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Conspiracy Theories:  
Philosophy and Critical  
Thinking

Session Six - The End

# Think, Pair, Share!

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- Think about some of the conspiracy theories you know about.
- Make a list.
- Rank them in order of plausibility.

# Recap: Some things we have discussed

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- 1. Shouldn't we be worried that belief in conspiracy theories engenders radical scepticism?
  - *Is such scepticism actually inappropriate?*
- 2. Surely our suspicion of the term “conspiracy theory” is based upon just how implausible most conspiracy theories turn out to be?

# "Typical" Conspiracy Theories

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- Most people, when they think about these things called "conspiracy theories" think about theories concerning:
  1. "Big" conspiracies
  2. Concerning influential institutions
  3. Up to "no good".

# Thinking generally about conspiracy theories

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- We should resist thinking about conspiracy theories in this "typical" fashion and widen our analysis to include any explanation of an event which cites a conspiracy as a salient cause.
- Why?



# Thinking generally about conspiracy theories

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- A wider focus allows us to examine whether belief in conspiracy theories is really irrational; most things which are typically called "conspiracy theories" are also considered to be part of a parcel of beliefs which are suspicious to hold.

# Generalism vs. Particularism

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- We can distinguish two broad theories about belief in conspiracy theories:
  - **Generalism** - Belief in conspiracy theories is generally irrational.
  - **Particularism** - Belief in particular conspiracy theories can be rational.
- We should be particularists.
- *Why?*

# A Generalist Case for Particularism about Conspiracy Theories

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- Any argument we encounter needs to be appraised on its own merits.
- We need to ask whether the stated reasons, *if they were true*, support the conclusion.
- We then need to ask if the stated reasons are plausible to believe.
- Finally, we should consider rival arguments



# A Generalist Case for Particularism about Conspiracy Theories

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- Conspiracy theorists typically have arguments which support their claim of conspiracy, and if we are going to dismiss their conspiracy theories, then we should appraise their arguments.

# The benefits of being particularists

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- We all turn out to be conspiracy theorists. This is good because:
  - 1. Removes some of the poison from debate by acknowledging that we indulge conspiracy theories all the time.
    - "The Nats pretend to be nice but they secretly just want their rich mates to reap the rewards of wholesale privatisation and deregulation!"
    - "The Greens hidden agenda, disguised as a solution to climate change, is secretly arguing that humanity should go extinct!"

# The benefits of being particularists

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- 2. We often put entertain conspiracy theories:
  - "National is evil and secretly wants to sterilise the poor!"
  - "The Greens are really the Red Menace: the Green co-leaders are basically just like Stalin!"
  - "Universities are just a Marxist breeding ground and their one agenda is to make the white man feel guilty!"

# The benefits of being particularists

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- 3. We often don't just entertain conspiracy theories, we try to persuade others to believe them too with the caveat:
  - "I'm not a conspiracy theorist, but..."