



Conspiracy as a Dirty Secret: The Case of 9/11

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Abstract In this paper, I analyze those conspiracy theories which have emerged after the tragic events of 9/11. Many people have felt that the US government possesses dirty secrets which are too strange to be believable. However, several different versions exist today. I present the most important cases some of which are more incredible than others. Next, I offer psychological explanations of them. Two main possibilities exist. The first one is an anxiety reduction model and the second refers to the disappointed hopes of paternalism. The second model refers openly to secrets: a paternalistic agent always possesses secrets, but those are not malevolent. According to the conspiracy theorists, they turn out to be dirty secrets. The resulting bitterness expresses itself by means of systematic epistemic irrationality. Some have to be guilty and thus responsible.

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1. Dirty Secrets and Conspiracies

I mean by a dirty secret a secret which is so unique, strange, farfetched, and shameful that it is practically unbelievable. We can then ask why would people want to believe it anyway? I mean by a conspiracy theory the content of any prima facie irrational accusations, shared and supported by a group of people, to the effect that an agent infinitely more powerful than the speaker has secretly and deceptively brought about wilful harm to us or some people who are sympathized by the speaker. Such a speaker is a conspiracy theorist. The definition is a normative one because it mentions irrationality. It is also metaphoric as it mentions infinite power. It is evident that a conspiracy theory entails a dirty secret. We ask, accordingly, why would anyone become a conspiracy theorist?

A dirty secret may or may not be true – this is not the problem in which I am interested in this paper. Many truths have been and still are unbeliev-

able. But to believe what is generally unbelievable requires a proper explanation. And such an explanation is not the strongest point of conspiracy theories. Their alleged secrets are really strange.

Real conspiracies exist too. They are historical facts. A less powerful group of conspirators plot against those in power and they may well be successful and even justified in what they do. Many revolutions started as conspiracies. Such a plot must be kept as a secret because it is directed against a stronger party. It is a key feature of such an account that the conspirators are less powerful than the target of their actions. The case where a powerful party plots against the weaker one is rare but possible. The state may stage a mock enemy attack and thus lure the nation into a bad war. This is a real conspiracy. As we see it is not easy to draw a distinction between real conspiracies and conspiracy theories. The main point is that the beliefs of conspiracy theorists are implausible to the extreme, they demonize the enemy, and exaggerate their power. In other words, their secrets are dirty. Real conspirators only have secrets.

In the case of conspiracy theories the stronger party is allegedly acting against the weaker one, or us. This is the key difference between conspiracies and conspiracy theories. The former indicate actions against those in power; the latter are the result of a possibly paranoid belief that those in power are misusing it against their subordinate agents. In that case the powerful party has a secret which is all the dirtier because of the power behind it. Moreover, the power in question is unlimited, the relevant intentions are malevolent, and the whole story generally implausible.

Conspiracies can be based either on rational or irrational beliefs. It is not impossible that spirits talk to the conspirators and demand action against strong enemies. But a conspiracy theory is always irrational in the sense that its evidence base is faulted. The epistemic assent to it may be a paranoid expression of powerlessness in a situation where the facts and their logic become psychologically both incomprehensible and unbearable. A conspiracy theorist tries to preserve the last vestiges of his explanatory powers by means of resorting to the view that he is harassed by someone who should not do so. 'They' want to harm us – and this is the crucial secret. Who 'they' are may be quite obscure. 'They' may be president's men or visitors from Mars. Such a position contains aspects of paranoia, as I said above, but it also implies megalomania, as for instance Elias Canetti (1960) claims in his great book *Masse und Macht*. I and we are so important, even if we are vulnerable, that those in power must conceal their actions and goals from us. Somehow, we are important and those who want to harm us recognize the fact by creating dirty secrets. But we are so clever that we cannot be cheated. We know the secret now. Do others believe what we say?

Perhaps, we are so important that we must somehow be subdued. Why

would 'they' keep all their actions secret from us and use such extreme methods? The more extreme they are the more important we are. In this way conspiracy theories subjectively empower the powerless.

My hypothesis in this paper is that conspiracy theories are closely related to disappointed paternalism. This gives them a tragic flavor. 'They' were initially on our side and we relied on them. They guaranteed our safety. Now they cannot be counted on any more. 'They' have secretly turned against us. Such anxiety can be reduced by turning to conspiracy theories. Those who were supposed to help are actually trying to harm us. When this dirty secret becomes evident, we know where we are in relation to 'them', and the initial anxiety vanishes. It is replaced by anger, which is a troubling emotion as well, but perhaps not as damaging as blind anxiety.

I try to explain how those atavistic paternalistic wishes breed conspiracy theories when they are disappointed. By paternalism I mean simply the view that a more powerful agent helps and takes care of the weaker one even against his or her own will. A paternalistic wish expresses then one's hope to be so served.

