrediting the other side. "Live and let live" is an impossibility for many adherents of both positions. Whereas gay sex does not necessarily discredit straight sex, and vice versa, in contrast, creationism and evolution *automatically* contradict one another. Each, inherently and by its very nature, provides a critique of the other. If one is right, the other *must* be wrong, and vice versa. (There's another logical possibility: In theory, both could be wrong.) Hence, the special vehemence of the adherents of these two positions.

For creationists, the dominance of evolution in the educational curriculum represents the triumph of secular materialism. If we descended from animals, we must have a kinship *with* animals; if what brought humanity out of the slime is a random, Godless power, it follows that humanity itself is guided *by* a Godless power; if apes are our ancestors, we must *be* apes. The propositions on which evolutionary theory is based must be false, reasons the creationist, otherwise we live in a society dominated by bestiality, not Christianity. Humans stand next to angels; they are touched by the hand of God; they share no kinship with beasts of the forest. To the creationists, the implications of evolution are terrifying: They seem to undermine the very foundation of Christianity, indeed, their very notion of their intimate bond with God. Evolution implies that the forces that created humanity were accidental, indifferent, unguided, capricious, purposeless. If certain events had turned out differently, humans would not have evolved at all. Humans were not fated or destined to appear on Earth, as Christianity decrees; we appeared at a particular time and place by a roll of the bio-geological dice. Evolution seems to deny every particular of the Christian cosmology. To the unsophisticated Christian who reasons in Manichean, black-or-white, either/or terms, evolutionary theory is a conspiracy to subvert Christian faith and weaken the Christian world. Not surprisingly, evolution has become a lightning rod for creationists everywhere, and evolutionists have become labeled as deviants.

For their part, evolutionists regard the belief in creationism as a failure in the scientific program. Like Professor Dini, scientists believe it is their task to draw reasonable conclusions from the available evidence, and the task of science educators to teach their students to reason likewise. The fact that some of their students, not to mention nearly half of the American public, hold a belief that contradicts the very foundation of modern biology indicates that scientists have failed at their task. In a sense, creationist belief represents an *indictment* of science education, a failure of one of the central missions of science itself. Evolutionists rarely bother to address the creationist challenge, which they find frustrating and puzzling; rather, most ignore it. To the extent they do address that challenge, creationists are depicted as ignoramuses, country bumpkins—or charlatans who hoodwink the masses into believing bogus assertions about how nature works.

Rationalistic nineteenth-century thinkers such as Karl Marx (1818–1883), Auguste Comte (1798-1857), and Herbert Spencer (1820–1903) argued that, as societies became increasingly educated, and as scientific knowledge became widely disseminated, mystical, occult, superstitious beliefs, including Christian and other religious dogma, would disappear. These writers would have been astounded by the persistence of religion in the modern age, in particular, the belief in Biblical creation. In a conversation, a prominent evolutionist predicted that, when the implications of the relevance of DNA research for evolutionary theory sink into the public at large, creationists will be convinced of the error of their ways; they'll pack up their road show and slink off into the night. I disagreed; I said there is no conceivable accumu-

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lation of evidence that will change minds on either side of this issue. Clearly, the belief in the account of the origin of the universe described in Genesis plays a major role in the lives of fundamentalist Christians. It is not going to go away any time soon. Clearly, the evolution–creation debate provides a major source of defining cognitive deviance—on both sides of the debate.

CONSPIRACY THEORIES

A substantial proportion of the public believes that there are one or more insidious, shadowy groups operating in league against the rest of the society. Conspiracy theories commonly contain the following components.

First, conspiracies involve treachery. Perpetrators are up to no good; they intend to inflict harm on good, decent people. Their actions are criminal or, at the very least, extremely unethical. Second, the actions of these perpetrators are secret, surreptitious, hidden, clandestine. They cover their tracks so well that the rest of us have a hard time figuring out what they are up to. Third, they are organized, so well organized that even some persons in very high places are in on the plot, pulling strings. And fourth, it is necessary for decent people to expose the nefarious doings of these schemers to protect that which is true, virtuous, and good.

Perhaps the most important feature of conspiracy theories is their reliance on *demonology*. Demonology is a theory of evil, a doctrine that portrays certain figures as devils, demons, or evil spirits. Demonology has been used for thousands of years to identify the enemy, whether otherworldly (for instance, the devil himself), or earthly (such as members of another tribe or nation, opponents in war, political plotters, rival sorcerers or shamans, competitors for a lover's affection, and so on). Conspiracy theories *almost always* contain a demonological or evil-indicating feature. A truly evil enemy is identified, analyzed, and denounced. Crimes of awesome wickedness and almost supernatural deviousness are attributed to him, her, or them. Conspiracy theories leave no room for subtlety, complexity, ambiguity, ambivalence, or doubt. They are morality plays spelling out bad guys and good guys. Conspiracy theories nearly always contain assertions about the cruel deeds of putative conspirators, commonly called "atrocity tales."

Claims of conspiracies are not necessarily false. Conspiracies *do* exist and *have* taken place; at certain times and places, a small number of shadowy actors have plotted against and committed evil deeds against the rest of us. One often hears or reads that conspiracy theories are a product of "paranoid" thinking. The term "paranoid conspiracy theory" is often used, as if these words naturally belong together. They don't. A popular saying that began in the contentious 1960s spelled the matter out: "Just because I'm paranoid doesn't mean that people aren't plotting against me." To some observers and critics of contemporary society, paranoia is a healthy, not a delusional, perspective. However, true conspiracies—that is, those that have been verified—don't allow for *undiluted* evil, because real-world human beings turn out to be a bit more complicated than mythological ones.

