

# Alien Minds and the Will to Believe

By [Edward Curtin](#)

Theme: [History](#)

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*Once upon a time in my youthful naiveté, I would mock those who said they believed in out-of-space aliens and flying saucers. In my hubris, I even wrote an extensive academic paper saying that the popularity of science fiction and the myth of planetary escape provided by the UFO cults and the media served the function of distracting us from earthly problems connected to the changing social structure of western societies and the concomitant transformation of our symbol systems from the traditionally religious to the scientific and technologically based.*

*I argued that there was something devious in this new narrative, like the story of astronauts playing golf on the moon. Although I didn't then say it, I imagined the next public relations stunt would be ping pong on Mars. But I now know that ping pong is a Chinese dominated sport.*

I must confess that I have never seen a space movie like *2001: A Space Odyssey* or *Star Wars* or the television series *Star Trek*; and I have never read any science fiction like *Childhood's End*. I was always repulsed by such fantasies, since figuring out what was going on here on earth was hard enough to grasp. They always seemed like a diversion to me. Of course I have studied their story lines and know about them, and fiction is fiction, right? The movies and television shows aren't real, right?

Culture, I argued in my youthful academic days, is the higher learning we are all subjected to; and culture rests upon the crystallization of a symbolic order that was then changing. I was writing about the late 1960s and early 1970s when the promotion of esoterica of all kinds was widespread and growing madly. And as Philip Rieff wrote in *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, “Faith is the compulsive dynamic of culture, channeling obedience to, trust in, and dependence upon authority.”

I then sensed we were undergoing a massive symbolic transformation in which the controlling symbolic (from Greek: to throw together) order was being replaced by a diabolic (from Greek: to throw apart) order (that controlled in a different way) and new stories were emerging that would not order people's lives but would disorder them as they were offered a pastiche of choices to scramble their brains so “they would never know” for sure. This was all happening at the time of the political assassinations of the 1960s, the war against Vietnam, the drug and sexual revolution, the crisis in traditional religion, the turn to the east

especially among the young, women's liberation, etc.

As a sociologist, I was following a tradition of theorizing that tries to describe social change and how culture organizes personality through its symbol systems, in this case the crisis happening between the mainstream faith in science and the counter-cultural reactions and the ways this alleged either/or was being manipulated.

Silly as it now sounds, I argued that as a result of the failure of rational, scientific, and technological culture to replace the traditional religious symbolic plausibility structure it destroyed, resulting in a deep existential void of meaning, an alternative myth about outer space and extraterrestrial life was promulgated to divert people's attention from the creation of our Nazi-run military space program, nuclear weapons, and the military-industrial complex's nihilistic intention to use them. I was so naïve then.

My thesis was that through this symbolic transformation, power over all life and death passed from God to men, and a need arose to provide a story about the gods' continuing existence. Thus the UFO and outer space motifs whereby alien gods - through the technique of *deus ex machina* - might swoop down in flotillas of extraterrestrial spacecraft and swoop up the deserving ones to a beautiful beyond while the rest of the world was incinerated in a nuclear war, a staple story line of science fiction. Of course they might also rape you; but they were the bad aliens who were at odds with the good. *ET* and *The X Files* were still to come.

This myth of outer space was joined to a widespread rise in the promotion of occult phenomena - astrology, the Tarot, alchemy, crystal balls, satanism, witchcraft, spiritualism, etc. - that opened up all kinds of alternative, hypnotic visions of other lives past "death," incredible new visions of inner "realities" and the cosmos, spiritual journeys to worlds unheard of, aided or not by the fuel of psychedelic drugs that were pushed by the CIA. Thus the gods within were added to the alien gods without and new faiths were born - or rather, created. These were mixed in a witches *mélange* with mainstream science or pseudo-science to create an anti-faith faith in forces that could save or destroy us, whether they be aliens, astronauts, or Indian gurus such as the creator of Transcendental Meditation (TM), Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, whose exotic teachings were married to pseudo-science and promoted as a way to reduce crime and violence and bring peace to earth.

This, I maintained in my youthful ignorance, was not a cultural accident. **Mass cultural confusion seemed to have a malign purpose that was setting us up for a reactionary backlash** that would return us back to the future. To a time when we could "never really know" but knew what we were meant to know.

That was in my old life as a scholar. I was so much younger then but I'm older than that now. For a few years, I have just been a regular beer-swigging normal dude walking unpaved roads and woodland hikes looking for the wild life. I have dispensed with the books. I have recently had a revelation like Saul on the road to Damascus but without the light or falling down. I heard no voices. It happened inauspiciously.

A while back I learned of a nice, peaceful place to take a walk down by the river across an old covered bridge down a dirt road where lovely birds could be seen and heard. I was surprised to learn of this place since I have lived here a long time and have sought out every wild country walk I could find. But serendipity happens and epiphanies occur.

