

## **WHY ARE SPREADING DECEPTIVE POLITICAL CONSPIRACY THEORIES ETHICALLY WRONG?**

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Conspiracy theories in expert circles generally have a bad reputation, which is conditioned by the fact that according to some studies, the spread of conspiracy theories has a number of negative consequences: it increases society's indifference to politics, distrust of science etc. However, there are some other researchers who believe that the spread of conspiracy theories has positive effects: it increases the accountability of authorities, contributes to the disclosure of hidden conspiracies, and, in general, is an indicator of the transparency of society. Therefore, attempts by state institutions to prevent the spread of such theories can lead to even more negative consequences. This article analyzes these two approaches to the problem and argues that the dissemination of conspiracy theories is ethically wrong mainly in cases when we are dealing with deceptive political conspiracy theories. These are deceptive, misleading theories that certain political groups use to serve their political agenda. From an ethical point of view, the wrongness of spreading deceptive political conspiracy theories is based on the fact that as a kind of fake news, they mislead and harm society, are mainly used by populist and authoritarian politicians to polarize various social groups, justify their illegitimate actions, and reject the principle of equality among members of society.

**Key words:** *conspiracy theorizing, conspiracy theory, political conspiracy theory, deceptive political conspiracy theory*

Conspiracy theorizing is viewed by theorists as a kind of “defective epistemology” that is weak from an epistemological and ethical point of view. Scholars mainly regard conspiracy theorizing (explanations of the events based on some conspiracy) as mostly false, irrational, incomplete, unscientific and, consequently, bad phenomenon. In addition, according to some studies, the spread of conspiracy theories and conspiracy thinking has some harmful side effects: a rejection of scientific findings, lower participation in politics, unwillingness to vaccinate, and threatening rationality etc.<sup>1</sup> Thus, conspiracy theories, conspiracy theorizing and conspiracy theorists traditionally have a mainly bad reputation. The bad reputation of conspiracy theorizing is fueled by the fact that more and more populist leaders use conspiracy theories in their public speeches. Based on the mentioned fact researchers have found some correlations between conspiracy thinking and populist attitudes of the elites<sup>2</sup>. Thus, more and more scholars believe that the spread of conspiracy theorizing is wrong and discuss

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<sup>1</sup> See **Cibik M., Hardos P.**, Conspiracy Theories and Reasonable Pluralism, European Journal of Political Theory, London, 2020, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> See **Silva B.C., Vegetti F., Littvay L.**, The Elite Is Up to Something: Exploring the Relation Between Populism and Belief in Conspiracy Theories, Swiss Political Science Review, 2017, pp. 1-21.

normative arguments of silencing conspiracy theories or banning the spread of at least some “bad conspiracy theories”.

Nevertheless, over the last years new approaches to conspiracy theorizing have emerged, according to which conspiracy thinking and conspiracy theorizing are not considered purely irrational or bad phenomena. The “defenders” of conspiracy theorizing mention that because of the bad reputation of conspiracy theories, often the explanations of social-political events based on conspiracy theorizing are not considered even worthy of discussion at all. One of the most well-known epistemologists of conspiracy theories David Coady claims, that the silencing of the debates on conspiracy theorizing “increases the likelihood of actual conspiracies (particularly conspiracies perpetrated by officialdom) and it makes it less likely that conspiracies will be exposed”<sup>3</sup>, as there are no warranties that the given conspiracy theory is necessarily false. The other bad side effect of silencing conspiracy theorizing refers to the democratic principles of freedom of expression and freedom of speech. The borderline between respecting the freedom of expression of each individual and the harm that the spread of a given bad conspiracy theory can supposedly cause is very thin, as there could be more dangers in giving legal tools of banning the spread of any political narrative to those, who are interested in silencing their political opponents. The state or other institutions themselves can be engaged in conspiracies against the citizens, and we know about numerous such examples from history books (Watergate scandal, Operation Northwood etc.). If there were no conspiracy theorizing, many real conspiracies would not ever be disclosed.

