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ARTICLE

Pathologies of Collective Attention

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Abstract

This article aims to offer a systematic account of pathologies of collective attention. It reconstructs attention, salience, and affordance as interlocking notions through which both subjects and collectives become oriented toward the world in specific ways, before turning to ideology, propaganda, and conspiracism as cases of pernicious attentional dysfunction. Drawing on both analytic epistemology and the tradition of critical theory, I argue that these phenomena are distortions in the way groups pay attention and saliences are misvalued. Taking up the notion of social pathology from the tradition of critical theory, the paper reinterprets it as a metaphor for those modes of collective life that obstruct attuned responsiveness to reality and brings it into dialogue with more recent debates on "negative" epistemic properties in (analytic) epistemology.

Keywords: Attention; political epistemology; social epistemology; epistemic pathology; critical theory; social pathology

1. Introduction

Recent decades have seen a rising interest both in certain "negative" epistemic phenomena (such as fake news or propaganda) and in attention as an analytical tool for understanding a variety of mental properties. Both philosophical and psychological approaches to attention have so far largely focused on how a given individual focuses or disperses their attention, at the cost of ignoring the way in which attention operates on a suprapersonal level. This article aims to bring together these strands by arguing that at least some of these "negative" epistemic phenomena can be understood as pathologies of collective, not just individual, attention.[1]

Section 2 reconstructs, leaning on the work of Weil and Murdoch as well as Sebastian Watzl's recent investigations, attention and salience as two co-originating concepts, followed by Section 3, which ties the Gibsonian notion of affordance and cognitive

[1]There is some research on cases in which group agency can become pathological – pathology being understood as behavior arising from a group's structure that is yet contrary to its explicit self-conception (Rachar 2024).

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penetration (due to Pylyshyn 1999 and other cognitive scientists) to the notion of attention. Section 4 then briefly introduces the notion of social pathology and argues that the notions of ideology, propaganda, and conspiracism can be re-read as pathological dysfunctions of collective attention. Thus, this article ties together overlapping concerns of both recent analytic epistemology and the tradition of critical theory throughout the last century.

A few notes are in order. First, the recent, yet dominant tradition of conceiving of attention in terms of the vocabulary of cognitive science and experimental psychology (while acknowledged in Section 2) is largely bracketed here. This is in favor of the tradition of what is sometimes called ethical attention stemming from Simone Weil and Iris Murdoch. Second, while this article references Weil's and Murdoch's accounts of attention, I want to set aside the religious dimension of their respective notions of attention since that element is not relevant to the main goal of this article.[2] Lastly, I will simply take for granted that collective attention as a base phenomenon exists, and I will assume, but not argue for, the idea that the subject of collective attention can be, in some cases at least, a suprapersonal entity like a group or institution. Central to the idea of a suprapersonal entity is a claim of irreducibility: a suprapersonal entity is an entity whose existence and properties are not reducible to any individual person or to the sum of individual persons. The entity has properties – including attention – that belong to it *as* an entity, not to its members severally. Such entities can have states and orientations that persist through complete turnover of membership, that no individual member fully endorses or is even aware of, and that produce effects in the world that no individual could produce alone. A scientific community can have blind spots no individual scientist chose. That is what makes the entity suprapersonal rather than just plural; it has a level of organization above the personal that is causally and explanatorily ineliminable. This is not an attempt to resolve debates about group agency or collective intentionality. It just needs to be granted that *something* at the suprapersonal level coordinates attention – media, institutions, shared practices, social norms, or something else entirely – in ways that are not fully explained by aggregating individual attentional acts.

[2]The idea of attention has a distinctly religious flavor in Weil; it is akin to prayer, an effort towards God. Weil's notion of attention is both religious and ethical through and through. Prayer is the prime case of attention: it is the "orientation of all the attention of which the soul is capable towards God" (Weil 2021: 61). The same capacity for attention can be applied to other things and can be developed through learning and studying. Attention is ethical in at least two ways. Firstly, attention is work on oneself insofar as practicing attention is practicing humility (Weil 2021: 64). Secondly, attention is a form of genuine love, according to Weil, because attention, directed upon people, "consents to the existence of another" (Rozelle-Stone and Davis 2024). To Weil, attention itself is considered a valuable effort, regardless of the object of attention. While Weil's idea of attention aims at both God and moral goodness, Murdoch tailors attention in a mainly moral, not spiritual, fashion. The religious overtones are somewhat more muted in Murdoch, but certainly still present. Murdoch does contemplate the role of God and religion for morality (e.g., Murdoch 1993), but attention as a moral notion as such takes center stage. Her main motive for adopting Weil's notion of attention is dissatisfaction with major strands of moral philosophy of her time, more specifically, with ethical views which center a moral will or maximizing utility. Against this, Murdoch stresses attention as a means of striving towards the good. Her own approach to attention and morality is strongly influenced by Plato. In particular, the triumph of attention is to Murdoch, as it were, a victory of the higher parts of the soul over the lower parts, sometimes interpreted as the triumph of reason over desire. The notion of attention does not contradict, but seems largely compatible with consequentialist, deontological, and virtue-theoretical approaches alike.

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2. Attention and salience

Attention seems, in the first instance, not to be a theoretical posit but something ordinary and immediately familiar, even if certain strands of psychology have treated it as a technical construct. At a purely cognitive level, attention may be described as the prioritization of information. Yet the notion of attention has developed along at least two principal trajectories in philosophy, whose boundaries with psychology and cognitive science remain porous. No single discipline can claim privileged ownership of the concept. For present purposes, I will distinguish these trajectories as those of *cognitive attention* and *ethical attention*.

