

What Exactly is a Conspiracy Theorist Anyway?

Shôn Ellerton, September 29, 2021

Calling someone a conspiracy theorist because you don't like what they say is wrong.



Ah! A great pair of words! How often have you come across the words, *conspiracy theorist*, in day-to-day conversations and what you read on social media? Unfortunately, it has become one of those words universally abused or conflated with other words or phrases such as *myth*, *story-telling*, *misinformation*, *disinformation*, *thinking-out-of-the-box* and so on. More to the point, the term is being frequently used to describe someone who does not conform to the groupthink or narrative of the day, but rather, based on taking an alternative approach to a problem not accepted by the majority. True, often enough, those who *do* take or explore an alternative approach could be proved wrong but there are those occasional ‘eureka’ moments in which a new frontier has been found.

Without those who explore beyond boundaries representing ideas and theories that are proved or thoroughly evidenced, science can no longer advance. The list of eminent scientists in our history which have advanced science but demonstrated, in their day, that their findings and ideas were rubbish based on not being thoroughly evidenced or peer-reviewed is quite an extensive one.

We can start with the old classics such as Copernicus’s heliocentrism in which he posited that the Earth revolved around the Sun, clearly a most ridiculous and extremely heretic one during those days. Then move on to James Lind’s paper in 1753 that scurvy can be deterred by eating citrus fruit. Unknown to many, it was not actually James Lind who identified this but a chap by the name of James Lancaster two hundred years prior who discovered this. It took more than

two hundred years and two million lives to accept that this theory could be heralded as science rather than mere quackery. Later in history, we have many more examples ranging from Benjamin Franklin to Isaac Newton to Nikola Tesla, and of course, Einstein, to give a few big names. There have been many references to those who claim that hydroxychloroquine and ivermectin may lessen the effects of coronavirus symptoms belong to the world of conspiracy theorists. This is simply incorrect. Conspiracy to do what? To do good or to find an alternative medicine? Perhaps the alternative medicines may not work, but perhaps they might. Those against the idea will quickly point out that such alternative medicines are damaging, and maybe they're right; if you take more than ten or even a hundred times the recommended dosage, an oversight often omitted!

January 6th, 2021 was an interesting moment in America's history when a mob of unruly people took it upon themselves that barging into the capitol, swing flagpoles and basically smash up a few things would be a fun day out. Not long afterwards, there were many who concocted up a conspiracy theory that it was all planned. And yes, in this case, it was correctly defined as a conspiracy theory because the intentions were to harm or affect cause in a derogatory fashion. In this case, the hyperbolic intention to destroy democracy. As of writing, an extraordinary effort is being made in the pursuit of gathering evidence to unearth any grounds that this may have been the result of a conspiracy. Another more recent example could be made of the debacle of the method of how the US withdrew presence in Afghanistan leaving the Taliban with an extensive array of weapons to play with. A conspiracy I now often hear is that, perhaps, it was done on purpose so that the US could have a lovely little war again to get more cash. Could it be true? Don't know, but this firmly sits in the world of conspiracy unless it is, somehow proved, and then converted from conspiracy into proof of collusion to obtain wealth through harm.

Another two examples I like to cite are the Flat Earth Theory and the Fake Moon Landings. It is usually accepted that such theories are peddled about by conspiracy theorists, but not for all the reasons all of us take it for. For a start, the claim that the Earth is flat is a myth, a story, if you will. However, the reasoning behind the flat earth theory and how worldwide governments have conspired with each other to ensure that no one can ever get to the edge because it is heavily guarded, is the basis of a conspiracy. To my mind, no sane man can believe that the earth is flat, and this is something that most anyone can prove

with the scantest of tools available to them. The faking of the moon landings is based on conspiracy *because* the reason for faking the landings was to win the space race requiring that a select few at the very upper echelons of the State conspired to fake them.

We often conflate conspiracies with myths, stories, misinformation, and even satire. It is sometimes jokingly generalised that Americans are made fun of because they don't understand satire, which, of course, is unfair considering that Monty Python's Flying Circus has been quite popular there over the years, to take one example. Unfortunately, the term *conspiracy theorist* is too often directed to those who others don't like what they talk about. It is a lazy accusation and seeks to signal to others that this person is not eligible to be taken seriously. Those who wrongfully throw this accusation often seek for proof and evidence, tried and tested, and hundred-percent peer-reviewed. Moreover, the tactic of '*stay-in-your-laneism*' is often employed suggesting that if the topic is outside your qualified area of expertise, your opinion does not count. Benjamin Franklin's discoveries were most certainly spawned outside his area of expertise, which was being a statesman. Ben Franklin, should he be transported to our modern world of social media, would not survive for very long in our pigeonholed, stay-in-your-lane, end-of-enlightenment society for very long. He would be discredited almost immediately for being a quack-artist.

There are many definitions conspiracy theorists; however, the overarching consensus when taken from several dictionary sources is that it points to the genesis of a nefarious plot to do harm by a group of powerful people who are *conspiring* with each other. Being a Freemason, often the target of many a conspiracy theorist, there are those who ask me, with a raised quizzical eyebrow, if I am one of 'those' in an organisation who wants to control the world and set up the New Order. No. Of course not. Great story, though!

Deep down, I think we are *all* conspiracist theorists to some degree although we may not want to admit it. Sometimes I get that feeling that when I'm driving on the road and for some unexplained reason, it felt that everyone or everything was trying to slow me down as if some higher power purposely changed the lights to red to make me angry or that a fleet of retarded drivers suddenly got released on the road to impede my progress. The most probably truth is that I was very tired which thus, impaired my driving skills. I once watched a Netflix documentary that Hitler *might* have employed an imposter of himself—like Stalin—and that he faked his own death and had a long reclusive holiday in

South America. This conspiracy almost seems plausible unlike the moon landing in which hundreds of thousands of people somehow conspired together to keep it a secret. We all have varying opinions of how valid a conspiracy theory might be.

Ultimately, I believe that being open to new or alternative ideas is a good thing and enables us to become pioneers into new discoveries. However, I am not suggesting that new or alternative ideas should always be accepted. Being a believer of '*if it ain't broke, don't fix it*', I don't condone change just for the sake of change, but if something can be improved by new ideas, let's explore it. I value heterodoxy while many others tend to be content within the tunnel-visioned approach of orthodoxy. I have no problems with that. We are all human. But what we should never do is to call out those as conspiracy theorists simply because their ideas are not in alignment with our own or against the narrative of the day.