In April 1961, a military force consisting of Cuban exiles landed at the Bay of Pigs in Cuba with the intention of fomenting rebellion among the Cuban populace and overthrowing the regime of Fidel Castro. It was crushed, and most of the rebels were either killed or captured. The operation had been secretly planned by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) since May of 1960. The CIA funded the training of the rebels and financed the invasion itself. Not only was the operation a secret, for a time after its failure, the American government denied complicity. Without question, the Bay of Pigs operation was an organized conspiracy. During the War in Vietnam, in the early 1970s, United State military forces secretly bombed Cambodia. Th action was illegal, it obviously harmed the Cam bodians, and government officials lied about ar covered it up. The bombing of Cambodia was conspiracy. During the presidential campaign 1972, President Richard Nixon authorized a seri of "dirty tricks" against his Democratic riva These tricks entailed, among other illegal tacti releasing false and defamatory memos on Dem rats' stationery; hiring prostitutes to seduce and on Democratic candidates; breaking into the of of the psychiatrist of a critic of the Vietnam

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to steal confidential files; and bugging the headquarters of the Democratic National Committee. Finally, in June 1972, several employees of CREEP (Committee to Re-Elect the President) were apprehended while burglarizing the Democratic National Committee headquarters, and the plot was revealed. President Nixon denied knowing anything about the operation but was forced to resign the presidency anyway. Audiotapes located much later revealed Nixon's involvement and intimate knowledge of the illegal project. Unquestionably, CREEP's "dirty tricks" campaign against Democratic candidates in 1972 was a conspiracy.

For nearly a century after the Civil War, blacks in the South (and even in parts of the North) were intimidated, threatened, and attacked by a conspiracy of white-sheeted hatemongers called the Ku Klux Klan. During the 1950s and the 1960s, the FBI spied on and conducted a clandestine operation against Martin Luther King, Jr. For decades, the United States Public Health Service conducted a secret experiment on black men who were suffering from syphilis. Physicians observed the progress of the disease, but did not inform their subjects of their condition and permitted the latter to infect their wives and, through them, their children. Even today, many real estate agents, banks, and insurers "redline" black applicants, conspire to treat them differently, charge them higher prices and fees, refuse to offer them coverage, or refuse to sell them houses in certain neighborhoods (Brackman, 1996).

In each of these cases, the evidence supporting the existence of the conspiracy is convincing and overwhelming. Some of the participants later admitted that they took part in a conspiracy. These examples represent only the tip of the iceberg. In the history of the world, many conspiracies have been planned and executed. It is foolish to deny that conspiracies exist. It is entirely possible that some conspiracies that currently operate remain unknown to us. It is even possible some will never be revealed. As a conceptual category, *some* (but not all, and probably not even most) conspiracy theories point to real-world phenomena.

That said, *very few* of the conspiracy theories that have been proposed over the years provide enough convincing supporting evidence for us to say they are unquestionably true, and the available evidence suggests the vast majority of conspiracies are demonstrably false. Jews have been a common target of conspiracy theories for thousands of years. *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*—perhaps the most famous conspiracy artifact of all time—a document purporting to lay out a plot for the Jews to rule the world, was forged by the Russian secret police in 1905. A 2006 Zogby poll found that more than four in ten Americans believe that the government and the 9/11 Commission "concealed or refused to investigate critical evidence that contradicts their official explanation of the September 11 attacks." A Gallup poll indicated that, well into the second decade of the twenty-first century, more than one in ten Americans believe that Barack Obama was not born in the United States and, hence, is an illegitimate president. True, his birth certificate indicates that he was born in 1961, in Honolulu, Hawaii, but that simply indicates that the plot is so vast that government and officials can fabricate hospital records. Or so this conspiracy theory goes. Another such belief is that Obama is "really" a Muslim, not a Christian. The fact that Obama is black, has an African father, and is perceived by right-wingers as liberal enflames these false beliefs.

The early demise of a celebrity often stirs up speculation about one or more conspiracies, and usually any major disaster stirs up conspiracy theories. A certain percentage of the population is conspiracy theory *prone* and will find nearly any explanation of dark doings of evil manipulators credible. Because of their dramatic, almost theological, qualities, certain kinds of story are more appealing *as atrocity tales* than others, and will attract larger audiences, carry more weight, endure for longer periods of time, and even cause more serious consequences. Moreover, an array of contemporary factors will drive tall tales more effectively. With Obama, not only do we find tall tales about his birth and religious faith, we also encounter allegations that he is taking steps to "take over" the United States in a ruthless power grab. In 2015, the Pentagon planned Jade Helm 15, a troop training exercise, in Texas and other states. Members of political far-right organizations, mainly in Texas, raised a question in blogs about whether the maneuvers were really "part of a secret plan to impose martial law, take away people's guns, arrest

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political undesirables, launch an Obama-led hostile takeover of red-state Texas, or do some combination thereof" (Fernandez, 2015, p. A1).

When it comes to evidence, conspiracy buffs are typically extremely self-serving in their arguments. They frequently allege that "the powers that be" hide and contaminate evidence of conspiracies. When challenged with evidence that contradicts a given conspiracy, they say, "That's the evidence they have *allowed* you to see, because that's what they *want* you to believe. But *I'm* not fooled by their deceptive schemes." As Robert Anton Wilson and Miriam Joan Hill say, "nobody can refute any truly crazy conspiracy theory, because all such theories have a Strange Loop in their construction. Any evidence against them also functions to support them, if you want to look at it that way" (1998, p. 9). When there is an investigation and no conspiracy is found, the agency engaged in it is part of the cover-up. (But if such evidence *is* found, it is *not* part of the cover-up—an indication of a non-falsifiable argument.) According to that logic, it's possible to verify any argument under the sun. If we were to believe the advocates of the most fanciful conspiracy theories, no evidence of any kind can possibly refute or falsify them.