The first line of inquiry (what I call cognitive attention here) belongs largely to philosophy of mind in dialogue with empirical research. Here the central questions concern how attention functions within the architecture of a single mind, and how it relates to agency, perception, and consciousness (see especially Mole *et al.* 2011; Wu 2014, 2023, 2024). This debate investigates the role of attention in decision-making, intentional and agentive control, self-regulation, perceptual experience, memory, introspection, and emotion (Watzl 2017: esp. 18–21 for a survey of psychological approaches). Some writers drawing on this corpus have extended it toward cultural and political concerns, examining how attentional capacities are commodified or instrumentalized within what has come to be called the "attention economy" (Purser 2019; Williams 2018). Important as these developments are, the argument advanced here will primarily align with the second, ethical lineage of the concept.

The second trajectory (called *ethical attention* here) originates with Simone Weil and is subsequently reformulated by Iris Murdoch. For Weil, attention is not merely a cognitive act but a contemplative orientation, a mode of perception whose purpose is to become wholly absorbed in its object, ideally without imprinting it with traces of one's own self. Murdoch, while indebted to Weil, later further diminishes the religious dimension of attention, translating the notion into a distinctly moral register. The essence of Weil's conception is captured in her concise formulation:

> Attention consists of suspending our thought, leaving it detached, empty and ready to be penetrated by the object [. . .]. (Weil 2021: 67)

To suspend thought in this way is to suspend the ego. Only by momentarily relinquishing the self can reality disclose its structure and complexity. Attention, in this sense, reopens the space of morality by dissolving distraction, defense, and projection. Weil calls it a "negative effort" (Weil 2021: 66). Attention, at least in some cases, is an act of suspension, i.e., a cultivated passivity, a willingness to be filled by the object rather than to act upon it.

Although now widely known, it may yet be helpful to recount Murdoch's illustration of the ethical dimension of attention:

> A mother, whom I shall call M, feels hostility to her daughter-in-law, whom I shall call D. M finds D quite a good-hearted girl, but while not exactly common yet certainly unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement. D is inclined to be pert and familiar, insufficiently ceremonious, brusque, sometimes positively rude, always tiresomely juvenile. M does not like D's accent or the way D dresses. M feels that her son has married beneath him. [. . .] However, the M of the example is an intelligent and well-intentioned person, capable of self-criticism, capable of giving

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> careful and just *attention* to an object which confronts her. M tells herself: I am old-fashioned and conventional. I may be prejudiced and narrow-minded. I may be snobbish. I am certainly jealous. Let me look again. Here I assume that M observes D or at least reflects deliberately about D, until gradually her vision of D alters. [. . .] D is discovered to be not vulgar but refreshingly simple, not undignified but spontaneous, not noisy but gay, not tiresomely juvenile but delightfully youthful, and so on. And as I say, *ex hypothesi*, M's outward behaviour, beautiful from the start, in no way alters. (Murdoch 1970: 16f.)

At first, the mother perceives her daughter-in-law as good-hearted, yet "unpolished and lacking in dignity and refinement." Over time, however, she begins to question the justice of her own judgment and resolves to reconsider. Through this renewed act of attention, her perception gradually transforms: the same traits that once appeared vulgar now seem "refreshingly simple," what once seemed undignified reveals itself as spontaneity, what once felt noisy becomes lively, and what she had dismissed as immaturity now appears "delightfully youthful" (Murdoch 1970: 17). Nothing about the daughter-in-law herself has altered. What has changed is the mother's manner of seeing – the quality of her attention. In attending rightly, she comes to recognize a reality that had always been present, waiting only to be discerned.[3] Weil's and Murdoch's views of attention are, however, not just about ethics, but about the whole of reality:

> Attention is rewarded by a knowledge of reality. (Murdoch 1970: 87)
> The authority of morals is the authority of truth, that is of reality. (Murdoch 1970: 88)
> Look at the facts! This is a way, a way, of directing attention. (Murdoch 1993: 384)

The crucial point is that attention should not be conceived of exclusively as a neural process or as a moral disposition structuring ethical life, but as the primary property through which a subject – individual or collective – becomes oriented toward its environment (or sometimes its own mental life). On this view, attention is not one mental operation among others but the condition under which objects, persons, and situations become available for further cognitive engagement: for perception, evaluation, and response. It is in this sense that attentional orientation can be assessed epistemically – as more or less adequate, more or less responsive to what is actually there – rather than only morally.

> We can find more recent, sober rephrasings of this idea in Sebastian Watzl's work: [. . .] all forms of attention consist in the agent's activity of regulating priority structures, which order the parts of the subject's on-going (occurrent) mental life

[3]One thing that is special about Murdoch's metaphysical picture is that truth and reality are themselves concepts with normative import. Realism is a "matter of doing justice to the objects one is confronted with" such that "dealing with" reality requires ethical consideration (Mason 2023: 649). Murdoch's example of M and D is the best-known exemplification of this idea. M only gets to see the world correctly because her capacity for attention (which itself is ethically fraught) allows her to grasp the way D really is. Accordingly, Murdoch's notion of objectivity differs from standard conceptions in traditional analytic philosophy. Some standard notions of objectivity hold that objectivity is standing in an appropriate representational relationship to parts of the world. But for Murdoch, being objective means meeting the world in its ethical demands in addition to, say, representing facts appropriately (Mason 2023: 650).

