

Conspiracy Theories and Misinformation: Exploring the Social and Cognitive Roots

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Conspiracy theories and misinformation are pervasive in modern society, yet their appeal and cultural success remain a topic of debate. Drawing on a cultural evolutionary perspective, this lecture argues that our proclivity to misinformation is a by-product of socially evolved attitudes rather than propositional ones. This tendency is rooted in our cognitive mechanisms for threat detection and error management, which have evolutionary roots. Through historical and social examples, we illustrate how susceptibility to misinformation varies across time and may increase during periods of cultural instability. Ultimately, this lecture proposes that instead of relying on media restrictions to reduce the spread of threat-related misinformation, we should focus on strengthening democratic institutions. By examining the social and cognitive roots of conspiracy theories and misinformation, this lecture seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of their appeal and cultural success.

Interpretativism vs. Naturalism: A Critical Examination in the Philosophy of Social Sciences

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In this lecture, I critically examine two opposing approaches in the philosophy of social sciences: interpretativism and naturalism. The interpretative approach emphasizes the importance of meaning and interpretation in social phenomena, whereas the naturalistic approach seeks to apply the scientific method and empirical evidence to understand social phenomena. I argue that one important advantage of naturalism is that it allows us to connect social sciences with natural sciences through evolutionary theory. To demonstrate the advantages of the naturalistic approach, I draw on recently developed Cultural Evolution Sciences, which provides a naturalistic framework to understand cultural phenomena. By analyzing the key tenets of naturalism and Cultural Evolution Sciences, I demonstrate how the naturalistic approach can provide a rigorous and reliable methodology for understanding social phenomena. Ultimately, this lecture proposes that a naturalistic approach is necessary for developing a comprehensive and reliable understanding of the complexities of society and culture.