People tend to believe in conspiracy theories because they are narratively interesting and dramatic, and because they serve political, ideological, religious, and/or emotional reasons (Wilson and Hill, 1998, p. 9). Belief in conspiracies validates a certain political or epistemological worldview and affirms solidarity with a certain social group or category. The vast majority of conspiracy theories that have been thought up by the human mind are demonstrably false. They are invented largely *because* they are pleasing to persons who hold a certain worldview.

William Cooper, a former naval intelligence officer, claims that "he personally" has seen documents that spell out the conditions of a treaty between extraterrestrial invaders and the United States government. These aliens have been behind countless abductions, cattle mutilations, and the CIA–cocaine connection. The government is powerless to stop these actions because of the superior weapons of the aliens (Wilson and Hill, 1998, p. 123).

Throughout much of the United States since the late 1960s, farmers and ranchers began finding their cattle and horses on the ground, dead, and mutilated "with surgical precision." Often, it is believed, their bodies were moved from one locale and "dumped" in another. The "cattle mutilation mystery" became the basis for a number of extremely elaborate conspiracy theories, one involving malicious experiments by the American government, usually the CIA, one involving a cabal of Satan worshippers, and, in a more paranormal vein, a third involving extraterrestrials.

According to many right-wing white supremacist "patriots," the United States government, otherwise known as ZOG (Zionist Occupational Government), in league with the forces of Satan, is involved in a conspiracy of horrendous proportions. Its intention, with the assistance of the United Nations, is to herd all white Christians into concentration camps, kill them off, and rule the world. Not all "patriot" groups combine this scenario with paranormal elements, but many do. Some take their cue from the Book of Revelations of St. John the Divine, which predicts a coming apocalyptic Armageddon or armed struggle between the forces of good and the forces of evil. In addition, a number of these racist "militias," "patriots," or "survivalist" groups are based on the notion that white Anglo-Saxons are the true Israelites, and that the Jews, an ethnic group from central Asia, stole their heritage.

One of the most famous of conspiracy theories is the tale told about the cover-up of the crash of an alien spaceship in the desert near Roswell, New Mexico, in June 1947. The "Roswell Incident," as it is referred to by UFO buffs, is the clearest example yet of alleged government cover-ups of extraterrestrial craft circling and landing on Earth. Ziegler (1997) asserts flatly that, "the Roswell myth has become a vehicle for the expression of antigovernment sentiment" (p. 2). Extraterrestrial conspiracy theory advocates believe that the remains of an alien craft are stored in Area 51, in an Air Force base in the Nevada desert. The claim of an extraterrestrial origin for the wreckage has never been backed up by physical evidence.

Without a doubt, the most famous and very likely the most believed-in conspiracy theory concerns the assassination of President John F.

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Kennedy. To be more precise about the matter, there are more than a half-dozen theories about JFK's murder: officials in the CIA did it because they disagreed with his politics; the Mafia did it because Bobby Kennedy, Jack's brother, who was Attorney General during JFK's administration, was vigorously prosecuting organized crime; or the mob did it because they held JFK responsible for the Castro take-over in Cuba, which resulted in the seizure of mob money in Havana casinos; the KGB or some other entity in the Soviet Union did it because JFK forced them to dismantle their missiles in Cuba; Lyndon Johnson did it because he wanted to be president and he didn't like Jack or his politics; the "military industrial complex" did it because JFK was trying to wind down the War in Vietnam, which was making the military and arms manufacturers a great deal of money; anti-Castro Cubans did it because Kennedy had betrayed them by not supporting them in their Bay of Pigs scheme to invade Cuba; right-wing militants did it because Kennedy supported civil rights legislation. (An entertaining and well-made, but fanciful and factually bogus, film dramatizing one version of the Kennedy assassination is *JFK*, directed by Oliver Stone and released in 1991.)

If so many people believe that a conspiracy such as the one that supposedly explains JFK's assassination is valid, why are conspiracy theories deviant? To begin with, any one of these conspiracies to kill Kennedy *could* be right, but all of them are *probably* wrong. In any case, two or more of them can't be simultaneously correct, unless agents whose interests conflicted with one another and whose members had previously had no contact suddenly and almost magically cooperated in bring off the vastest conspiracy in American history. Unlikely? Certainly. But not impossible. But no word of credible evidence has leaked out that the man who actually pulled the trigger on JFK, Lee Harvey Oswald, had any contact with any of these groups, and the reason nothing's leaked out, says Vincent Bugliosi, is because there's nothing to leak out. All of the arguments for a conspiracy address the means, the opportunity, and the supposed motive; credible evidence of the events actually taking place as these theories contend, as Bugliosi says, is utterly lacking (2007). But falsity does not make a theory deviant. Conspiracy buffs disagree with *one another*, and discredit the arguments, and the proponents, that falsify their own; in a sense, they regard as deviant *the other* conspiracy theories, and their theorists. Few issues have aroused as heated a debate as the JFK assassination, and today, more than a half-century after the deed, everyone regards any explanation other than one's own as wrong, and its advocates, as asinine and cognitively deviant as well. What *makes* conspiracy theories deviant is the same element that makes everything else deviant: They and their proponents are condemned, criticized, and ridiculed by the members of influential social collectivities.

