

# PROSPIRACY THEORY

Every once in a while, I'm pretty sure, you've looked in horror at the headlines, contemplated the scope of human history, or even just spent half an hour channel surfing, and asked yourself this question:

***"Just what the heck is really going on here, anyway?"***

Some people think they have the answers all sussed out, and what they see isn't pretty.

Somewhere, somehow, according to these "conspiracy theorists," there is some hidden cabal of folks, shrouded in deliberate obscurity, who not only know what's really going on, but can actively manipulate and orchestrate events in ways that put us mere mortals (except maybe wedding planners) to shame. These powerful people, furthermore, are not acting with our best interests at heart, but are instead scheming to deceive, enslave, poison and brainwash us, and very possibly sell us as appetizers to extraterrestrials.

After a lot of study and thought on the subject, though, I've come to the conclusion that there is no such group. What we do seem to have, as near as I can tell, is a whole bunch of *different*

cabals, each of which *thinks* that they really run the world, or ought to! — or at least they just go around acting as though they really did.

I find so-called "conspiracy theories" problematic for a couple of different reasons. For one thing, they aren't very *predictive*. A good scientific theory not only explains observed phenomena, but also gives you some idea about what to expect in the future. "Conspiracy theories" usually manage to cover a lot of bases regarding past events, drawing intriguing and possibly even valid connections, but they don't give us much of a clue about what might be coming next. For this very reason, they're not very *testable*, either — which is another quality that something needs if you're going to call it a "theory."

They're also rarely *actionable*. By definition, these supposed conspiracies operate deep in the background, far under the radar — and the theories rarely suggest courses of concrete action to take in response (beyond, of course, spreading the theory to other people). As a result, these theories can be very disempowering. If our fates are held so solidly in the clutches of these massive and powerful groups, after all, what can a single individual or small group of people possibly hope to accomplish?

(Not to mention the fact that by the time you have mastered all the arcane trivia that supports the theory, you barely have room in your head for any other information!)

They are "unactionable" in another sense, too. I like asking conspiracy-minded folks this question, which I invite you to contemplate as well: Suppose that it was proved beyond a shadow of doubt that there was, say, more than one gunman involved in the assassination of John F. Kennedy (to cite one of the most popular subjects for conspiracy theorists). Would your daily life change in any way? Would you do anything differently? Would you switch careers, move somewhere else, take up macramé? Probably not — and if not, why concern yourself with such things at all?

Another thing about conspiracies: we always seem to assume that they're nefarious, up to no good, plotting to control or torment or exploit, and probably quite a few of them are. But couldn't there also be *benevolent* conspiracies? I don't mean groups that use lofty ends to justify terrible means, like promoting the advancement of humanity by culling the population, or enforcing some ideal system of utopian governance that only they understand. No, I'm thinking shadowy groups of

crafty and clever individuals who lurk around, unnoticed, finding opportunities to secretly do *nice stuff* for other people.

Let's not even call such a thing a conspiracy. Let's call it a *prospiracy*. And let's call the participants *delightists* ó the opposite of terrorists. These would be folks who, in Anne Herbert's marvelous phrase, go around practicing "*random kindness and acts of senseless beauty*." Such folks might also, unlike their conspiratorial counterparts, eschew any ambition for trying to control or orchestrate events, but instead would recognize the utterly illusory nature of such attempts, and become experts at body-surfing the waves of change.

I'd be willing to bet that many of the people reading these words are already involved in this delightist *prospiracy*. And it's easy enough to join. There are no secret handshakes to learn, paintings to decode, or puzzles to figure outó although if you know someone who likes puzzles, you might make one up for them and leave it on their doorstep.

Just (*ssshhh*) don't tell anybody. It'll be our secret.

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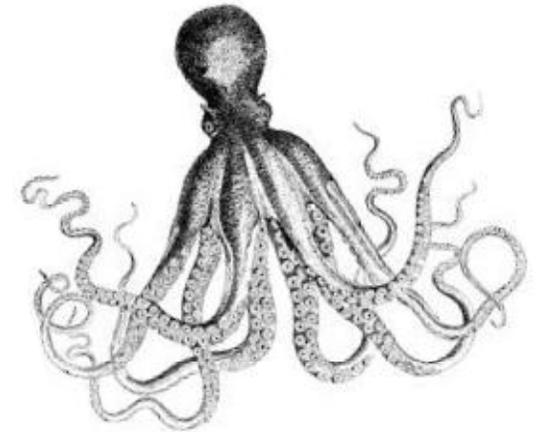
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*by Skip Mendler*



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