

ON THE COGNITIVE SCIENCE OF CONSPIRACY THEORIES, NEOLIBERALISM, AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

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Associated URL: <https://conspiracy-theories.eu>

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Fundamental scientific questions concerning the rational and irrational factors which undergird conspiracy theories have engaged me during my entire PhD as a European Union funded Marie Curie Fellow at the University of Plymouth (United Kingdom). The nominal topic of my PhD was entitled “Irrational Decisions” (Project#14) and much of my empirical research was concerned with basic mechanisms of perception, logical inference/reasoning, and unconscious processes in human judgments. From a cognitive psychology perspective, I reached the conclusion that “belief bias” (i.e., in syllogistic reasoning), generic dual process accounts of cognition, and various models of selective (limited) attention provide excellent explanatory theoretical frameworks to analyse conspiratorial cognition in a systematic and scientifically valid manner.

In addition, research findings from contemporary neuroscience are of great pertinence in this context, for instance, studies on prefrontal executive functions, the neuroanatomy and processing characteristics of the limbic system (e.g., fear and the amygdalae), neurochemical dopaminergic activation of reward circuitry (viz., nucleus accumbens/ventral tegmental area), schema formation in higher-order associations cortices, regulatory/inhibitory top-down mechanisms, the role of the 5-HT_{2A} receptor in pattern-recognition and creative problem-solving, the role of neuroplasticity in cognitive flexibility and open-mindedness, etc. pp.). Furthermore, well-established theories in social psychology (especially inter/intra-group dynamics, ostracism, and Social Identity Theory) provide analytical tools which afford an in-depth analysis of conspiracy theories and their role in social systems (cf. cybernetics). As a web-developer I am keenly aware of the importance of free access to information (i.e., the open-access/open-source philosophy which enabled the evolution of quasi-egalitarian world-wide-web) and the workings of the Public Relations (PR) industry and their questionable utilisation of insights derived from the social sciences and humanities.

Summa summarum, these research domains are complementary with respect to each other and I am firmly convinced that interdisciplinary scholarship is of crucial significance for a scientifically valid understanding of conspiracy theories.

Fragmentation of knowledge and a lack of meta-cognitive epistemological reflection and humility (due to extraneous factors like publication pressure and group conformity influences which interact with endogenous characterological variables correlated with careerism, ego-centrism, and narcissism) are the primary impediments to this endeavor in the reigning, unfortunately predominantly neoliberal, mainstream académe; but see Prof. Noam Chomsky on the anti-Humboldtian neoliberal assault¹ on academic institutions and academic freedom, an attack which is executed primarily by the military-industrial-entertainment complex and its associated co-opted *myrmidónes*.²

Supplementary information has been compiled on the following websites which were created by Dr. Germann for the purpose of public dissemination:

- <http://cognitive-liberty.online/erich-fromm-to-have-or-to-be/>
- <https://cognitive-liberty.online/the-opportunistic-marketable-salable-character/>
- <http://tuis.tk>
- <http://neoliberalism.tk>

Further pertinent references

Stanovich, K. E., & West, R. F. (2008). On the Relative Independence of Thinking Biases and Cognitive Ability. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.4.672>

Groves, P. M., & Thompson, R. F. (1970). Habituation: A dual-process theory. *Psychological Review*, 77(5), 419–450. <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0029810>

Evans, J. S. B. T. (2011). Dual-process theories of reasoning: Contemporary issues and developmental applications. *Developmental Review*, 31(2–3), 86–102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dr.2011.07.007>

Petty, R. E., Heesacker, M., & Hughes, J. N. (1997). The elaboration likelihood model: Implications for the practice of school psychology. *Journal of School Psychology*, 35(2), 107–136. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4405\(97\)00003-4](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0022-4405(97)00003-4)

¹See Chomsky’s excellent lecture entitled “Academic Freedom and the Corporatization of Universities” which can be accessed under the following URL: <https://chomsky.info/20110406/>

²In classical Greek mythology of Homer’s *Iliad* *myrmidónes* were commanded by Achilles during the Trojan War. According to the legend Zeus created them from a colony of ants (*myrmex*).