PARANORMAL BELIEFS AS DEVIANT

What makes paranormal beliefs—those that contradict what scientists believe to be the laws of nature—a form of cognitive deviance? As with creationism, how can beliefs held by half, or more than half, of the population be regarded as *deviant*? Gallup and Harris polls show that nearly half the American public believe in ghosts, a third in astrology, three-quarters in miracles, and six in ten in the devil. How can beliefs with such widespread support be unconventional or non-normative? It's simple: *In* certain contexts, these beliefs are derided, scorned, not permitted a serious hearing. These beliefs are not valorized in the dominant institutions; they are non-hegemonic, not validated by the dominant educational, media, and religious institutions. The higher we move up the ladder of prestige and power, the less acceptable—and the more deviant—they are.

Sociologically, we look at paranormal beliefs by focusing on how they are generated and sustained. The routes through which this takes place are many and varied. Perhaps five are most likely to be interesting to the sociologist. For each, we should ask the basic question: "Who is the paranormalist's social constituency?" And for each belief, the answer is significantly different.

First, there are paranormal beliefs that originate from the mind of a social isolate, a single person with an unusual, highly implausible vision of how nature works. The isolate's message is presumably directed mainly at scientists, although any connec-

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tion with the scientific community is tenuous or nonexistent. Scientists refer to these people as *cranks*. The social constituency of the crank usually does not extend beyond himself (most cranks are men). It is deceptive to think that cranks address their message to the scientific community, as they do not engage in science-like activities or associate with other scientists, nor do they publish their screeds in science journals; their goal is to *overturn* or *annihilate* conventional science, not contribute to it. Not enough attention has been paid to the crank, but it is a sociologically revealing subject nonetheless. Donna Kossey devotes an entire book, entitled *Kooks*, to the topic (1994).

Second, there are paranormal belief systems that begin within a religious tradition that existed long before there was such a thing as a scientist. Such beliefs sustain, and continue to be sustained by, an identifiable religious organization. Creationism is a prime example. The social constituency of the creationist is the like-minded religious community.

Third, there are beliefs that depend on a client–practitioner relationship. In other words, the key fact of certain belief systems is that they are validated by professionals who possess special expertise that is sought by laypersons in need of personal assistance, guidance, an occult interpretation of the reality of their lives, or a demonstration of paranormal proficiency. Astrologers and other psychics exemplify this form of paranormalism. The social constituency of the astrologer and the psychic is made up primarily of the client and, secondarily, of other astrologers and psychics.

Fourth, another form of paranormalism is kept alive by a core of researchers who practice what seems to be the *form* but not the *content* of science. Many adherents are trained as scientists, they conduct experiments, publish their findings in professional journals, and maintain something of a scientific community of believers, but most traditional scientists reject their conclusions. As we've seen, parapsychology offers the best example here. Unlike astrologers and psychics, parapsychologists do not have clients. They are researchers and theorists, not hired for a fee. Although a substantial number of laypersons may share the beliefs paranormalists claim to validate in the laboratory, these paranormal scientists or "protoscientists" form the sociological core of this system of thinking. For the *professional* parapsychologist, that is, the parapsychological *researcher*, the social constituency is that tiny band of other professional parapsychologists and, ultimately, the mainstream scientific community.

Fifth, there are paranormal belief systems that can be characterized as "grass roots" in nature. They are sustained less by individual theorists, a religious tradition or organization, a client–practitioner relationship, or a core of researchers, than by a broad-based public. In spite of the fact that it is strongly influenced by media reports and the fact that there are numerous UFO organizations and journals, the belief that UFOs are "something real," and that extraterrestrials are on or circling around Earth has owed its existence primarily to a more-or-less spontaneous feeling among the population at large. The ufologist's social constituency is primarily other ufologists, secondarily the society as a whole.

The assertions of the scientific "crank" represent one of the more interesting of all paranormal belief systems. He is a self-styled scientist or (from most scientists' point of view) a *pseudoscientist* who persists in advancing views of how nature works that are regarded as either nonsensical or contradicted by the available evidence (Gardner, 1957, pp. 7ff.). Although many legitimate scientists have advanced theories that were later overturned, falsified, or refuted by evidence, most of their peers regarded their theories as plausible, even though they were ultimately proven false. Moreover, many of the legitimate scientists who propose erroneous theories are able to recognize the error of their ways once the evidence against their hypotheses begins piling up. (To the extent that a real scientist continues to advance an incorrect theory, even after it has been disproven, he or she is more likely to be called a *curmudgeon* than a crank.) In contrast, the crank usually advances theories that are completely implausible to most scientists, or irrelevant or contrary to the way the world operates, or simply impervious to empirical test.

Have proponents of novel theories that were eventually validated and accepted been regarded as cranks? Why aren't Albert Einstein (whose theory of relativity subsumed Newton's laws of physics), Alfred Wegener (who proposed the theory of continental drift), Karl Jansky and Grote Reber (who

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discovered radio waves), and Ignaz Semmelweis (who discovered that germs could infect mothers who were delivering babies)—all of whose theories were initially either rejected or considered controversial (Ben-Yehuda, 1985, pp. 106–167)—cranks?

For instance, did any physicist in 1905 regard Albert Einstein as a crank for proposing his theory of relativity? One physicist says no, that Einstein's contemporaries did not and would not have branded him a crank (Bernstein, 1978). To begin with, Einstein published his ideas in a recognized journal of physics. Second, his theory of relativity passed the test of the "correspondence" principle, that is, it proposed exactly *how* it fit into or extended existing and established theory. In other words, Einstein's theory was very clear on just where Newton's principles ended and where his own theory began. In contrast, crank theories "usually start and end in midair. They do not connect in any way with things that are known" (p. 12). Third, most crank theories "aren't even wrong." Says physicist Jeremy Bernstein, "I have never yet seen a crank physics theory that offered a novel quantitative prediction that could be either verified or falsified." Instead, they are "awash in a garble of verbiage . . . all festooned like Christmas decorations." Einstein's paper was very clear about its predictions; it virtually cried out to be empirically tested (p.13).