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> by their relative priority to the subject. [. . .] Perceptual attention consists in prioritizing some parts of a perceptual state over other parts of that state. [. . .] When attention is non-perceptual what is prioritized is a non-perceptual aspect of the subject's ongoing mental life. (Watzl 2022: 96)

Watzl characterizes attention as something like a mental magnifying glass: when one enlarges a single word on a page, the surrounding text does not vanish from the paper, it simply recedes into the background for some time. The same conceptual architecture usefully illuminates the kind of attention envisioned by Weil and Murdoch, whose concerns, though ethical and phenomenological, resonate with this structural account of mental prioritization.[4] Watzl gives a structural, functional account of attention as the regulation of priority structures – it is explicitly neutral on phenomenology and ethics. Weil and Murdoch give an account of attention that is phenomenological and normative – for them attention has a particular quality (receptive, ego-suspending) and a particular directedness (toward reality, toward the other). The connection is that Watzl's priority structures provide the formal architecture that Weil and Murdoch's ethical attention instantiates in a particular way. Ethical attention, on their account, is a specific normative configuration of priority structures – one in which the self's habitual saliences are subordinated to what is actually there. So Watzl explains the mechanism; Weil and Murdoch specify a normatively significant *mode* of running that mechanism.

Weil and Murdoch mainly consider the positive aspects of attention. One existing account of negative aspects of attention at the individual and collective level that are explicitly epistemic is found in Ganeri's *Attention, Not Self* (Ganeri 2017). Ganeri distinguishes two types of attention: narrative attention and empathetic attention. Narrative attention is extended over time, not just momentarily, organizing experience into a story-like sequence by connecting perception, memory, and anticipation. Narrative attention shapes how we track and organize the world over time. Empathetic attention is directed toward other people as minded agents and gives us access to their perspectives and experiences. It is first and foremost about awareness of others as others, not necessarily about caring about them as people (which would be sympathy). What Ganeri shows us is that attention itself is an epistemic access mechanism.

Attention seems conceptually inseparable from *salience*. The two notions are co-originating: different expressions of the same underlying structure. To be minded at all is to have one's attention directed, and such direction presupposes that certain features of the world stand out as salient. But salience is not a simple notion, and its complexity is worth pausing on before proceeding. For example, in the famous attention test experiments – dubbed *The Invisible Gorilla* – by Simons and Chabris (1999; popularized in Chabris and Simons 2010), people are asked to watch a video of a group of people passing balls to one another while scurrying around. They are asked to count the number of times the ball is passed between people in white shirts only, thereby making them focus just on that. Many of those watching do not notice at all a person in a gorilla costume shuffling through the frame upon first watching the video. What the researchers do with this instruction – "only pay attention to people in white shirts passing" – is to manipulate the salience structure, rendering the gorilla (usually very attention-grabbing) invisible. Salience has two partially distinct dimensions that the present framework must hold together. On the one hand, certain features of the world

[4]Ganeri seems to support this irenic idea when he writes that "attention is a determinable whose determinates include [. . .] the empathy for others that situates us in a social world" (Ganeri 2017: iii).

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possess a kind of objective claim on attention – a fire alarm, a sudden movement, a familiar face in a crowd – that compels notice regardless of the perceiver's prior orientation. In this sense salience belongs to the world: it is what presses itself into the foreground of awareness, what Watzl, in a deliberately neutral formulation, calls a "passive force" drawing attention toward particular features (Watzl 2022: 96f.). On the other hand, what stands out to a given perceiver is never entirely independent of that perceiver's values, habits, training, and prior orientation toward the world. For example, the experienced oncologist sees the shadow on the lung; the layman does not. The ideologue finds confirmation everywhere the skeptic finds ambiguity. In this sense, salience also reflects our own directedness toward the world – it is shaped by what we bring to experience, not only by what experience delivers. Priority structures, in Watzl's sense, express this interaction: what becomes prioritized in our attentional field is a function of both the world's objective claims on attention and the perceiver's own attentional dispositions (Watzl 2022). Philosophers and cognitive scientists capture one dimension of this interplay with the distinction between endogenous and exogenous attention: the former governed internally, as in deliberate focus or trained perception; the latter elicited externally by stimuli that forcibly claim awareness.

Like attention, saliences too can be normatively fraught. Individuals may bear responsibility for what they find salient, while Chappell and Yetter-Chappell maintain that one's pattern of salience reflects one's moral character (Chappell and Yetter-Chappell 2016). In other words, what stands out to us reveals not only our habits of mind but also our ethical orientation; it is not simply a matter of conditioning or coincidence. While some salience structures are so demanding that we cannot help but attend to them (a fire alarm), moral responsibility can still arise at a reflective level: we can be accountable for failing to notice what, though not immediately salient, *ought* to command our attention. Much of moral life depends on cultivating this capacity – to attend rightly even to what does not naturally stand out. A familiar example of misplaced salience can illustrate this dynamic. Consider Hillary Clinton's often-cited remark:

> Women have always been the primary victims of war. Women lose their husbands, their fathers, their sons in combat. Women often have to flee from the only homes they have ever known. (Clinton 1998)[5]

These remarks provide a striking illustration of how salience structures operate. What is salient to Clinton is not the men who die in war but the female relatives of the dead men who are supposedly the main victims. Clinton, or at least her speechwriters, surely knew that men are overwhelmingly those who perish in war. Male loss registers as secondary to Clinton, as the cause of bereavement for women. This is not to diminish the very real suffering of women in war, but it presents a clear example of how attention and salience interlock. What makes salience normatively interesting is the relationship between these two dimensions. Attentional pathologies characteristically involve the second dimension masquerading as the first: an undue salience structure that presents itself as simply reflecting what is objectively there, as it were.