Thus, in general, we have two approaches to assessing the spread of conspiracy theories or conspiracy theorizing. According to the first approach, the spread of conspiracy theories is mainly a wrong phenomenon. According to the second approach, the spread of conspiracy theories should not be regarded as a wrong phenomenon, as sometimes conspiracy theories turn out to be true, so preventing their spread prevents the disclosure of reality, which may be beneficial for possible or real conspirators. So, how to understand, in what cases is the dissemination of conspiracy theories wrong? I think the answer to this question depends on what kind of conspiracy theories we are dealing with, real or false/uncertain ones, the ones which pursue political goals or not. I claim that the spread of conspiracy theories is wrong only in those cases when we are dealing with certain types of conspiracy theories: deceptive political conspiracy theories. Let's look at the difference between conspiracy theories in more detail since the answer to the question of whether the dissemination of conspiracy theories is wrong or not depends on it.

Even though there are many definitions of conspiracy theories and some researchers claim, that it is nearly impossible to come to a unified account of conspiracy theories<sup>4</sup>, I will consider the simplest definitions and differentiations of conspiracy theories, which are very widespread in our common understanding of them. According to Joseph Ucinski: “Conspiracy theory is an explanation

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<sup>3</sup> Coady D., Are Conspiracy Theorists Irrational? *Episteme*, Volume 4, Issue 02, 2007, p. 202.

<sup>4</sup> See Huneman P., Vorms M., Is a Unified Account of Conspiracy Theories Possible? *Argumenta*, no. 6, 2018, pp. 247-270.

of past, present, or future events or circumstances that cites, as the primary cause, a conspiracy”<sup>5</sup>. Cambridge Dictionary defines conspiracy as “the activity of secretly planning with other people to do something bad or illegal”<sup>6</sup>. That is, all theories explaining events by any kind of conspiracy are conspiracy theories.

The supposed conspiracy presented in the particular theory can be false/uncertain or true, and therefore the given conspiracy theory can be about false/uncertain or real conspiracy. For the differentiation of the real or false/uncertain conspiracy theories philosopher Quassim Cassam suggests dividing conspiracy theories into two large groups: conspiracy theories (in lower-case letters when we are dealing with real conspiracies) and Conspiracy Theories (in capital letters when we are dealing with false or unclear conspiracies, which serve as a tool of political propaganda). In the context of this definition conspiracy theory is a theory that tells the story of a conspiracy that happened in real. Conspiracy Theory (henceforth CT) is theory explaining the particular event based on false or uncertain conspiracy that serves as a tool of political propaganda, it is a form of political propaganda<sup>7</sup>.

Cassam proposes five features, which are typical for all CTs. CTs are speculative (they are based on conjectures rather than knowledge, educated (or not so educated) guesswork rather than solid evidence), contrarian (CTs are contrary to official versions or the obvious explanation of events), esoteric (there are very few who can really understand the mismatches between the appearance and reality of the particular event in the presented explanations of given CTs), amateurish (CTs are usually propagated by non-specialists related to a particular sphere), and premodern (it is the view that complex events are capable of being controlled by a small number of people acting in secret, and this is what gives these events a deeper meaning)<sup>8</sup>. These five features characterize CTs, but we should keep in mind that their main characteristic is that CTs serve the political propaganda of certain political groups, mainly right-wing, but also left-wing or other political groups.

We can call Cassam’s approach to the definition of CTs a “functionalist approach”, as he defines CTs by their function. I think that Cassam’s definition is somewhat narrow, as not all the CTs can be seen as an instrument of political propaganda. There may be many theories, which we can call CTs as they explain some event referring to false/uncertain conspiracy and correspond to the Cassam’s characterization of CTs, but may not play a role as a tool of political propaganda. For example, the conspiracist explanations of the deaths of many well-known people like Elvis Presley, Jim Morrison and others meet the conditions for calling them CTs, but it is nearly impossible to find any political agenda, which may be served from these conspiracist explanations. This means that some explanations of some events may include false/uncertain conspiracy, but may not be political. Thus, Cassam’s definition of CTs is a narrow defini-

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<sup>5</sup> **Uscinski J.E.**, *Conspiracy Theories: A Primer*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, London, 2020, p. 23.