Cranks tend to have at least two basic characteristics. First, they usually work in almost total isolation from orthodox scientists. They have few, if any, fruitful contacts with genuine researchers and are unaware of, or choose to ignore, the traditional canons of science, such as falsifiability and reproducibility. Cranks tend not to send their work to the recognized journals; if they do, it is rejected for what scientists regard as obvious, fundamental flaws. They tend not to be members of scientific academies, organizations, or societies. And they tend not to receive grants or fellowships or awards from scientific organizations. In short, they are not members of the scientific *community*.

Second, cranks have a tendency toward *paranoia*, usually accompanied by *delusions of grandeur* (Gardner, 1957, pp. 12–14). I am not using these terms in the clinical or psychiatric sense, but descriptively. That is, they believe they are unjustly persecuted and discriminated against because they are geniuses, because their ideas are so important and revolutionary they would threaten the scientific establishment. Cranks argue that practitioners of entire fields are ignorant blockheads; they are wrong, blinded by pig-headed stubbornness and stupidity. Only they themselves, the true visionaries, are able to see the light. Consequently, they have to continue to fight to expose the truth. If the scientific establishment ignores them, that only demonstrates their arguments are unanswerable. If scientists challenge their charges and attempt to answer their arguments, that only shows they are out to destroy them. It is all part of a plot. It never occurs to cranks that this opposition is, in all probability, generated by basic flaws in their work (Gardner, 1957, pp. 8ff.). As a consequence, cranks are usually *driven*, compelled to spell out their theories and get them recognized as valid. Like many other paranormalists, they are seized with a messianic zeal (Kossey, 1994, p. 56).

The central concept in the field of sociology is the group. Ideed, it can be said that sociology is the *study* of group life. Sociologists are very interested in the social "glue" that binds the members of a society—the networks of relations and associations, both formal and informal, that make interaction an ongoing enterprise. It is the shared expectations people have of who we are and what we should be doing, as well as the sanctions we apply to transgressors, that bring most disruptive and destructive behavior under control. In the absence of such communal links, mutual obligations, and shared meanings, social life as we know it would be impossible. It is the sociologist's job to understand exactly how social life operates.

Social isolates choose to live apart—or have been driven—from the bosom of the conventional group and, hence, from these social influences. (Although, even before their isolation, all of them have already been influenced by the groups that have shaped them and will manifest that influence to their dying day.) As a result of this social isolation, sociologists have not paid much attention to cranks.

In my estimation, this is a mistake. Cranks and their theories are worth examining, even by sociologists. I'll state this even more strongly: sociologists ought to be *especially* interested in cranks.

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They seem to defy the sociologist's insistence that the group is the measure of all things. In a way, the crank offers an example of the limiting or negative case: someone who pursues a line of action that is not validated by any relevant social groupings. How did the crank come to generate ideas that practically everyone else considers crackpot? Where did these ideas come from in the first place? What motivates the crank? What keeps him (again, they are usually male) at the task of churning out missive after elaborate, detailed missive, spelling out theories or interpretations of reality that only he grasps? Where does the crank fit into the sociologist's relentless pursuit of understanding group dynamics?

All crank theories take scientists to task for the error of their ways, their inability to see what is clearly and plainly in front of their noses. Nearly all deride or demean the existing scientific hierarchy of power, prestige, and influence. All argue that the "crank" creators and proponents are vastly wiser and more intelligent than the scientific establishment. Nearly all assert the wisdom of good common sense and challenge the warping, distorting perspective of encrusted scientific dogma. Many challenge the narrow specialization of practicing scientists and respond with their own broad, sweeping view of things. Most offer a critique of the dehumanizing tendency of science, especially its emphasis on rationality (Kossey, 1994, p. 58). It might be said that cranks possess much the same hubris, arrogance, and self-righteous audacity manifested by biblical prophets. They offer a kind of apocalyptic vision of how we ought to view reality and, hence, to re-order our lives, reform our behavior, and transform the society. Cranks are a cultural phenomenon; rather than debunking or dismissing them, we should attempt to understand them.

In a way, then, cranks want it both ways.

On the one hand, they want to *annihilate* the prevailing theories of established science. Scientists are wrong, I am right, they are ignorant, I am well informed, seems to be the prevailing position of the crank. The hubris or *arrogance* of the person possessed of superior wisdom and knowledge seems to suffuse the crank's self-presentation.

But, on the other hand, the crank also lusts to be *accepted* by the scientific fraternity as well. Otherwise, why do they send established scientists their writings? Cranks deeply and sincerely believe that, through the presentation of their evidence and the sheer power of their argument, they will convince the scientific powers that be that they are right.

What they want is contradictory, of course; it can be said that cranks have a *love–hate* relationship with established science. On the one hand, they do not play by the rules of conventional science. But, on the other, they are sufficiently removed from social contact with those who set those rules that they are either unaware of what those rules are or are deluded into thinking that such rules are mere technicalities that can be swept away by the tidal wave of truth. And it is they alone who are possessed of that truth.