[5]Hillary Clinton delivered this speech on domestic violence in San Salvador. Whether her remarks were partially improvised or entirely scripted is ultimately beside the point.

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3. Affordances and cognitive penetration

The notion of *affordance* is related to the notions of attention and salience. The concept of affordance was introduced by James Gibson in his *The Senses Considered as Perceptual Systems*:

> I mean simply what things furnish, for good or ill. What they *afford* the observer, after all, depends on their properties. The simplest affordances, as food, for example, or as a predatory enemy, may well be detected without learning by the young of some animals, but in general learning is all-important for this kind of perception. (Gibson 1966: 285)

An affordance is an element of one's environment opening up an opportunity to do something ("experienced mandates," Siegel 2014: 52). Text affords reading. A piano affords playing. Stairs afford climbing. A cup affords grasping. A lock affords turning a key.[6]

What counts as an affordance is dependent on one's biological organism (a bee is given different affordances by its environment than a bear). Humans then, as always, are special since humans are not constrained by their environment, but are open to the world (Scheler 2009). This openness also entails that affordances can be social in kind. The field of affordances available to us is shaped by our intersubjective practices. Some affordances are therefore not material but interpersonal: A uniform affords authority; a confession affords opportunity for forgiveness, and a gift affords a possibility for gratitude. As the "language animal" (Taylor 2016), we perceive and engage with reasons through speech. Affordances are thus normative as well as physical, insofar as they are woven into the socio-linguistic structures that govern human responsiveness (Calabi 2005: 261f.).

One crucial purpose of cinematography in movies is to manage affordances and their related saliences for the viewer. Consider, for example, the famous red dress scene in the movie *The Matrix* (1999) in which Neo erroneously believes he has re-entered the Matrix as part of his training regime. Having been put into a simulation (external to the Matrix), Neo finds himself on an ordinary busy metropolitan road with hordes of people exclusively dressed in black and white. He suddenly comes across a blond woman dressed in a red cocktail dress, in stark color contrast to the rest of the environment. Neo's (and the viewer's) attention is instantly captivated, leaving him open for an assault by the (equally simulated) agent, the antagonist of the story. But also outside of movies, saliences can grasp our attention. Consider an X-ray of a lung. The experienced oncologist immediately sees a salient white patch that a layman simply cannot see. The patch is there, and it is salient, but one person recognizes the salience while the other person does not. In fact, part of what training to become a doctor requires is to become sensitive to certain saliences a physician encounters. These salience structures are part of the world. They stand out to us. We do not always choose them to stand out to us. They *grab* our attention (if we have the capacities to perceive them) irrespective of whether we want them to. We do not have to decide to pay attention to them. As with other parts of the world, we can be unresponsive to certain salient structures in the world. For example, a color-blind person may not find that the little girl in *Schindler's List* stands out. What

[6]There is an ongoing debate about the ontology of affordances, mainly about realism or projectivism (see Ingold 2018). While interesting in its own right, it is not relevant for the current context.

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these examples illustrate is not just that salience varies between perceivers, but that the salience of an affordance – its felt urgency and proximity as an action-possibility – depends on the capacities, training, and orientation the perceiver brings to the situation.

Siegel (2017) extends the notion of affordance into the social domain. In her view, perceptual experience does not exclusively register physical features of the environment but also its social significance. Crucially, Siegel proposes that we can have perceptual experiences of affordances, not merely beliefs about them. This allows her to explain how socially contingent hierarchies can come to feel natural or even like common sense: they are not just intellectually endorsed but perceptually presented as part of the structure of one's situation. The connection to salience is then that affordances, on Siegel's account, vary in their felt salience – they can be more or less "live" and pressing. Fear of heights illustrates this: the acrophobe does not simply believe that falling is possible, but experiences the affordance of falling as immediate and pressing. Distorted salience, in this case driven by affect, generates distorted perception of the distribution of affordances in one's environment. One attends selectively to fear-congruent features and discounts those that would tell against the fearful outlook. The pattern of selective attention thus feeds back into the experience of affordances themselves.[7]

Ganeri approaches the affordance-salience nexus from a different angle, via the distinction (due to Hubert Dreyfus; see Dreyfus 2005) between affordances and solicitations. Where Gibson's affordances are objective features of the environment described in terms of their meaning to the organisms that inhabit it, solicitations are those affordances as they bear on the needs, interests, and dispositions of a particular perceiver. An apple affords eating regardless of whether anyone is hungry, but it solicits eating only when one is. The same feature of the world motivates differently depending on the state of the perceiver. For Ganeri, attention is what mediates between these two elements. It is the glue that binds our sensate, active, and rational natures, i.e., what allows us both to be drawn into a field of solicitations and to access the objective features of the entities that solicit us. To be conscious in the world is to be oriented towards an objective order within a field of felt solicitations. Attention, on this picture, is a feature through which the world comes into view as organized, meaningful, and action-guiding.