Three years ago when I first walked the bridge over troubled water, the place was deserted. On the other side of the twisting Housatonic River I was surprised to see a large stone monument with an inscription signed by the governor of Massachusetts, Charlie Baker. I knew Baker, a Republican, like the former governor Mitt Romney, was the type of “mild” Republican that the overwhelmingly Democratic voters generally didn’t complain about. The monument commemorated [a 1969 UFO event](#), attesting to it being “the first off-world/UFO case in U.S. history” when a nine-year-old boy named Thomas Reed and his family were said to have encountered a UFO and were taken out of their car by the aliens to a cavernous enclosure with strange lights. Beamed up and out in other words. Then deposited back in their car.

I had mocked such reports before but this one was endorsed by the mild-mannered and thoroughly establishment Charlie Baker, a former CEO of Harvard Vanguard Medical Associates, and I was shocked. So I read about it and discovered it had been a big event in the area on the night of September 1, 1969 when about 40 others reported seeing a UFO. It made me laugh at people’s gullibility since remnants of my intellectual skepticism still clung to my numbskull. The more I learned about it, the less I believed it, despite Baker’s endorsement.

When I again returned to the spot a few years later, the monument was gone, and I learned a controversy had ensued, some people had complained, and the town had hauled the monument away. Now there is a smaller round shaped plaque on a metal pole commemorating the event.

It seems the 1969 event caused mass confusion, which would seem appropriate for that time and place, as my youthful writings about culture at large explained. This was two weeks following Woodstock, the height of the Vietnam War, twelve days after the release of the movie, *Alice’s Restaurant*, based on the 1967 experience of local resident Arlo Guthrie’s famous encounter and song about getting anything you want at Alice’s restaurant, a local establishment run by Alice Brock that attracted hippies and counterculturists from all over. Clearly something was happening here, what it was wasn’t exactly clear, since you could get anything you wanted in those tumultuous times. And anything and everything was everywhere in the culture.

But things are so different now. We are all older and wiser. We follow the science. We just do what we’re told. We read the papers about the new government report about UFOs or what they now call UAPs (Unidentified Aerial Phenomena). There are some things we just don’t know but others that we think we do, just like the Defense Department and the intelligence agencies. That’s what they say, isn’t it, and they wouldn’t lie? We follow the science today. The CDC wouldn’t lie, right? We just do what we’re told.

The creator of the television show, *The X-Files*, Chris Carter has a prominent Op Ed guest essay in the [New York Times](#) to explain why he so desperately wants to believe in aliens and how he actually does so without actually admitting it. Along the way, Carter makes sure to slyly tell us he knows the truth about COVID-19:

We are living in times of uncertainty, where truth may be unknowable. I don’t have to tell you this has bred a universe of rampant conspiracy theories. From the Covid conspiracy documentary “[Plandemic](#)” to the idea that [we’re living in a black hole](#) created by the CERN’s Large Hadron Collider when we discovered the Higgs boson.

He follows the science. He thinks truth may be unknowable, a saying that you may have heard before. You know: "We'll never know." Except for certain truths. For he knows all about the pandemic and aliens. And he tells us:

When we were dressing the original set for Agent Mulder's office on "The X-Files," I came up with the poster with a U.F.O. on it that reads "I Want to Believe." And I think that's where most people come down on the whole extraterrestrial business. Not quite there yet, but waiting for a sign.

I'm not waiting. I'm there. I received the sign. I know. I got there just a few days ago when again, in my new found clarity devoid of my old intellectual perspective, I walked that bridge over troubled waters and saw a large piece of metal lying in a watery ditch right where Thomas Reed described his abduction. It was new and very shiny. Talk about signs! If that isn't science, I don't know what is. Direct observation has brought me to the truth. The aliens came back and lost a bumper. Although you might say that's just circumstantial evidence, I must disagree. It's not a symbol, I know that. I saw it with my "eyes wide shut." I follow the science. Life is not a movie, is it?

I once thought the UFO people were crazy and there was a concerted effort to confuse people. But I was so much younger then. I'm older than that now.

Carter ends his essay by saying, "I want to believe."

I say: Lords, I believe. Help my unbelief.

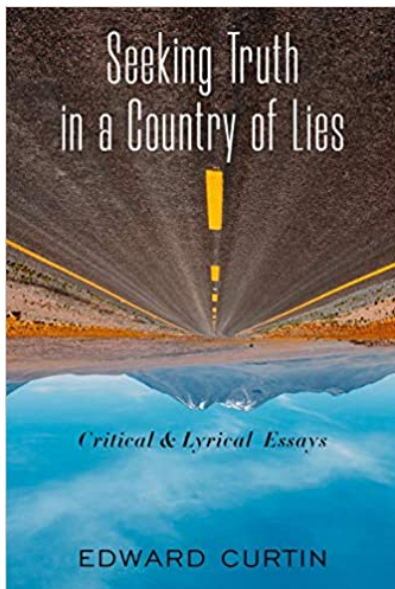
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He is the author of ***Seeking the Truth in a Country of Lies***

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