SUMMARY

The processes by which some members of the society come to hold beliefs thought in mainstream social circles to be unacceptable are interesting and significant. Sociologically, we can refer to such beliefs as *cognitive* or intellectual deviance. Yet few sociologists of deviance discuss or deal with the topic. Atheism is a prime example of cognitive deviance; many Americans, for example, believe that an atheist cannot be trusted, and less than half of the public would even consider voting for an atheist for president. As with deviant behavior, unacceptable beliefs elicit negative reactions from audiences, including stigma, social rejection and isolation, criticism, even punishment. Different audiences "deviantize" different beliefs. And different audiences deviantize *one another*: Liberals deviantize conservatives, and vice versa; evolutionists deviantize creationists, and vice versa; atheists deviantize theists, and vice versa. At the same time, it's not a matter of a random hodgepodge of different, separate, and independent belief systems: Some audiences have more power to define what's cognitively acceptable and what's deviant.

Some conceptual distinctions are in order here. Not all deviant beliefs lead to deviant behavior; many beliefs remain in the cognitive realm. Hence, the topic is important in and of itself; it is not a simple extension of the fear that deviant beliefs will

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translate into deviant behavior. Deviant beliefs should be distinguished from mental disorder. Although nearly all mental disorder has a cognitive manifestation—just about all mental disorder entails deviant beliefs—most holders of deviant beliefs are psychologically normal. Beliefs are deviant, not because they are "wrong" in some empirical sense, but because they are *regarded as* wrong by specific audiences. Galileo was *right* about the Earth revolving around the sun, but, in the 1600s, that belief ran afoul of the Catholic Church hierarchy, and, hence, Galileo was defined *by* the Church at that time as a deviant. The fact that Galileo made empirically correct observations has no bearing on his deviant status—*in* the seventeenth century, *to* the Catholic Church. Some beliefs become dominant (and therefore conventional) at a later point in time. In the 100s, Christians were persecuted for their beliefs; by the medieval era, Christianity was the dominant religion in Europe, and it was non-Christians who were persecuted.

Belief systems are never "just" beliefs; beliefs are never a simple matter of what one individual believes. Human consciousness is a product of social existence. Marxism argued that our beliefs are a product of our economic life. Scholars no longer accept a simple Marxist theory of social and ideological beliefs. Max Weber, an early-twentieth-century sociologist, held a more sophisticated view of the origin of belief systems, arguing that people tend to have an *affinity* for certain beliefs, based on their social circumstances and their position in the society's system of ranking. In addition, Weber argued that ideas could influence social position as much as social position influences ideas.

Religion is a major source of differing definitions of true and false; hence, religion spawns a substantial sector of cognitive deviance. People "know" religious truths to be valid in the same way that they know that the sun sets every night. Religion and deviance intersect in a variety of ways. Religion influences and, hence, correlates with acts the society defines as deviant; this is a case of religion *and* deviance. Mainstream religions define certain religious sects and cults as unorthodox and heterodox, that is to say, deviant; this is a case of religion *as* deviance. In addition, religious bodies define certain secular practices as deviant; this is deviance *according to* religion. Theological disputes among practitioners of a particular religion and wrongdoing by religious functionaries may be referred to as deviance *within* a religious organization. And religious bodies attempt to define other religious beliefs and bodies as deviant; this might be referred to as deviance *between and among* religious organizations.

One of the more interesting instances of religious deviance is how a mainstream body defines and reacts to sects and cults. A "sect" is a religious body that breaks off from an established, mainstream body. A "cult" is a religious body that is radically different from an established, mainstream body; some cults stem from within the same society, whereas others stem from outside the same society, as the established body. In the United States at this time, sects that offer a stronger, more evangelical, more zealous, and more dogmatic version of Christianity are growing faster than the old-line, established, mainstream ecumenical denominations. In a sense, sects are deviant—albeit only moderately deviant—because they are "too religious." In contrast, cults are deviant because they contrast too sharply with the established denomination. In the nineteenth century, the Church of the Latter Day Saints (the Mormons) was an example of a cult. Their difference from established denominations has declined over the years.

The struggle to define creationism as deviant and evolutionary theory as intellectually acceptable, and vice versa, is one of the more interesting examples of cognitive deviance we might examine. The controversy is fraught with conceptual confusion. In the past two decades or so, "intelligent design," the view that evolution occurred but it was guided by the hand of God, has been added to the struggle. Nearly half of the American public believes that the Earth is less than 10,000 years old, and that all species on the planet were created in six days, as spelled out in the Genesis account. Less than 10 percent accepts a materialistic version of evolution, that is, that evolution occurred but God had nothing to do with it; in contrast, roughly 99 percent of biological and geological scientists accept this belief. In addition, representatives at the pinnacle of society's major institutions accept the evolu-

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ordinary account. Perhaps for no other major belief is there such a yawning gulf between what the public believes and what scientists believe. As both creationism and evolution are tied in to a larger worldview, this controversy is unlikely to disappear any time soon.

Paranormal beliefs, those that scientists argue contradict the laws of nature, are extremely widespread. Some paranormal beliefs originate with a "crank," someone disconnected from the scientific establishment who attempts to overturn conventional science by proposing a "theory" that challenges what scientists believe to be true. Observers argue that cranks are completely different from legitimate scientists, such as Einstein, who propose a revolutionary theory that challenges conventional paradigms. The theories of cranks usually cannot be empirically tested, falsified, or verified. Other paranormal beliefs originate from a religious community; examples include creationism and the belief that angels and the devil exist as material beings that influence worldly events and behavior. Still other paranormal beliefs are sustained in a client–practitioner relationship; here, astrology is a prime example. And some paranormal beliefs are sustained through the activities of a body of researchers whose work, in the estimation of scientists, is deviant because it lacks the form but not the content of science. Here, parapsychologists offer the prime example, as, in the judgment of the vast majority of scientists, its practitioners are unable to offer a satisfactory, testable, cause-and-effect model for how the mind can influence material phenomena. Finally, many paranormal beliefs have a "grass roots" or popular origin; they are an aspect of the traditional culture. Examples include belief that UFOs, ghosts, and witches are "real."