<sup>6</sup> Conspiracy, [dictionary.cambridge.org](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conspiracy), Cambridge Dictionary, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conspiracy>, web. 28.02.2023.

<sup>7</sup> See **Cassam Q.**, *Conspiracy theories*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> See **Cassam Q.**, *Conspiracy theories*. Polity Press, Cambridge, 2019, p. 16-21.

tion for referring to them as only political propaganda tools. Thus, we can differentiate CTs as non-political and political CTs.

According to Juha Raikka: “Political conspiracy theorists offer conspiracy theories to explain social events by referring to genuine political conspiracies whose existence is not widely known or presumed”<sup>9</sup>. For example, “the Masson conspiracy”, “the Reptilian conspiracy” and other similar explanations of global historical events are CTs, but it is challengeable to call them tools of political propaganda. According to the “Reptilian conspiracy” theory thousands of years ago a group of reptilians arrived on planet Earth, who, acquiring a human form, secretly rule mankind and therefore all the ruling elites are not people, but anthropomorphic reptilians<sup>10</sup>. It may seem strange, but the “Reptilian conspiracy” theory, is one of the widespread and well-known total conspiracy theories that people with different political views believe in. It is an example of how a theory can be a CT, but not serve the propaganda of any political organization. The “Reptilian conspiracy” is an example of CT, as it corresponds to Cassam’s five characterizations of CTs, but does not correspond to Cassam’s functionalist approach of defining CTs, as it does not serve the political propaganda of any political group.

We can differentiate the political CTs too, based on the fact whether the distributors of certain political conspiracy theory believe or not in the truthfulness of the conspiracy presented in the theory. There may be cases when the distributors of CTs believe that the theory is true. However, there may be cases, when the distributors of the CTs believe that the theory they spread is not true. Based on this we can differentiate political CTs into deceptive political CTs and open political CTs. Deceptive political CTs are the ones which falseness is obvious for the distributors, but they disseminate those kinds of theories for their economic, political or other interests or motives (Fake Global Warming theory, The Eurabia theory, The Dulles Plan theory etc.). Open political conspiracy theories are the ones, in which distributors distribute particular theory for obtaining their political goals and believe that the theories are true, but the truthfulness of the theory is not proven based on the facts and evidence (GM Food theory etc.).

Let us call deceptive political CTs just DPCTs.

The distributors of DPCTs have unacceptable motives in an ethical sense, as they distribute particular PCTs to misleading people. I claim that spreading DPCTs is wrong for three reasons.

Spreading DPCTs is ethically wrong because:

1. They are a kind of fake news.
  2. They are used by authoritarian and/or populist politicians for the legitimization of their politics.
  3. Their spread is “ethically unreasonable”.
1. The definition of DPCTs makes it clear that they are a kind of fake news. Social epistemologist Kay Mathiesen suggests three features of the phe-

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<sup>9</sup> Raikka J., *The Ethics of Conspiracy Theorizing*, Springer Science + Business Media B.V., 2009, p. 458.

<sup>10</sup> See Tyson L., Kahn R., *The Reptoid Hypothesis: Utopian and Dystopian Representational Motifs in David Icke’s Alien Conspiracy Theory*. *Utopian Studies*, Vol. 16(1), 2005, p. 45.

nomenon of fake news: it is designed to fool people, it is created with no concern for truthfulness, and it is designed to be as viral as possible<sup>11</sup>. The DPCTs are designed to fool people with no concern for truthfulness, as they are deceptive by their nature. In addition, as the DPCTs are designed for serving political propaganda of a particular political group or individual, they should aim to be as viral as possible. Thus, it is obvious that DPCTs are a type of fake news. Mathiesen claims: “Fake news has a number of harmful effects. It deceives people into believing falsehoods, sometimes systematically distorting people’s world-views. It leaves many skeptical of news sources in general, lessening people’s ability to acquire accurate information. It reinforces group polarization, as information at the extremes is more likely to garner clicks and shares”<sup>12</sup>. Thus, these harmful effects apply to DCPTs.