2. A Disaster in New York: What Really Happened

A key case and an empirical illustration is the destiny of WTC in New York in 9/11 and the large number of different conspiracy theories which shroud it today. Many, perhaps most, Americans believe one or more versions of them, which is made easier because the theories range from absolutely unbelievable delusions to almost sensible suspicions. In all these theories the culprit is the US government security agencies which are supposed to guarantee the safety of the people against international terror. They did not; on the contrary, 'they' secretly attacked the people. The helper has turned into an enemy within.

To count them is difficult, but it seems to me that at least the following 9/11 related conspiracy theories can be found. They all differ with respect of the dirty secret which is now brought into open. Then evidence is offered to those who still do not believe:

(i) There were no airplanes attacking WTC's Twin Towers and the Pentagon. No airplane crashed on that remote field in Pennsylvania (Flight 93). The supporters of this view say that in no picture of the collapsed part of the Pentagon wall can we see debris of aircraft – no engines or tail parts, which are normally visible after such a big crash. In pictures from Pennsylvania we see even less: there is only a charred hole on the ground. The eye witnesses say that they did not see any wreck of a plain there, just small pieces of metal and a hole on the ground. The main problem is, of course, created by the eyewitness' reports in New York and the very clear video-

tapes which show planes hitting the Twin Towers. Also the apparent existence of grieving relatives of the Flight 93 must somehow be explained. Many ordinary people claim to have lost relatives and acquaintances. How can that be? How was this counter-evidence created and made so successful in protecting the secrets?

A typical example of such extreme denial can be found for example in <http://www.911blogger.com/node/16498> (accessed 20.07.08). The point is that those who called from the hijacked planes were all very calm and poised. This is grossly unintuitive when we think of their predicament. I quote a part of the above-mentioned document:

At the very least, these details appear highly unusual. As with much else about the events of 9/11, these phone calls raise serious questions. Were they really being made from the four planes targeted that morning, by passengers and crew members? Or is it possible the perpetrators of the attacks were faking them, in a cruel deception intended to help establish the official story, and this was why the callers were able to maintain such calmness? The calls need to be subjected to far closer and more critical scrutiny than has so far occurred, as part of a real investigation into the attacks, in order to establish the truth.

Such a view can be expanded to cover all the facts concerning the attacks, until we reach the conclusion that no attack took place. A slippery slope can be applied starting from a denial of some facts and then ending with comprehensive scepticism.

(ii) The attacks took place but they were organized not by Al-Qaida (openly) but some US government agencies (secretly). This view is supported by detailed examination of the pictures of the collapsing towers. It is not denied that they were hit by aircraft and that they were burning intensely. All this really happened. But the towers did not collapse because of the fires lit by the crashing planes and their fuel load. The true cause of the collapse was the use of explosives which were secretly installed inside the buildings in advance. When the fires burned on the upper floors, the explosive devices were triggered by US agents, and this brought the towers down.

It is said that these explosions can be seen quite clearly on videotapes when they are compared with those which depict real demolitions of buildings by means of controlled explosions. Such comparisons have been very detailed and they apparently look convincing to many people. Some say that the agents used small nuclear devices. It is said that no fire upstairs could cause the collapse of the whole building. The US agents knew that the towers will be hit, and they decided to make the show even more spectacular in order to enrage the people. In this way they could go

on with their war plans in the Near East. Perhaps the new Obama government will release the truth about these operations? The secrets may be so dirty and dangerous that no one wants to release the truth about them. They might well think that secrecy is still the best strategy in this strange case.

(iii) The Twin Towers were hit by two aircrafts and the ensuing fires made them collapse. The planes were hijacked by terrorists. All this is true. But their plans were known by the US government although nothing was done to stop them. They were allowed to succeed because that gave the government a possibility to justify their aggression in the Near East, and everywhere else as well. This is the same as the alleged government strategy in the case of Pearl Harbour (Dec. 7, 1941) has been said to be. Then the government knew about the Japanese plans but decided to do nothing. At a deeper level the terrorists and the US government served each other's interests. It was a win-win situation. Perhaps the government did not realize that the towers will collapse and thus they predicted damage which was much less than the havoc actually caused by the crashing planes? Perhaps they thought that no amateur pilots can hit such small targets in great speed, and the damage would be not so drastic at all? The success rate of the terrorists was indeed remarkably and unpredictably high.

All these three alleged secrets have generated enormous interest and found many supporters all over the world, and not only in USA. Why this happens is an open question. Perhaps the shock of getting to know the dramatic and quite exceptional situation was too much to bear for many people who now try to get consolation from their conspiracy theories. The weakness of this simple yet appealing explanation is easy to see. If the extent and nature of destruction was too much to bear, why is that not also true of the alleged explanation in terms of 'their' malevolence? If a citizen cannot trust his country's government, is this not an anxiety increasing thought as well?