Thus, salience is the phenomenal face of affordance: what stands out in one's perceptual field tracks, more or less accurately, the affordance structure of one's environment. When salience structures are well-calibrated, they guide attention responsively across the affordances that are genuinely there. When they are distorted, attention is redirected away from genuine affordances toward spurious or exaggerated ones. It is this possibility of systematic distortion that makes the affordance-salience nexus the right

[7]She also develops the view that perceptual experiences themselves can be subject to epistemic evaluation, a position she captures with the notion of epistemic charge. Experiences are not epistemically neutral inputs to cognition but can be positively or negatively charged – that is, they can epistemically support or undermine a subject's subsequent beliefs. A central feature of this account is that epistemic charge can be modulated by prior psychological states – expectations, desires, or biases – through what Siegel calls inferential modulation. When such antecedent influences are epistemically problematic, they render the resulting experience defective: the epistemic failure lies not only at the level of belief but already in how the world is perceptually presented to the subject. Epistemic charge is also content-specific and graded: different aspects of a single experience may differ in their epistemic status depending on how they were formed. This framework allows for a diagnosis of what Siegel calls hijacked experiences (cases in which perception is shaped by non-evidential factors such as prejudice or desire) and establishes that perceptual experience is an epistemically significant stage in cognition, one that can itself be assessed, distorted, and implicated in the downstream transmission of epistemic defect.

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level at which to locate collective attentional pathologies. If attention is the structure through which reality becomes available, and if salience is what guides that attention across the affordance landscape of one's environment, then pathologies of collective attention can be understood as social mechanisms that miscalibrate that landscape. The following section develops this claim through three cases: ideology, propaganda, and conspiracism.

4. Pathologies of collective attention

This section argues that several epistemic phenomena recently prominent in philosophical debate – ideology, propaganda, and conspiracism – can be understood as pathologies of collective attention. Bringing together the critical theory tradition of social pathology diagnosis with more recent work in social epistemology, I aim to show that what these phenomena share is not primarily a structure of false belief but a characteristic distortion of joint attentional orientation. The three cases examined here do not exhaust the range of possible attentional pathologies, but they are sufficiently distinct in structure to illuminate the framework's general application.

Before turning to the pathologies themselves, a clarification is in order. Attention can be evaluated morally (whether one attends fairly, with appropriate concern) and epistemically (whether one is properly responsive to evidence, affordances, and countervailing features of reality). These two dimensions can come apart, and the framework developed here is concerned primarily with the latter. What makes ideology or propaganda pathological is not that they violate some morally correct distribution of attention, but that they impair a group's responsiveness to the world as it is.

There are two partially related, yet distinct traditions of talking about pathologies relating to social life (rather than organisms). One is due to Freud, developed in his *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901; Freud 2001), in which he views psychological pathology as a structural deviation in how the psyche coordinates intention and behavior; conflicts between the conscious and unconscious motives lead to behavior that is done *by* the subject, yet somehow alien *to* the subject. The famous "Freudian slip" is a mistake in speech or action that seems accidental or meaningless but actually reveals an unconscious thought, wish, or conflict.

The other metaphorical usage of a "pathology" of reason or other mental faculties is due to the tradition of critical theory, where it refers to the idea that modern societies (and their forms of rationality, communication, or subjectivity) can become distorted or "diseased" from their original shape in ways that inhibit freedom, reason, or genuine human flourishing. The first generation of critical theorists (Horkheimer, Adorno, Marcuse) used the term "pathology" to describe how modern capitalist societies deform human reason and subjectivity, for example with Horkheimer's conception of instrumental rationality (Horkheimer 2013) and the idea of a dialectical structure of reason (Horkheimer and Adorno 2002). More recently, Axel Honneth expanded the idea of social pathologies to refer to distorted patterns of recognition within social life (Honneth 2009). For Honneth, a social pathology is a systemic, socially caused distortion in the ways individuals relate to one another that undermines the conditions of freedom, self-realization, and recognition (cf. also Laitinen *et al.* 2015 and Harris 2019). The subsequent treatment will follow this second line of critical theory.

What would that second notion of pathology look like tailored to collective attention? If attention is the structure through which reality becomes available to a subject – individual or collective – and if salience and affordance are the mechanisms through

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which that attentional orientation is guided, then a pathology of collective attention is a social distortion of the mechanisms surrounding attention. It is not merely that groups come to hold false beliefs, but that the social structures governing what they jointly notice, find salient, and are responsive to are distorted. The Honnethian notion of social pathology – a distortion that undermines the conditions of freedom and self-realization – is here transposed into an attentional vocabulary: a collective attentional pathology is a distortion that undermines the conditions of a group's epistemic responsiveness to the world. Ideology, propaganda, and conspiracism are the three cases examined here, each representing a distinct modality of that distortion.

Collective attention here is understood as joint responsiveness to the world (loosely following Tomasello 2008 and Eilan *et al.* 2005). Whereas the descriptive question concerns how attention allows one to get a grip on reality in the manner that is amenable to descriptive vocabulary, the normative question asks to *what* and *how* we ought to pay attention. This normative desideratum is present in the ethics of attention literature since an ethics of attention "delineates the normative pressures" on attention as a "central structure of the mind" (Watzl 2022: 89; cf. Archer 2022).

Fairweather and Montemayor (2017) suggest that collective agents (groups, courts, markets, science, etc.) use attention-like processes like filtering, inhibiting, and prioritizing information. They introduce a useful distinction between virtuous insensitivity and non-virtuous insensitivity. Virtuous insensitivity consists in ignoring information where doing so is epistemically necessary, e.g., filtering noise, focusing on relevant data. A virtuously insensitive agent for example largely ignores conspiracy theories about lizard people. Non-virtuous insensitivity means ignoring information that is actually epistemically relevant, leading to epistemic failure. A flat earther who ignores data and evidence by NASA on the shape of the earth is, for example, non-virtuously insensitive. The crucial aspect is that collectives sometimes intentionally block or devalue "good" information for non-epistemic reasons (moral, legal, political). Fairweather and Montemayor (2017) call this "masking" epistemic capacities. For example, courts may ignore illegally obtained evidence although that evidence would be pertinent for a just conviction. Or science as an institution may restrict inquiry for ethical reasons by pronouncing research moratoria. It might be helpful to understand pathologies of collective attention as non-virtuous insensitivity to pertinent information.