However, a completely justified question arises: should society, the state or a group of interested people be consistent in preventing the spread of all kinds of false theories, such as religious ones, pseudoscientific theories, myths, fairy tales, fiction literature and so on? At least, all these examples can be considered examples of false theories about reality. In addition, if the dissemination of these examples does not seem dangerous, then what is the problem with the dissemination of DPCTs or other fake news?

As I have mentioned at the beginning of this paper, many researchers claim that silencing CTs has more negative than positive effects. For example, according to epistemologist David Coady, as the spread of false scientific theories is a price that we should pay for true scientific theories, the spread of CTs is the price that we should pay for the spread of true conspiracy theories. Coady compares the right and wrong conspiracy theories with the right and wrong scientific theories. He presents examples of false scientific theories that were considered true for some time and were used as justifications for vital policy decisions but were refuted after some time. By the time these theories were refuted, they already had made great damages to society. Trofym Lyesenko’s environmentally acquired inheritance theories are a vivid example of this. This theory “held back Soviet science and agriculture for decades, which caused real harm to every citizen of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, no one would claim that there is some general problem with false (or unjustified) scientific theories. Rather we recognize that false, unjustified, and positively harmful scientific theories are the price we pay for true, justified, and beneficial scientific theories and this seems, all things considered, to be a price worth paying”<sup>13</sup>. We know of numerous such scientific theories, which made real harm to societies, but nearly no one would claim that we should not rely on science in our decision-making processes, as they may turn out false in the future.

The analogy of conspiracy theories-CTs with scientific theories-

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<sup>11</sup> See **Mathiesen K.**, Fake News and the Limits of Freedom of Speech, in the book “Media Ethics, Free Speech, and the Requirements of Democracy” (ed. Carl Fox and Joe Saunders), Taylor & Francis, New York, 2019, p. 168.

<sup>12</sup> **Mathiesen K.**, Fake News and the Limits of Freedom of Speech, in the book “Media Ethics, Free Speech, and the Requirements of Democracy” (ed. Carl Fox and Joe Saunders), Taylor & Francis, New York, 2019, p. 161.

<sup>13</sup> **Coady D.**, Cass Sunstein and Adrian Vermeule on Conspiracy Theories, *Argumenta* 3,2, 2018, p. 298.

pseudoscientific theories is acceptable, but the analogy between DPCTs and pseudoscientific theories is not. DPCTs are deceptive theories, which means that the holders of these theories know that their theory is false, whilst the holders of pseudoscientific theories are sure of the truthfulness of their theories. CTs may be the price for acquiring real conspiracy theories, as at this particular time we do not know the true ones. Nevertheless, we should not pay the price of tolerating DPCTs for acquiring real conspiracy theories, as we already know that the DPCT is deceptive, it aims to mislead the people. Trofym Lisenko's aim was not harming the agriculture of the Soviet Union (I hope), but the distributors of DPCTs are usually intentionally harming their believers by making them believe in false theories. That is the difference, which makes real sense. The same we may say about religious teachings. Even when the religious teachings are false theories (I believe that they are), their holders and disseminators do not want to fool people. On the contrary, they want "to enlighten" people, to make them believe in the "right theories".

The analogy between DPCTs and fairy tales, myths, fiction literature, and religious teaching is not correct either. The aim of the tellers of fairy tales, myths or fiction literature is not to make the listeners believe in the existence of dragons, witches, mythical gods, fiction literature heroes etc. The listeners know that fairy tales, mythical or fiction literature stories are fictional, and they do not need to believe in them. However, the DPCT distributors aim to manipulate the people.

Thus, DPCTs are examples of false theories about reality and are a kind of fake news, but although the rejected scientific theories, fairy tales, myths, religious teachings and fiction literature are false theories, they are not fake news. And if it is ethically wrong to disseminate fake news, it is also ethically wrong to disseminate DPCTs.