In other words, why replace one source of anxiety by another one which is even more drastic. Terrorists are expected to do bad things to their enemies, but the fact that the government can do even worse things to the citizens looks like the supreme source of anxiety and fear. The simple anxiety reduction view cannot be correct. We need a deeper explanation if we want to understand the attractiveness of the dirty secrets of conspiracy theories. Next, I offer a sketch of such a more complex explanation.

3. Mental Coping Strategies

To create a deeper version of the anxiety reduction model of explanation we can add the following. 9/11 was simply too grand an event to be under-

stood in a normal way using our everyday models of making events comprehensible. It was in a way an impossible event. The scale of destruction was obvious, comprehensible, and well documented. Yet, at the same time, people could not believe that it was a fact. Such cognitive dissonance is a painful state of the mind, and, therefore, some mechanisms of anxiety reduction are needed.

However, it may well be an oversimplification to say that the destruction as such was the only source of mental pain. Much more might be at stake. To put it simply, the US witnesses of 9/11 might have felt deep anxiety caused by the unavoidable idea to the effect that the Arabs are so much better, more clever, and resourceful than 'we' Americans; we have been invincible almost for ever. Ours is the greatest military might in the world, and we are so well protected at home against foreign enemies. Now, all these truths have been made void. We have been outwitted. It is ridiculous to say but we have trained these rookie pilots how to fly and they go straight through every security system and create unprecedented havoc in our most holy temple of freedom, WTC's Twin Towers. They also (indirectly) destroy Building 7 of the World Trade Center, which incidentally housed several security agencies. Their success is most admirable. Their supporters are elated. We look like fools. They are better than us and they are winning. This cannot be the truth. Thus, there must be a secret here.

These thoughts are as disturbing as they get. Nothing can be worse. A way out exists, but the solution is not easy to find, even if it so obvious: The Arab terrorists did not do it – we did it ourselves! This brilliant invention instantly denies the victory from the enemy and gives it back to us. How could anyone think that such lower creatures as Arabs could ever outwit our mighty security agencies and presidency? It is impossible. The question is, if the Arabs did not do it, who did it? We did it, of course. Therefore, we are clever, resourceful, and successful.

Once this subconscious mental strategy appears, it becomes evident that it carries a high price tag. Our government is invincible but it is also secretive, absolutely ruthless, and immoral. It is willing to kill any number of its own citizens in order to be able to do what it must do. In this way they are successful but also immoral. This is the price of being the best in the world. What is one supposed to think of this truth?

The citizens have two alternatives to consider. First, they must consider the idea that their government were outwitted by some Arab terrorists who did exactly what they wanted to do, and even more, without anybody being able to fight back. Second, the citizens must consider the possibility that his or her government is indeed the most competent and successful in the world, and thus invincible, but also a ruthless and immoral killer. What is the best choice?

The history of the 9/11 conspiracy theories shows that both these alternatives are appealing and it is a matter of personal choice which one the person selects and supports. A conspiracy theorist selects the latter one. The result is a kind of proud bitterness. We are still the best, but we the people are also treated very badly by our own government. So, some residual anxiety remains but the main worry is gone: we are not weak and stupid. Some people are better equipped to handle the basic anxiety brought about by the bombings. They say we were outwitted, the results are horrible, and that is it. We need to be humble however difficult it may be.

4. Sources of Irrationality

Let us return to the second strategy of anxiety reduction above. It leads to a conspiracy theory which is by definition a *prima facie* irrational position. Why is it irrational? It is irrational both on epistemic, conative, and emotional grounds. I am not going to give a detailed argument in favour of the alleged epistemic irrationalism here. The main problem seems to be some kind of phenomenological naivism which forgets the need to provide explanations.

Let me give an example. The Twin Towers collapse videotapes show some clearly visible bursts of gases and debris coming out of the walls just below the currently collapsing part of the wall. These are said to be the effects of those explosions which actually brought down the building. However, these jets could result from the collapse itself. The real epistemic problem concerns not the visual impressions created by the collapse but the explanation of the fact that the building was fitted with a large number of sophisticated explosive devices. How could they be put there without anyone noticing? Some people even argue that Building 7 was equipped with explosives already when it was built. It was always explosion ready. How could all this work be accomplished without anyone noticing or any of the workers starting to leak information? In ancient times, all the workers who did this type of sensitive work were put to death after the work was finished, exactly for this reason. Nobody can be trusted. Secrets cannot be protected.