Attention being normative implies that there is *good* attention and *bad* attention. That attention is normatively evaluable – that it can be better or worse oriented, more or less responsive to what actually matters – is a claim increasingly prominent in the recent literature on the ethics of attention (Watzl 2022: 89; Archer 2022; Chappell and Yetter-Chappell 2016), and one the present framework endorses. Good attention has been called attunement (Gardiner 2022). Attunement is paying

> attention to the right things in the right way, at the right time, being sensitive to significant features; and ignoring what should be ignored. It relates to questions of attention span, concentration, and quality of focus but, as will become clear, it is not exhausted by these. (Gardiner 2022: 49)

In other words, patterns of attention require evaluation. Attention can be better or worse oriented, more or less answerable to what matters. The idea of a good kind of attention is related to what has been called epistemic vigilance which describes an attentional posture responsive to reasons and evidence (Sperber et al. 2010). Consider, for instance, an individual whose focus remains narrowly fixed on a single political conflict, perhaps

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one implicating their own religious or national community. Such a person may respond with passionate indignation to violence within that particular context, yet remain unmoved by equally grievous suffering elsewhere when it fails to implicate their in-group. In this case, attention is indeed exercised, but not in the way that is perhaps morally required of them. The selective concentration on one specific case of injustice, when structurally identical cases elsewhere are systematically ignored, represents an epistemic inconsistency on top of a moral failing if the attentional pattern is unresponsive to evidence that, by the agent's own implicit standards, ought to apply. Such a person is not properly attuned, but exhibits a pernicious habit of attention. In this case, attunement would mean true solidarity, attentional openness capable of recognizing analogous harms regardless of where they occur or to whom.

Something is epistemically pernicious if it (an event, a state, or part of one's own mind) impedes one's apprehending things as they are. This notion is certainly broad, and one can view developments in epistemology of the last few decades as exploring certain ways in which something can be an impediment to one's grasp on the world. We can view the live discourse on epistemic biases and conspiratorial belief as examples of such impediments. What has not been mentioned sufficiently, however, in those debates is that the way attention is managed *can be*, and *often* is, epistemically pernicious. Failures and pathologies of attention are forms of pernicious cognitive penetration related to attention. Their perniciousness lies in making one lose contact with the world in certain ways. Paying attention in the *wrong way* can be epistemically pernicious. Pathologies of attention prevent (collective) agents from achieving more adequate epistemic responsiveness to the world – not because there is some perfectly neutral attentional stance available to us, but because some configurations of attention are more consistent, more open to disconfirming evidence, and more responsive to the full range of relevant affordances than others.[8] Attention can remove these epistemically pernicious parts of the self by working against parts of the self that obscure, not disclose, parts of reality. The point of becoming more attentive in the right way is to bring oneself into an epistemologically more favorable position.

Such "bad," epistemically pernicious cases of attention can be called *pathologies* of attention. A collective attentional pathology occurs when social mechanisms that ordinarily coordinate attention toward shared features of reality become distorted – concentrating, dispersing, or redirecting attention in ways that hinder a group's epistemic responsiveness.

The large-scale phenomena typically gathered under terms like ideology, propaganda, and conspiracism can be understood as collective *pathologies of attention*. The pathologies described in this part can be a result of deliberate attention engineering by bad actors (fake news) or "organically" develop on their own, although many cases of pathological collective attention are a combination of "naturally" developed epistemic bubbles (Nguyen 2020) and deliberate misinformation and social engineering. Rather than seeing these as failures of cognition alone, they are perhaps better described as disorders of attention. They exhibit the ways in which attention ceases to be a free, responsive openness to reality and becomes instead a managed, monopolized, or numbed resource. The following analysis proceeds by tracing how these social forms each enact a specific modality of attentional distortion.

[8]This framework does not presuppose a single correct distribution of attention, but only that attentional configurations can be evaluated by their degree of responsiveness to evidence and affordances, a standard that admits of degrees and allows for reasonable pluralism.

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4.1. Ideology

The history of the term ideology is – positively speaking – so rich (see Freeden 2003 for an overview) that – negatively speaking – the term is sometimes thought to be too vague to be of value (see Bianchin 2020; Haslanger 2021; Stahl 2024 for recent attempts at unifying some of the disparate history). Among the most intractable concepts in philosophy and political theory, ideology has traditionally been treated as a system of beliefs, doctrines, or worldviews that usually somehow misrepresent reality. I will briefly summarize an account of ideology I developed elsewhere (Spiegel 2020). Ideologies can be understood as consisting of three interlocking elements: metaphysical character, universality, and presuppositional status.

Metaphysical theorems are those that deal with objects or explanations beyond sensory experience and, in the traditional sense of a *metaphysica generalis*, concern the structure of the world as a whole. Ideologies as worldviews have a metaphysical character insofar as they concern the structure of the world as a whole. Universality means that worldviews do not concern just one area of life or thought, but the whole. Ideologies are therefore not like individual beliefs, not like philosophical theorems (e.g., the analysis of knowledge as true, justified belief), and also not like scientific theories with a manageable scope of validity (for example, the oxygen theory of combustion). Lastly, the presuppositional status of worldviews makes it such that ideologies are a priori in a certain sense. Ideologies (and the propositional content with which they can be grasped) do not have easily determinable truth conditions like ordinary language statements.