Accounts: A Potpourri of Scientifically Deviant Beliefs

I gathered these quotations from a variety of sources; they reflect a variety of scientifically deviant belief systems. They are deviant to scientists, but obviously not to their believers. By that, I mean that, in all cases, the ontology, epistemology, and cosmology—the very empirical or factual basis—of the belief system their proponents endorse are rejected by the vast majority of natural scientists as demonstrably empirically false and, hence, deviant—that is, rejected by a substantial proportion of at least one extremely influential collectivity, that is, the scientific community. Of course, their rejection by one collectivity does not preclude them from being valorized in one or more other social circles—for instance, among fundamentalist Christians, paranormalists, Wiccans, Scientologists, Mormons, ufologists, and so on. In my scheme of things, religious miracles are paranormal claims and, hence, to traditional scientists, are empirically deviant. And who knows? Maybe all of these assertions will turn out to be true. Maybe some of them will. What's important is that we recognize this fundamental fact about deviance: What's considered morally or intellectually wrong among members of one audience may be regarded as right among another.

The Creation

In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. . . . And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. . . . Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together into one place, and let the dry *land* appear. . . . And God said, let the earth bring forth grass, the herb yielding seed, *and* the fruit tree yielding fruit after its kind. . . . And God said, Let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creatures that hath life, and fowl *that* may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven. . . . And God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind. . . . And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our

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likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish in the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them. . . . Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them.

Adapted from *The Holy Bible* (King James Version), Genesis, 1:1–27, 2:1.

Jesus Healing the Sick, Distributing the Loaves and the Fishes, and Walking on Water

Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick. And when it was evening, his disciples came to him, saying, This is a desert place, and the time is now past; send the multitude away, that they may go into the villages, and buy themselves victuals. But Jesus said unto them, They need not depart; give ye them to eat. And they say unto him, We have here but five loaves, and two fishes. He said, Bring them hither to me. And he commanded the multitude to sit down on the grass, and took the five loaves, and two fishes, and looking up to heaven, he blessed, and brake, and gave the loaves to *his* disciples, and the disciples to the multitude. And they did all eat, and were filled: and they took up of the fragments that remained twelve baskets full. And they that had eaten were about five thousand men, beside women and children. . . . In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them [his disciples], walking on the sea. And when his disciples saw him walking on the sea, they were troubled, saying, It is a spirit; and they cried out for fear. But straightway Jesus spake unto them, saying, Be of good cheer; it is I: be not afraid.

Adapted from *The Holy Bible* (King James Version), Matthew, 14:14–27.

Young Earth Scientific Creationism

By adopting the view of ancient history given in Scripture, a Christian is then able to study the results of creation, the plant and animal types that were created. We can study the results of the flood of Noah's day, which certainly laid down the majority of the earth's sedimentary rocks that contain fossils. Although we did not witness creation or the Flood, we are convinced they really happened in history, and can attempt to interpret the *present* evidence, the results of *past* events, within a true historical framework. In this way, we can fill in the gaps in our knowledge, more fully understand the past, and make sense of the present.

On the other hand, if the Bible is correct and creation, the Curse, the Flood, and the dispersion at Babel really happened, what occurs when someone assumes an evolutionary history instead? Obviously, if one *denies* true history, and accepts a false view by assumption, any attempt to reconstruct history is doomed to failure. It will not only be wrong, it will be inferior to a reconstruction based on real events, and it will neither be internally consistent nor scientifically satisfying. The data will not fit very well, yet it cannot be absolutely disproved. There will always be a story that can be told about the evidence.

Adapted from John Morris, 1994, pp. 17–18.

Pyramid Power

I'll talk about the strange, mysterious influences of Egyptian pyramids. Modern scientists have discovered that any pyramid fulfills three requirements: (1) It must have the same aspect ratio between the peripheral and the height of the Kufu pyramid in Giza; (2) two sides must be placed parallel to geographical North and South; (3) it must be made of non-conducting material. Any pyramid with these characteristics has the influences and the properties of the Great Pyramid.

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What are these influences and properties? By placing objects under a pyramid:

- coins and jewels become shiny, as if they were new;
- steel razor blades become sharp again; they can be used fifty to 200 times;
- milk will never spoil—it just separates into layers and becomes yoghurt;
- meat and eggs will never spoil, they will just become dried;
- flowers live longer; they finally dry and keep the same shape and color;
- muddy water becomes clear and pure;
- tooth pain, migraine, even rheumatic will all be relieved after a few sessions;
- sitting inside the pyramid promotes healing, meditation, sensitivity, and telepathy.

Adapted from: Ragy Anayet, *Stranger than Imagination: The Pyramid and the Secret of its Super Power*. Unpublished blog, 2011.

Wicca

At the core level I am a Witch. I do spellwork . . . but it is done sparingly and with a great deal of thought and consideration for all potential outcomes. . . . There are evil people in the world. These people—the child abusers and molesters, the rapists, wife beaters and murderers, those who prey on the innocent and unsuspecting. . . . Sometimes it IS appropriate to hasten karma if someone is truly a threat to another. . . . Just as there are police officers and prisons in the physical world, I believe that we also need some of this in the spiritual world. . . . I set forces in motion against a person who is truly guilty and if karmic or spiritual justice needs to be hastened . . . I focus energy through ritual or spellwork that brings the person to the attention of the Goddess and let Her decide if karmic retribution is appropriate by asking that true justice be granted. . . . Just as you would hopefully not stand idly by and turn away from a murder, mugging, or rape in the physical world, you should not do so in the magickal worlds as well. Being a Witch brings with it great responsibilities and you must always reflect foresight, humanity, and compassion in your workings but at the same time use discretion and care to ensure that you are not becoming an abuser of your divine gifts.