The second source of irrationality is conative and emotional. Who can seriously think that their government kills thousands of citizens when its motives are highly obscure? Why kill all those people? No good answer is coming. And if no good motive is shown to exist, the result is pure paranoia. The President, his government, and its agencies look in this view like some strange creatures from Mars, so alien are their motives and reasoning. It is true that the President and CIA have done many clandestine operations and lied to the press and people, but they seem to have had a

strong motive for doing this. What does it tell about the people who think it is obvious that their own government is ready to murder thousands of citizens at one time and in one place?

The irrationality here seems to focus on the alien way the authorities are supposed to think. We the people do not know, and cannot know, our own government in a democratic country. Nevertheless, the fact that such beliefs are irrational does not imply that they are necessarily false. It may happen that the US government detonates a nuclear explosive device in a major American city just to get what they want, although nobody ever understands what it is that they want. The President can go to war if he wants, and he can create a near police state equally well. No explosions are needed to achieve that. No secrets need to be created.

I have argued that a conspiracy theorist is proud of his or her country: we are invincible and the best in the world, thus, the Arabs could not be successful. They are not successful because we did it ourselves. But this idea leads to the belief that the President is mass murdering good US citizens. This is a deep contradiction. We are invincible which means that we are rotten and immoral. It means that we are the best and the worse at the same time. The government should be admired and hated. The best is the worst – such is the fundamental contradiction in the heart of this modern version of the time honored conspiracy theory.

5. Between Paternalism and Authoritarianism

In this section of the paper I will develop a speculative psychological argument which explains why conspiracy theories about 9/11 are so compelling and persistent. My point is simple: the authoritarian wish for paternalism is first disappointed and next replaced with a conspiracy theory. This scheme may explain the extreme nature of the version of conspiracy theory which I want to discuss and criticize here. When the government fails us we subjectively lose our sense of safety and security, which is an intolerable idea. Again, this seems to explain the bitterness and the near desperation of the debate. The rhetorically essential list of nation, democracy, freedom, protection, and safety are now seen to be not only an inconsistent set but also totally empty of content, and that void must then be filled again. Something should replace the empty rhetoric. Otherwise we all are staring at a black and dead abyss. We must act and then we figure out how a conspiracy theory can be used to fill the void.

The government does not protect us, therefore, it secretly attacks us – this is how an adequate explanation comes back into the picture and allows us to go on with our reasoning and knowledge gathering. No secret may harass us from now on. The government was the exact opposite of what it was supposed to be. Safety was in fact danger and benevolent protection

turned into wilful destruction. Freedom is tyranny, friends are enemies, truths are lies, safety is danger, protection is destruction, trust is deception, promises are threats, and power is weakness – just as George Orwell said in 1984.¹ This is how language is to be used from now on.

A conspiracy theorist sees all of this in its rare clarity, and reacts in one's own way, that is, by saying that what was supposed to be protected is actually destroyed. But one also adds that the destruction was no coincidence. On the contrary, it was a realization of a secret and evil master plan almost too grand to be believed, but not quite. You just need to be courageous enough.

Let us now move on to the conceptual and philosophical side of such a mode of thought.² Compare the following three cases:

- Authority: *A* has secrets; *B* has no secrets (*B* trusts *A*).
- Care: *A* has no secrets; *B* has secrets (*A* trusts *B*).
- Paternalism: *A* has secrets; *B* has secrets (no trust).

I mention secrets in this context because then we can see what is going on in a clear and concise way. Moreover, all conspiracy theories deal with dirty secrets, horrible and deadly mysteries that are no longer unknown. Trust is also a key concept in these theories, or actually the break down and the lack of it. It is sad and painful to lose one's trust and to know that no trust will be possible ever. I discuss paternalism for an obvious reason: it is the key concept of my argument, and the same can be said of authority. I include the concept of care in order to show in more detail how power, secrets, and trust are related.

Now, if *A* is an authority he is able to keep his secrets. For instance, *A* has the right not to disclose them to *B*. This entails a power difference in favour of *A* relative to *B*, but this is trivial as *A* is an authority anyway. *B* cannot keep his secrets if *A* wants to know them. *B* is no longer entitled to them. How easy it is for *A* to get to know *B*'s secrets depends on many factors which all refer to the power difference between *A* and *B*. But, in principle, *B* is unable to protect his secrets from *A*. A rather surprising corollary follows: *B* trusts *A*. Why is this so? *B* must trust *A* if *B* is dependent on *A* and *B* does not know what *A* knows (know-how, intentions, plans). Of course, one may say that this trust is not true trust but mere as-if trust, which may well be so. One behaves as if one trusted the other person. According to the behaviouristic models of explanation no difference exists between trust and as-if trust in the case we are

¹ See Orwell (1950).