2. It is ethically wrong when based on particular DPCTs the political authorities mainly associated with authoritarianism and populism make crucial political decisions. In such cases, the consequences can be tragic. A striking example is the case of the decision-making logic of nowadays-Russian political establishment. Russian historian and media expert Ilya Yablokov in his works proved how the decision-making of the modern Russian political elite is based on various PCTs, such as the "Color Revolutions Conspiracy", "George Soros Conspiracy", "Hostile Collective West Conspiracy", "Soviet Collapse Conspiracy", "Fortress Russia" and others. Generally, according to the core narrative of these CT's, there was and is a great struggle between the imaginary collective West and the "Russian world", and the imaginary collective West throughout history initiated and continues to initiate hostile plans and actions against Russia. Collective West used fictional ideologies like democracy, open society etc., the tools of soft and hard power to destroy the "Russian world". Such theories are used to explain the collapse of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union. Representatives of the modern Russian political elite and their propagandists have repeatedly referred to these theories in their public speeches. Although the notion of Western conspiracy was a key part of Russian intellectual life for more than two centuries "...in the years following the collapse of the Soviet Union, anti-Western conspiracy theories gradually moved from the political

margins to the center of official political discourse. By 2017, the image of the West as the conspiring ‘Other’ had become a crucial element of this discourse and was regularly used by political elites, including top-level politicians, to gain public support for their actions and to delegitimize the opposition”<sup>14</sup>. Of course, we cannot definitely know if the Russian political elites actually believed in these CTs, but at least in their public speeches they repeatedly promoted these theories. Moreover, as we have seen the spread and implementation of these theories into the Russian political elite have led to tragic consequences.

The other disastrous example of how the conspiratorial thinking of authorities made tragic consequences for humanity is Nazi anti-Semitic propaganda from 1933 to 1945. The Nazi regime of 1930-1940-s Germany for “justification” of their politics against Jews used plenty of anti-Semitic DPCTs. Such DPCTs like “The Protocols of the Elders of Zion”, “Jewish-Bolshevik conspiracy” and others demonizing Jews and disseminating anti-Semitic ideas were the basis of the Nazi regime. Although, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>-century anti-Semitic DPCTs were very widespread throughout the western world, in Nazi Germany this kind of DPCT “came from above, with the Party marshalling the full power and resources of the state towards propagating them”<sup>15</sup>.

It is not a coincidence that the political authorities who rely on xenophobic or other PCTs are mostly associated with authoritarian regimes. I agree that: “The ideological formation and modes of legitimization of authoritarian regimes are a major factor in the employment and pervasiveness of conspiracy theories”<sup>16</sup>. Nowadays there are plenty of other authoritarian regimes that rely on xenophobic conspiratorial theorizing. An illustrative example is the contemporary Azerbaijani authoritarian regime, which rests on Armenophobic political propaganda. As the authoritarian regimes lack democratic legitimacy for their power, they need some other “legitimization”. Xenophobic and racist PCT’s sometimes are useful propaganda tools in the hands of authoritarian regimes, as they create the image of the “collective enemy” of the particular nation or ethnic group. In this logic, the threat coming from “demonized collective national and ethnic groups” can only be overcome by the leadership of a particular authoritarian leader, which may serve as a tool of political legitimization of particular authoritarian regime. Thus, it is “natural” that for modern day Azerbaijani authoritarian political authorities “conspiracy narratives have been strongly associated with the representation of the enemy image of Armenia”<sup>17</sup>.

The mentioned cases are illustrations of how the implementation of DPCTs in policy-making processes may lead to harmful, even catastrophic consequences.

3. The last argument refers to the “ethical unreasonableness” of the dis-

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<sup>14</sup> **Yablokov I.**, *Fortress Russia: Conspiracy Theories in Post-Soviet Russia*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2018, p. 185.

<sup>15</sup> **Fay B.**, *The Nazi Conspiracy Theory: German Fantasies and Jewish Power in the Third Reich*, *Library & Information History*, 35:2, 2019, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> **Giry J., Gurpinar D.**, *Functions and Uses of Conspiracy Theories in Authoritarian Regimes*, *Routledge Handbook of Conspiracy Theories* (ed. Butter M., Knight P.), Routledge, New York, 2020, p. 317.