Characterizing ideology mainly in terms of belief does not seem to do the phenomenon justice. The present framework does not deny that ideologies have propositional content, i.e., that they consist, among other things, in beliefs, doctrines, and worldviews. What it claims is that the propositional level is downstream of a more fundamental attentional level. Ideological beliefs gain their force in part by the salience structures that make certain features of the world visible and others invisible. To treat ideology only as a system of beliefs is to focus on the output while ignoring the mechanism that produces it. Understood in attentional terms, ideology is what makes collective attention self-reinforcing and resistant to revision.

Rather than offer a more comprehensive reconstruction of the common philosophical usage of the term (cf. Jaeggi 2009), the present framework tries to reframe ideology as a pathology of collective attention – a social configuration in which the mechanisms that ordinarily distribute and regulate attention become rigid and self-reinforcing. This attentional narrowing can be described as a totalizing force and as an immunizing force.

First, ideologies act as a totalizing force. Ideologies differ from ordinary interpretive frameworks not primarily in their propositional content, but in how they structure collective salience. They privilege particular aspects of reality and repeatedly direct shared attention toward them, until these aspects come to dominate the field of what can be noticed, questioned, or deemed relevant. Ideologies as worldviews bring with them a selective totalization: an aspect (or a few aspects) of the world becomes a focal point through which the world as a whole is looked at. Ideologies, however, are collective phenomena – while a person can have an ideology by themselves, ideologies are typically created, developed, proliferated, and inherited on a collective level. In terms of attention, ideologies focus joint attention on such selective aspects in a manner that can potentially cognitively penetrate one's experience of the world as such, narrowing the collective

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salience landscape so that everything else becomes background noise. Ideology transforms a partial perspective into a total one by monopolizing attentional resources onto *one* thing that appears overly salient to those under the spell of a certain ideology. The world is organized around a dominant salience – race, nation, market efficiency – which becomes the lens through which every event is perceived. What was once a contingent focus becomes a compulsory focal point.

Second, at the same time, ideology exerts immunizing effects on collective attention. Because attention is finite, ideological systems develop feedback mechanisms that resist re-allocation. For an ideology, it is important that the aspect of the world through which the rest of the world is viewed does not change. Contrary evidence fails to gain salience at all. Dissonant facts or alternative affordances are rendered invisible or reinterpreted to reconfirm the salience of that which is taken to be salient (cf. Spiegel 2025). Ideology thus operates as a self-immunizing attentional ecology: it filters incoming information such that disruptions are absorbed and recontextualized. These features jointly produce what can be called attentional inertia: the resistance of a collective salience structure to revision. Ideology is therefore not primarily a set of false propositions, but a frozen configuration of attention: a social state in which responsiveness to the world's affordances is replaced by a repetitive and self-confirming pattern of attending.

This framework also clarifies why ideological commitment is so resilient. Correcting beliefs does little if the salience structures that make those beliefs intelligible remain intact. Ideology endures because it organizes the field of what can appear at all, making it exceedingly difficult for alternative configurations of salience to gain a foothold. To challenge an ideology, then, is to interfere with its attentional architecture that keeps attention fixed in place.

An example may make this clearer. Racist ideologies channel collective attention toward somewhat superficial markers of difference – skin color, ancestry, language – while rendering invisible the social and historical construction of those very categories. They perform attentional totalization (race becomes the organizing salience) and immunization (counter-evidence is dismissed as naïve or biased), while resources of care and concern come to be distributed unequally. What upholds racism is not simply the persistence of false beliefs, but the continual re-orientation of attention toward cues that reaffirm them. The result is an attentional environment in which certain lives, histories, and perspectives remain peripherally visible or wholly unseen.

Critiquing ideology (*Ideologiekritik*; see Jaeggi 2009; Aytac & Rossi 2023; Bianchin 2021; Ng 2015; Sankaran 2020), a traditional activity of critical theory, can be reframed as a critique of how collective attention is distributed. Ideology critique then would amount to not just a matter of cognitively "correcting" individuals through, say, education, but it would aim at a kind of attentional liberation, i.e., at loosening the inherited patterns of salience that determine what can appear as relevant or real. Ideology critique is thus a practice of *re-saliencing*: restoring to visibility what the prevailing order of attention suppresses. Ideology is a state in which the collective gaze ceases to be answerable to the world and becomes answerable only to itself. The task of critique is to re-open that gaze – to recover, however briefly, the capacity for collective responsiveness on which both truth and freedom depend.

4.2. Propaganda

Propaganda has accompanied political life since antiquity, yet philosophical debate about its nature remains unsettled. It has been described variously as irrational

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persuasion, emotional manipulation, or the dissemination of falsehoods. The present framework proposes a different emphasis: propaganda may be understood as a technique for engineering collective attention. It operates not primarily by implanting beliefs but by organizing what a population jointly notices, ignores, or emotionally invests in. Propaganda's success lies less in convincing people of propositions than in reconfiguring the salience landscape within which those propositions acquire meaning.