² See my paper "Trust and Risky Secrets" (forthcoming).

discussing here. The trust-relevant behaviour is the same in both cases. But if one looks deeper than the behaviouristic model would allow, one finds, or course, differences.³

However, for our purposes it is sufficient to say that *B* behaves as if he trusted *A*, but he has also a solid motive to start trusting. He satisfies his authority's expectation and avoids spending any extra energy when trying to do what is impossible, namely, learn to know *A*'s secrets. *B*'s best prudential strategy is to trust in a stronger sense than mere as-if trust. My conclusion is that an authority can keep its secrets and then the subordinate agent trusts him, for instance, not to harm him on the basis of his secrets. We may or may not trust our government's security agencies in this way. Yet, we do not know much about them.

The case of care is the opposite of authority. In that case the carer *A* has no secrets, because the patient *B* has the unconditional and inalienable right to know everything which concerns his own care and its context. In that sense, *B* is in a stronger position than *A*, who is unable to protect his secrets, which may or may not be uncompromising to him. But *B* is allowed to keep her secrets as she likes. *A* may ask any question he wants but the truthfulness and accuracy of the answer is up to *B* herself. Whatever she has not disclosed must not be used against her when her care is organized and realized. For instance, if I do not tell my doctor that I am a heavy drinker, I harm myself. But when he finally finds out the truth and my secret is revealed, he must re-organize the treatment in a respective manner. He has no choice. He cannot dismiss my case because of my initially undisclosed secrets. I may keep whatever secrets I like without penalty. (This presupposes that one does not take the idea of patients' relevant duties too seriously; it is possible to do so.) It follows that the doctor must trust me when I tell about myself. Here the problem of as-if trust returns, but I cannot discuss it further here.

Paternalism means that *A* takes care of *B*'s interests even without his agreement. The following idea is essential: *A* helps *B*, and *A* would have helped *B* even if *B* did not want to be helped. When we once again pay attention to secrets and trust, we can say this. Unlike in the case of care, in paternalistic cases *A* has and keeps his secrets and so does *B*. *B* cannot trust *A* because she knows that in some situations *A* will provide help and care against her will, that is, act against her will. If *B* does not want what *A* offers, *B* has a good reason to resist *A*. Such a motive requires *B* to keep his secrets, which again implies no trust. Similarly, *A* knows that *B* will resist his good intentions and try to avoid *A*'s influence on her life.

³ Hollis (1998: 51). See also my paper "Trust and Risky Secrets" (forthcoming) and Airaksinen (2008: 406ff).

Thus *A* cannot trust *B*. *A* keeps his secrets.

What if *A* is a paternalistic authority? In this case *B* cannot keep his secrets (without denying *A*'s authority). But in the case of paternalistic programs, such as some therapies aimed at those who abuse drugs or alcohol when they are pregnant. *B* can and is expected to keep her secrets. We seem to have a contradiction here.

The solution is simple. If *B* agrees that *A* is a relevant type of authority, she agrees that *A* knows what is good for her. Therefore, *A* is no longer a paternalistic agent from *B*'s point of view. If *B* struggles against *A* and disagrees with *A*'s interpretation of her good, *A* is no longer an authority to *B*, and she has a good reason not to reveal her secrets to *A* and thus trust him. To put it briefly, a paternalistic authority is not an authority; such a person is paternalistic; if he or she is an authority the person has no need to be paternalistic. (Of course, one might say that *A* may be a higher order paternalist in the sense that he first influences *B*'s ideas of her own good, and only then promotes it.) Anyway, a paternalist does not trust and cannot be trusted.

However, even if a paternalist cannot be trusted in the sense that we would disclose our secrets to him, we can still rely on him. This is a key point from the point of view of the argument of this paper. It is possible to rely on an agent without trusting him. We say that the paternalistic agent works independently of my permission and thus bypasses my wants, wishes, and desires in any given case. Thus I cannot trust him. But I can still rely on him in the sense that I need no longer worry about my security situation and my own opinions about it, given that the paternalist agent works to protect me. I leave my security in the hands of the paternalistic actor, and in this sense I fully rely on him. I cannot act myself, so I rely on this agent. This requires a sort of blind faith. I keep my secrets and I realize that the paternalistic agent will do the same; yet I rely on him because he says he protects me. I do not know how he does it, so this is an expression of authoritarianism (which is different from a rational belief on authority). I rely on an agent or an agency that have more power than I have, without trusting them. Reliance without trust is what is expected from us in national security matters. A simple example of such a case is a very old and nasty car I must use because it is all I have; in this case I rely on the car (because I use it) but I do not trust it (I would not use it if I could avoid it). It seems to me that national security is often like such a very bad car.

