

Author: Albert OGIEN
Paper: *The Sociology of Deviance*
Year: 1995 (2002)
Published in: Armand Colin, Paris (Polirom, Iasi)

Review by: Gelu TEAMPAU
MA Student in Anthropology, Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca

“To kill your neighbor, to deliberately drop the hot chocolate on a white carpet during a visit, to make noise in the classroom, to be gay, to rob a postal office, to forget about the birthday of a relative, to cheat while playing domino with your friends, to make drug business or to be a prostitute, to blow your nose in the middle of a violin concert. Everyday life confronts us with countless behavior deviances which in a way or the other break what is considered to be the normal flow of things.” This is the way Albert Ogien (principal researcher at GRASS-IRESO and professor at the University of Paris VIII and at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales) begins his book on the sociology of deviance.

This book has the structure of an academic course and proves to be a really useful, if not indispensable instrument meant to help anyone interested in sociology, anthropology, psychology or ethics. The issue of social deviance is not one easily to deal with. Many researches realized in the last century have tried to find the causes, to explain and to give solutions for “correcting” all kinds of deviances. The major problem that Ogien stresses on is though, that the first step (and the most difficult one) when starting such a hard work must be the defining of the state of “deviance”.

Presenting the theories on the subject in a critical manner, professor Ogien manages to place his book in a position of equilibrium regarding the theories exposed. Not only the professor presents these theories, but he reviews them critically, insisting on the fact that none of these is sufficient to explain the complex concept of social deviance (a concept which can be perceived from so many perspectives). This is one of the reasons why this book is a gift that Albert Ogien offers not only to the students that want to initiate themselves in this matter, but also to the other researchers involved in this problematic struggle, who can thus compare their own results to those of a versed analyst of this theoretical spectrum (or, why not, get some hints useful in their future investigations).

Starting his discourse by defining (in fact, proposing definitions that take into account the old ones which cannot cover all the aspects of empiric data and try to fill their “empty slots”) the key-terms and concepts, like crime, punishment, normality, deviance, anomy, pathology, morality, conflict or legitimacy, Albert Ogien tries to combine and to take scientific advantages from two disciplines which should cooperate in their endeavor: sociology and criminology.

Important parts of the book are concerned with the two sets of theories on social deviance: the theories that focus on the **causes** of the deviant phenomena, which fall mainly under the incidence of criminology (like those finding the origin of the criminal behavior in the nature of the individual, or in the social environment or even in the society as a whole) and the theories that try to **comprehend** these manifestations, which belong to the sociological discourse (the theories of non-adaptation, of differential association, of anomy, of sub-cultures or of the “labeling”). Each theory presented is not only described and evaluated, but also placed in the larger context of both disciplines and related to the other theories that circumscribe the issue of deviance.

Another chapter discusses the topic of the deviant seen as an active and rational social actor, who commits a criminal action by **choosing** to act that way after analyzing the range of possibilities. The starting idea at this point of the analysis is that since a clear and generally accepted definition of a non-conformist behavior has not yet been elaborated, one should try to look at the problem from the point of view of the actor. Therefore, Albert Ogien draws light upon the morality of the “criminal”, considering the state of delinquency as a way of life.

Finally, professor Ogien exposes “a specific idea of normality”, pursuing older directions in the elaboration of a universal acceptance of **normality**, which could be the only axis that could help in defining a criminal act.

Two are the conclusions Ogien reaches in his rigorous, documented and intelligent discourse. The first one is that “*the deviance is a judgment that expresses a relation and not a state of fact*”. The second would be that “*an action considered to be deviant when it is described through the agency of some criteria that are related to a certain normative order can be considered to be normal when it is described through criteria that belong to another normative order*”.

Besides being a leading scholar and an authorized voice in the field of human sciences, Albert Ogien has also the great quality of a genuine writer. His ideas and demonstrations do not suffer from redundancy, tautology or lexical exclusiveness, handicaps that unfortunately affect many other scientific productions. Reading Ogien’s book is a pleasure, as much as it is an intellectual challenge. The scientific community can expect two major consequences of this book: on the one hand, other analyses issued by the scholars stimulated by Ogien’s exquisite material and, on the other hand, more work from the inspired hand of Albert Ogien.

Deviance is any behavior that violates social norms, and is usually of sufficient severity to warrant disapproval from the majority of society. Deviance can be. Theories of Deviance. Deviance is any behavior that violates social norms, and is usually of sufficient severity to warrant disapproval from the majority of society. Deviance can be criminal or non-criminal. The sociological discipline that deals with crime (behavior that violates laws) is criminology (also known as criminal justice). Sociologists who study deviance and crime examine cultural norms, how they change over time, how they are enforced, and what happens to individuals and societies when norms are broken. Deviance and social norms vary among societies, communities, and times, and often sociologists are interested in why these differences exist and how these differences impact the individuals and groups in those areas. Overview. Sociologists define deviance as behavior that is recognized as violating expected rules and norms.