Adapted from: "Herne's Ramblings: A Witch's Justice," *The Celtic Connection*, wicca.com, 1997–1999.

Alien Abduction

I had no control of myself. . . . The craft was . . . ball-shaped, no lights. . . . Two small beings came out of the craft. . . . I was awakened by [an extraterrestrial] being [that was] armpit-high, holding my hand and attempting to take me somewhere. . . . I said get away from me and if they touched me again I was going to hit them. . . . I knew that if I hit them . . . my fist would go right through them. . . . He explained that they wanted to do some medical examinations on me. . . . [They] took some semen from me. . . . [Then] they took my right eye out of my head. . . . Next they put a b-b-like metal ball in my eyes socket [to] . . . monitor me from space. . . . Then they put my eye back in and that was that. . . . Within less than a minute they were done and my full vision was restored. . . . [One of them said that] the world will clean itself . . . by eliminating all life on her. They [the aliens] will repopulate earth after this happens. Like they have so many times before. . . . They are us a million years from now. After this I found myself back in my house with five minutes to go to work.

Adapted from Anonymous, ufocasebook.com/trueaccountofalienabduction.html

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Crop Circles

The earth is flat. We live on the backside of a huge, flat blackboard (whiteboard, scratch paper, or whatever) used by aliens in their schools and universities. There are many of these in the universe. The flat disk of the earth is fine enough that student doodles made in alien art and math classes "bleed" through to our side. This happens because their writing instruments emit mitogenetic radiation (M-rays) that are well known to affect some living plants, especially wheat, barley, and corn. M-rays weaken the stalk structure near the ground, and the stalks bend over gently to lie flat on the ground, showing no evidence of forceful breaking. So the crop circles in grain fields are nothing more than the reverse pattern of alien students' diagrams made in geometry class. Look carefully at photos of crop circles in books and on the Internet, and a striking fact emerges. *Crop circle designs are constructed from circular arcs and straight lines*. Even the more complex crop circles, including those to look like Mandelbrot sets, or the head of Mickey Mouse, conform to this rule. All crop circles can be constructed using the standard methods of Euclidean geometry. This should tell us something. The aliens making these drawings must be using undergraduate rules and compasses. Has anyone ever seen a crop circle in the form of a pentagon?

Adapted from Ken Amis, "The Truth About Crop Circles," lhup.edu/-dsimmanek/cutting/cropcirc/htm

Dianetics

Arthritis, dermatitis, allergies, asthma, some coronary difficulties, eye trouble, bursitis, ulcers, sinusitis, etc., form a small section of the psychosomatic catalogue. Bizarre aches and pains in various portions of the body are generally psychosomatic. Migraine headaches are psychosomatic and, with the others, are uniformly cured by Dianetic therapy. (And the word cured is used in its fullest sense.)

Just how many physical errors are psychosomatic depends on how many conditions the body can generate out of the factors in the engrams [a term used in Dianetics to refer to a "recording" of a past painful or injurious experience that the religion reveals or makes available to the person's mind]. For example, the common cold has been found to be psychosomatic. Clears [persons who are on the path to enlightenment and salvation, free of the influence of engrams] do not get colds. Just what, if any, part the virus plays in the common cold is not known, but it is known that when engrams about colds are lifted, no further colds appear—which is a laboratory fact not so far contradicted by 270 cases. The common cold comes about, usually, from an engram which suggests it and which is confirmed by actual mucus present in another engram. A number of germ diseases are predisposed and perpetuated by engrams. Tuberculosis is one.

Adapted from L. Ron Hubbard, *Dianetics: The Modern Science and Mental Health, A Handbook of Dianetics Procedure*. Los Angeles: Bridge Publications, 1985, p. 104.

Questions

Do you believe that most scientists are wrong about their judgment that some of these assertions are wrong? If so, which ones? Why? Are scientists always the ultimate judges of what's true and what's false? If not, in what areas do you feel scientists fail to provide adequate guidelines for reality? And, if scientists are right about these beliefs, why are so many widely believed? Is it possible that scientists are wrong and the millions of believers are right? How do scientists come to their conclusions about what's right and wrong anyway? Do scientists disagree among themselves? Is it possible that scientists will eventually

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change their minds about some of them? Do you see a clash between science and religion? How does one choose between them? If some of these beliefs are widely held, why are they deviant? In what *way* are they deviant? This book has stressed the role of audiences—different collectivities or social circles that determine actions, beliefs, or conditions to be wrongful; what social circle considers these beliefs as deviant? All of them? If it's only some of them—which ones? Do reactions take place when someone is known to hold such beliefs? What might some such reactions be? What *consequences* does holding and expressing some of these beliefs have for their believers? Are some of these reactions more serious than others? Are these reactions specific to the group or social circle in which they take place? Do you feel some of the beliefs expressed in this "potpourri" valid or true? Have you expressed them in certain social settings? Did they elicit or touch off any reactions in persons in these settings? What was the nature of these reactions? What if you wrote a paper in a course that expressed one or more these beliefs? What would your instructor do or say in response to your views? Do you feel that beliefs constitute a valid type of deviance? If so, why? If not, why not?

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