6. Safety and Security in Focus

Next, we must ask in which sense a conspiracy theorist is the disappointed client of a paternalist. In other words, how does the failure of paternalism

lead to the easy acceptance of conspiracy theories? We are discussing here a particular type of case in which the goal and purpose of action is to protect and promote citizens' safety, which means protection from terrorism and other similar threats. The context is typically paternalistic as the citizens need not see the relevance of protective acts but yet they are protected and even coerced to obey the relevant rules. This is legal paternalism. It does not matter if the client wants to be protected or not. They are not allowed to estimate their own risks and act accordingly. This means that the citizens need not trust the protecting agencies (they are not authorities in the relevant sense), and they cannot be trusted either.

Now, when something unbelievably horrible happens, or people's interest in safety is grossly violated, the logic of transformation from paternalism to conspiracy theory looks like this: we never trusted the protected agencies although we relied on them. Now it becomes obvious that even such reliance was misplaced. Their dirty secrets prove it. We are disappointed and anxious. This allows us to believe absolutely anything about the government, because we did not trust them in the first place – this the key explanatory point. We knew that they have secrets. This describes, of course, only one necessary condition of the emergence of a conspiracy theory, but it seems to be an informative one.

Paternalism implies *B*'s dependence on *A* without mutual trust.⁴ Safety is typically protected in a paternalistic manner. It is never understood as care. The reason for this is that people are not allowed to keep their secrets (right to privacy) when we discuss safety. The security agencies typically have an access to peoples lives in a manner which does not (fully) respect the right to privacy. The citizens struggle to keep their secrets although the state denies their right. Safety is also a field of action which does not follow the rules of authority. The security agencies do not expect people to reveal their secrets in the name of safety; on the contrary, these agencies are always willing to use coercive methods if their clandestine work is not successful.

Of course, security agencies claim an authority and they are authorized to apply certain strategies, but at the same time they know that people cannot be trusted to respect their authority. Those who are most suspicious and likely to constitute a security threat cannot be trusted. They must be coerced. In this way the security agencies are authorized to do their work but they cannot rely on their status as an authority. They think paternalistically and this entails secrets and concealment of facts.

Suppose security agencies have, contrary to fact, the status of an authority. They have the right to know. This is to say that relevant people should

⁴ See Heta Häyry (1991).

disclose their secrets to them. It depends on the status as targets to be protected. Some people may do so, others do not. Those who resist are in need of a paternalistic treatment; those who do not, respect an authority, and that is enough. Is a government security agency paternalistic or authoritative? We must say that it is paternalistic, because paternalistic definition says: if someone resisted, he or she is still helped. This implies that all get help. If the agency is an authority, only those get help who trust them and tell them their secrets. This group is small. Yet national security is for everybody. Hence the agency is paternalistic.

If *B* accepts all this, she has a propensity for authoritarian and irrational thoughts and feelings. How strong this propensity is, is difficult to determine. It is clear that all people are invited to share such authoritarian attitudes which are then seen as necessary to the nation's self-defence, often understood in a grossly extended and abstract sense. In many cases the distinction between an attack and defensive strategy is difficult to draw. The main point is, however, that safety and national security are protected by strong, decisive, and efficient methods by some competent agencies. We do not know much about them, of course, because their work is classified information – for obvious security reasons. We are invited to rely on their work without an adequate proof and its associated trust. We believe that they are powerful enough to do their work. This is said to be possible, which is a sign of authoritarianism.

As I said above, some people give them the right to protect themselves and at the same time surrender their right to know what is going on. They treat them as authorities.⁵ This requires strong faith and trust because here the limits of normal democratic life are crossed. Many others do not have such faith. Then paternalistic attitudes are seen to be necessary, at least in the sense that it is difficult to find any other way to take care of the national security needs of all. We are left with only one alternative, which does not belong to the best possible world. Many people are uncomfortable with this, but not all.

Therefore, *B* must know that her safety interests will always be managed regardless of her own motives and desires. Some people like this idea, others do not. Here we can find deep cultural differences between people and their respective cultures. In Finland people accept it as a matter of fact that their safety is protected by some government agencies alone. People have the right to protect themselves only passively (lock your doors) but not actively (use a gun to protect your home). In USA you need not lock your doors because you can shoot the intruder. In Finland, active

⁵ We can call this a Hobbesian model of authority. See, for instance, Kavka (1986) and Coleman (1977).

self-defence is normally punishable by law.

It seems to follow that the field of self-defence, safety, and security is more paternalistic in Finland than it is in USA. But here we must draw a distinction between personal safety and national security. In Finland national security is almost a non-issue, in opposition to USA where it is a nearly obsessive public concern. Thus, even if USA is non-paternalistic with respect to personal safety it may be very paternalistic indeed in terms of national security. Common safety is conceptualized in a way which is independent of individual safety. When national security is discussed, people's relevant rights can be by-passed. The government protects the nation regardless of people's opinion, will, and even rights.