<sup>17</sup> **Terzyan A.**, *Sustaining power through external threats: the power of enemy images in Russia and Azerbaijan*, *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs*, 6(2), 2020, p. 50.

semination of DPCTs. Citing the definition of reasonableness by philosopher Martha Nussbaum: “A reasonable citizen is one who respects other citizens as equals. A reasonable comprehensive doctrine is one endorsed by such a reasonable citizen, that is, including a serious commitment to the value of equal respect for persons as a political value”<sup>18</sup>, researchers Matej Cibik and Pavol Hardos claim that the “bad conspiracy theories” (CTs) “deserve public policy containment insofar as they are ethically unreasonable”<sup>19</sup>. However, Cibik and Hardos admit that not all “bad” or “far-fetched” conspiracy theories (CTs) can be considered as ethically unreasonable. They bring an example of “Lizard people” (i.e., “Reptilian conspiracy”) or “Flat Earth” CTs, which do not challenge freedom, equality or the mutual respect of the citizens, thus they cannot be considered as ethically unreasonable theories<sup>20</sup>. However, I claim that although not all the CTs are ethically unreasonable theories, all the DPCTs are. DPCTs are always based on such narratives, according to which there are some groups that want to harm society, are plotting against society. These kinds of narratives are compatible with the logic of any PCT. And in this context, it doesn’t matter that the particular PCT is deceptive or open, as in both cases the disseminators of that kind of theory use the unproven CTs for their political purposes, they discriminate against particular social groups by regarding them as harmful and malware, thus this kind of theories are not ethically reasonable. In addition, the disseminators of unreasonable PCTs do not respect the political value of equality of those, whom they want to make believe in unproven CTs. In this sense, the ethical wrongness of the DPCTs is not based on their epistemological deficiency, but on the ethical deficiency. For example, let us suppose that we do not know if the disseminators of the “George Soros conspiracy” PCT believe in their advocated theory or not. It means that in this particular case, we do not know if the “George Soros conspiracy” is a DPCT or open political conspiracy theory. According to that PCT, Hungarian-American executive George Soros through the “Open Society Foundation” (established by him in the mid-1980s) branches spread the liberal democratic ideology and values throughout the world plotting to destabilize the political and economic system of the countries for taking them under his control<sup>21</sup>. Even in the case when we do not know if the given theory is epistemically right or wrong, the ethical unreasonableness of the theory is obvious. The distributors of this theory are ethically unreasonable as they challenge the “fact of reasonable pluralism”, and as long as they demonize the proponents of the values of liberal democracy, the proponents of this theory challenge the “freedom and equality” of the citizens who are affiliated with the OSF. The citizens who are affiliated with the OSF aren’t abstract or imaginary groups, and therefore the disseminated hate speech and demonization can have dangerous consequences for their safety and life.

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<sup>18</sup> Nussbaum M., Perfectionist liberalism and political liberalism. *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 39 (1), 2011, p. 33.

<sup>19</sup> Cibik M., Hardos P., Conspiracy Theories and Reasonable Pluralism, *European Journal of Political Theory*, London, 2020, p. 12.

<sup>20</sup> See Cibik M., Hardos P., Conspiracy Theories and Reasonable Pluralism, *European Journal of Political Theory*, London, 2020, p. 13.

<sup>21</sup> Plenta P., Conspiracy theories as a political instrument: utilization of anti-Soros narratives in Central Europe, *Contemporary Politics*, Routledge, 2020, pp. 3-4.



## Conclusion

One of the most important advantages of democratic societies is that they create a competitive field for theories that explain and interpret the world. But this advantage sometimes may be exploited by particular political groups through the dissemination of various CTs for the promotion of their political agenda and reaching their political goals. In this case the particular CTs become PCTs. Although, the dissemination of PCTs is not always ethically wrong, the ethical wrongness of the distribution of PCTs relies on the particular type and content of theories. Only in the cases when we deal with DPCTs we can definitely claim that their spread is ethically wrong, as they are kind of fake news, as they interfere with the political decision-making of the authorities and as their distribution is ethically unreasonable.