National, common security and safety related needs are important, but when the flying avengers of 9/11 come these values are seen to be mere rubbish. The explosions reduce WTC into piles of gravel and the same can be said of the safety and security of the people. When one listens the speeches which were given by President Bush after the event, the impression is just the contrary. Bush tells his people that they will be safer than ever in the future. He does not mention the catastrophic security failure which made 9/11 possible in the first place which was so alarming that it should have led to his immediate retirement because of incompetence. But his own interpretation of the meaning of the events is that safety will be increased. Disaster is seen as the first step towards full security, if the nation lets Bush do whatever he wants to do. He insists on total freedom to act, for himself. And this happens after the failure, as if the failure were inductive evidence for the belief that he can manage security affairs well. Failures speak for success, in this typical political context.

Conspiracy theory expresses and thus reduces these painful feelings which otherwise might become overbearing. The more one relies on those paternalistic and authoritarian security measures in their own secretive world, the greater is the disappointment when 9/11 takes place. A strange twist of logic follows: belief in security changes into the strongest type of disbelief, which is conspiracy theory. We have not been protected. We have been secretly attacked. Our reliance is breached and once that happens we cannot rely anymore; and because we never trusted them anyway we can now believe what ever we want.

The government says 9/11 was the work of foreign terrorists, but we never had any reason to trust them anyway or believe what they say. They were never credible. Therefore we need to ask who did it, and answer the question independently of official government reports. It is not good logic, but the reasoning is this: because the government says Arab terrorists did it, they did not do it (we do not trust the government anyway). So who did it? Again it is bad logic, but the only possible answer is: our own government did it; who else could it be? When terrorists are eliminated,

only the government is left, and thus it must be the culprit. Once trust is lost, everything becomes possible. The result is a full blown conspiracy theory.

In this way, conspiracy theories can be seen as results of failed paternalistic convictions and our reliance on them. Reliance on our own security agencies changes into a belief that the country's government planted small nuclear bombs in WTC well ahead of the expected attack in order to guarantee the collapse of the buildings. They also exploded a bomb at the Pentagon wall which killed 150 people inside the building, and then lied about Flight 93 in Pennsylvania. They made and photographed a hole on the ground in Pennsylvania and said it was made by a plane crash. Then they fabricated all the information which indicates that it really happened.

The final argument against conspiracy theories is that they raise many more questions than they can ever answer. Conspiracy theories are problem generators, not problem solvers. The secrets are simply too dirty to be plausible. This is their peculiar function. For some reason which I must confess I do not understand, some people would like to face such a battery of extra questions and problems. Why would the world be not as simple as it looks? We all saw what happened independently of what the US government says. The Twin Towers were attacked. The attack was the cause of their collapse. Victims' relatives tell about the loss of their loved ones, and we believe them. Why would they lie to us? Why would they have their own dirty secrets as well? How can they keep them? Why do they not tell?

7. Documentation

The excerpts from letters below document the kind of a conspiracy theory I have discussed in this paper. The letters are written to me by my Texan friend and former philosophy student in Texas A&M University, Corpus Christi, TX, Mr. Roy Holcombe, MSc. The letters are published here with Roy's kind permission. I have learned much from them.

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Appendix 1

... I just thought I would throw this at you. The biggest conspiracy theory of them all is the government's ridiculous story that 19 Arab terrorist

armed with boxcutters and directed by a lunatic in a cave with a laptop computer was able to attack the USA by surprise. That is the most ridiculous theory of them all. We have the most sophisticated air defense in the world, especially at the Pentagon and yet these guys who had never flown jets before were able to find these targets on the ground and hit them without any kind of opposition. There is no doubt that the World Trade Center was brought down by explosives. Skyscrapers don't fall down because of fire and even if they did, they couldn't have fallen at free fall speed without some help. We have something called the laws of physics that were evidently suspended on that day if we are to believe the government's story. Just watch the videos of the towers and there is no doubt they are being blown up from the top down. A gravity collapse couldn't eject tons of steel beams upward and outward hundreds of feet without the help of explosives. All the concrete and some of the metal were turned to powder by some sort of energy source besides gravity. Just watch the videos. This was done to get the American people to support a war we shouldn't be in. The plan on 9/11 was to bring martial law to the US by Bush, Cheney and that bunch but for some reason the attack on the Capitol didn't happen like it was suppose to. So, don't be surprised if there is another 9/11 in the very near future. There is talk of one of our aircraft carriers being attacked and sunk in the Persian Gulf by Iran or a nuclear bomb being exploded in one of our major cities and of course Iran will be blamed for it too. Bush and his bunch want to go into Iran so bad they can taste it. They don't want the fighting in Iraq to end either in order to justify building the 15 or so military bases over there. The US is in trouble and the people over here are so ignorant to what is going on. More and more are beginning to wake up though. More later.