**ԼԵՎՈՆ ԲԱԲԱՋԱՆՅԱՆ – Ինչո՞ւ է խաբուսիկ քաղաքական դավադրապաշտական տեսությունների տարածումը բարոյապես սխալ** – Դավադրապաշտական տեսությունները փորձագիտական շրջանակներում հիմնականում վատ համբավ ունեն, ինչը պայմանավորված է այն հանգամանքով, որ համաձայն որոշ հետազոտությունների՝ դավադրապաշտական տեսությունների տարածումն ունի մի շարք բացասական հետևանքներ. հանգեցնում է հասարակության կողմից քաղաքականության նկատմամբ անտարբերության խորացմանը, գիտության և գիտականության նկատմամբ անվստահությանը և այլն: Սակայն քիչ չեն նաև այն հետազոտողները, ըստ որոնց՝ դավադրապաշտական տեսությունների տարածումը ունի նաև դրական հետևանքներ. մեծացնում է կառավարիչների հաշվետվողականությունը, նպաստում է թաքնված դավադրությունների բացահայտմանը և ընդհանրապես հասարակության թափանցիկության ցուցիչ է, իսկ պետական հաստատությունների կողմից նման տեսությունների տարածման կանխարգելման փորձերը կարող են հանգեցնել էլ ավելի բացասական հետևանքների: Հնդվածում վերլուծվել են խնդրի վերաբերյալ այս երկու մոտեցումները, և հիմնավորվել է, որ դավադրապաշտական տեսությունների տարածումը բարոյապես սխալ է հիմնականում այն դեպքերում, երբ գործ ունենք խաբուսիկ քաղաքական դավադրապաշտական տեսությունների հետ, այսինքն՝ այնպիսի խաբուսիկ, մոլորեցնող տեսությունների հետ, որոնք որոշակի քաղաքական շրջանակների կողմից օգտագործվում են իրենց քաղաքական օրակարգը սպասարկելու նպատակով: Խաբուսիկ քաղաքական դավադրապաշտական տեսությունների տարածման բարոյական տեսանկյունից սխալականությունը պայմանավորված է նրանով, որ դրանք, լինելով կեղծ տեղեկատվության տեսակ, մոլորեցնում և վնասում են հասարակությանը, օգտագործվում են հիմնականում պոպուլիստ և ավտորիտար քաղաքական գործիչների կողմից՝ սոցիալական տարբեր խմբերին բևեռացնելու և իրենց ապօրինի գործողությունները արդարացնելու համար, ինչպես նաև մերժում են հասարակության անդամների հավասարության սկզբունքը:

**Բանալի բառեր** – *դավադրապաշտություն, դավադրապաշտական տեսություն, քաղաքական դավադրապաշտական տեսություն, խաբուսիկ քաղաքական դավադրապաշտական տեսություն*

**ЛЕВОН БАБАДЖАНЯН – Почему распространение обманчивых политических конспирологических теорий является неправильным в плане этики?** – Конспирологические теории в экспертных кругах в основном имеют плохую репутацию, что обусловлено тем фактом, что согласно некоторым исследованиям распространение конспирологических теорий имеет ряд негативных последствий: это приводит к углублению безразличия общества к политике, недоверия к науке и научности и т.д. Однако есть немало исследователей, согласно которым распространение конспирологических теорий имеет и положительные последствия: оно повышает подотчетность управляющих, способствует раскрытию скрытых заговоров, и в целом это показатель прозрачности общества, а попытки государственных институтов предотвращения распространения подобных теорий могут привести к еще более негативным последствиям. В статье проанализированы эти два подхода к проблеме и обосновано, что распространение конспирологических теорий этически неправильно в основном в тех случаях, когда мы имеем дело с обманчивыми политическими конспирологическими теориями, то есть с такими обманчивыми, вводящими в заблуждение теориями, которые используются определенными политическими кругами для обслуживания своей политической повестки. С этической точки зрения неправильность распространения обманчивых политических конспирологических теорий обусловлена тем, что они, являясь разновидностью фейковой информации, вводят в заблуждение и наносят вред обществу, используются в основном популистскими и авторитарными политиками для поляризации различных социальных групп и оправдания своих нелегитимных действий, а также отвергают принцип равенства членов общества.

**Ключевые слова:** *конспирология, конспирологическая теория, политическая конспирологическая теория, обманчивая политическая конспирологическая теория*