Appendix 2

... The conspiracy theory is the line of crap our government is giving us as to how and why those buildings came down. In order for those buildings to collapse the way the gov said they did, one would have to rewrite the laws of physics. Those buildings fell at free fall speed and the concrete was pulverized from the top down. In order for that to happen the kinetic energy would have to be at least 500 times greater than what those floors would have created by just collapsing in on themselves like we were told. It would be like sawing a tree down and have it turn to sawdust from the top down. Explain that. Explain the molten metal at the bottom of each collapsed building months later. Jet fuel doesn't burn hot enough to melt steel like that. Explain how the concrete and metal beams were blown outward and upward hundreds of feet out from the tops of the buildings as

they collapsed. All one has to do is watch the videos and use common sense to see that the governments explanation is a bunch of hogwash. Timo, there are over 300 scholars and engineers and demolition experts who all say without a show of a doubt that those buildings were brought down by controlled demolition. The fact that Bush wasn't whisked away by the secret service the moment they got word that we were under attack shows that they were aware that the President wasn't under any threat. Hell, if someone was to fart too loud around the President, the secret service is on him to protect him immediately. Why was this time different? There are too many inconsistencies in the gov story. All one has to do is a little research and use a little common sense to see that we were lied to. Come on, Timo, you are not going to fall into that group that blindly believes what he is told instead of going out and doing a little digging to see that we are not being told the truth. ...

Appendix 3

... And of course our government continues to lie to us about everything. Since the cover-up of 9/11 continues you can't believe a word that comes out of their mouths. Through my research I have to agree that the twin towers were brought down by the use of mini hydrogen bombs. The evidence to support this is overwhelming. What kind of government does this to their own people? ...

Appendix 4

... c-4, thermate and micro hydrogen bombs brought down the whole wtc complex, not just the twin towers and building 7.
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j H3XzLUijA&feature=related> ...

Appendix 5

... I've done some research into how our cancer treatments were developed back in the early 1900's, and I have found some disturbing facts about our treatment modalities. It's called cut (surgery), burn (radiation), and poison (chemo) and what was surprising is that nothing has really changed in the last 50 years on success rates. I just heard a report on the news that cancer rates were actually up, but our American Medical Association (AMA) wants us to believe that they have made all these great advances in treatments, but they really haven't. My research shows that humans have the ability to fight off all diseases including cancer by means of our immune systems. But, our immune system has been greatly weakened over the years by all the crap that our government puts in the air, our foods and in

our water. They have been putting one of the most deadly toxins, sodium chloride, into our cities drinking water since the 1960's with the belief that no child would have cavities by the age of eight. That is crazy. I just saw another government report trying to convince the American people that mercury might be beneficial to children's brains. That is the craziest thing I have ever heard, but I can bet you that the American people will believe it if our government says it is so, just like 9/11. There's no doubt that Bush ordered 9/11 and that micro nukes were used to bring down the towers. The scientific evidence is there. They believe 4th generation micro-hydrogen bombs were used that yield low levels of radiation. One of the main by-products of a hydrogen bomb is elevated levels of tritium which was found at ground zero and the surrounding areas. They have a piece of concrete and steel that has been fused together that consists of four floors of one of the towers that could only have been created by the heat produced by a nuclear blast. That is why there was nothing left of the concrete and large pieces of steel were vaporized just like everything else, including people. Most of the people who worked down at ground zero are dying from conditions that are only caused by radiation exposure. All of the rescue dogs have already died. I could go on and on with evidence that shows that our own government caused 911. If the American people don't wake up we are going to be living in a police state. This Bush regime is following right in the footsteps of a man named Hitler. Compare what Bush has done and what he is pushing for and then compare it to how Hitler came into power and the similarities will make your hair stand up. And, the puppets that are running for President this time will bring more of the same. We have so much voter fraud going on in this country and have had since Bush was supposedly elected in 1990. He didn't win in '90 and he didn't win in '94 and it won't matter who the people vote for this time either. Look at who we have to choose from. It's scary and pathetic. I could go on and on and on about this. I have done extensive research and there is no doubt that the Neo-Cons want control of the world and will do whatever it takes to accomplish their plan. I am very surprised that we haven't had another false flag incident like 9/11 but worse, but Bush still has time. He wants to go into Iran so bad I wouldn't be surprised if they nuke one or more of our cities and blame it on Iranian terrorist. I am passionate about this and I hate seeing our great country destroyed by a bunch of megalomaniacs.

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