Philosophical discussions have long oscillated between epistemic and practical interpretations of the term "propaganda." Some authors emphasize the epistemic dimension, portraying propaganda as a mechanism that distorts rational deliberation and restricts access to evidence (Lumley 1933; Marlin 2013; Ross 2002; Stanley 2015; Stebbing 2022). On this view, propaganda is, in the classical sense Stanley describes before rejecting it, a "manipulation of the rational will to close off debate" (Stanley 2015: 48). Others stress its pragmatic orientation toward affect and action: propaganda not only shapes what people think but mobilizes how they feel and behave (Ellul 1965; Hyska 2021; Wimberly 2023). Propaganda functions by capturing, directing, and synchronizing attention so that alternatives become inaccessible.[9]

Attention is the primary property through which a subject becomes oriented toward its environment – determining what stands out as salient and what recedes into the background. To attend well, in the terms developed above, is to be answerable to the world's affordances, to remain responsive to the action-possibilities and saliences that one's environment genuinely presents, rather than to a pre-organized attentional template that determines in advance what will register as relevant. Affordances vary in their salience and that salience can be more or less accurately tracked: well-calibrated attention follows the affordance structure of one's situation, remaining open to revision when new affordances come into view. Poorly calibrated attention (through individual bias, affective distortion, or, as here, deliberate external engineering) substitutes genuine responsiveness with a fixed pattern of salience, rendering more difficult the ordinary revisability of belief that life requires.

Propaganda corrupts this capacity by reorganizing salience, so that an externally engineered salience structure comes to substitute for the world's own claims on our attention. This is what Begby (2021) calls evidential preemption: the process by which certain epistemic inputs are blocked before they can function as evidence at all, not by being refuted but by being rendered invisible or irrelevant. The mechanism is attentional before it is doxastic because it operates at the level of what gets noticed rather than what gets believed. Nguyen's (2020) account of echo chambers extends this point to the social level: echo chambers do not just filter information, but actively discredit outside sources. What propaganda achieves, on this account, is the social institutionalization of evidential preemption. In other words, propaganda manages our attentional environment in which the ordinary revisability of collective orientation is systematically suspended.

This does not necessarily require the assumption that there exists some neutral or undistorted attentional baseline from which propaganda represents a deviation. Perception is always already shaped by values, habits, and prior orientations. What propaganda distorts is not a pristine attentional state but a more or less open and revisable one. The relevant contrast is not between contaminated and pure attention, but between attentional configurations that remain responsive to a wider range of

[9]Debate also persists about whether propaganda is always pejorative. Some (Barnes 2021; Stanley 2015) allow that "good propaganda" can advance just causes, as in anti-racist movements or certain resistance activism. For example, poster campaigns for universal health care are arguably "good" propaganda.

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affordances and evidence and those that have been engineered toward a narrower, self-reinforcing set of saliences. Propaganda is pernicious not because it introduces partiality into an otherwise impartial mind, but because it makes difficult the kind of attentional revisability that ordinary epistemic life – however perspectival – still makes possible.

If looked at through the lens of collective attention, propaganda can be seen to operate through interlocking attentional operations, such as amplification, suppression, and stabilization. It makes certain cues (symbols, narratives, emotions) more salient until they dominate what we collectively attend to. One crucial point of propaganda is to filter or suppress competing information that might redirect attention elsewhere which often happens simply through repetition. These mechanisms can take linguistic, visual, or now algorithmic form. Classical wartime posters, radio broadcasts, or contemporary social media feeds all share this form.

Crucially, propaganda can do its work even when its content is true and not mendacious. What makes an utterance propagandistic is not falsity but the way it assigns salience to different information and events. Propaganda constrains what recipients are likely to consider, investigate, or contest. As Quaranto and Stanley (2021: 125) note, propaganda "bypasses reason" not necessarily by lying but by orchestrating attention so that reasoning itself becomes secondary. The possibility of harm in propaganda thus lies in its ability to manage collective attention. It interrupts the ordinary capacity of collectives to allocate attention across competing affordances more responsibly.[10]

Consider for example the asymmetrical visibility of wars. Certain wars receive much more collective attention than others. To take a historical example, compare the memory of the US-led Korean War (1950–1953) and the US-led Vietnam War (major US combat involvement from 1965). Both were major military engagements in the same region, separated by little more than a decade, each framed as a confrontation between "freedom versus communism," and each producing massive civilian suffering. Yet in Western cultural memory, Vietnam has become an enduring object of reflection (its images, music, and films saturating the collective imagination) while the Korean War has faded into comparative obscurity, often referred to as The Forgotten War (Blair 1989). This asymmetry is not the result of differing moral attitudes, but of joint *attentional engineering*. This attentional engineering was in large part created through Hollywood movies functioning as propaganda tools. Hollywood has played a decisive role in stabilizing this asymmetry of collective attention (Alford 2010; Rushton 2013). Film operates as one of the central institutions of the modern *attentional economy*. From *Apocalypse Now* (1979) and *Platoon* (1986) to *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *The Deer Hunter* (1978), or *Good Morning, Vietnam* (1987), Hollywood turned Vietnam into a visual and moral landscape of endless reinterpretation. Hollywood produced well over thirty major feature films engaging with the Vietnam War between 1968 and 1990 alone (Anderegg 1991; Dittmar and Michaud 1990). The Korean War, by contrast, generated a handful – most notably *MASH* (1970), which is remembered primarily as a Vietnam allegory anyway, and *The Manchurian Candidate* (1962).

Few recent events illustrate the dynamics of propaganda as an attentional technology more vividly than the killing of Brian Thompson, CEO of UnitedHealthcare, in Midtown Manhattan on December 4, 2024, and the subsequent arrest of Luigi Mangione as the suspect. Within days of the incident, public discourse polarized into sharply

[10]Consider, for instance, recently discussed epistemically pernicious phenomena such as closed-mindedness, dogmatism, and polarization. These too are perhaps amenable to reconstructions in terms of collective attention.

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defined salience regimes: on one side, mainstream outlets emphasizing criminality, moral depravity, and law and order; on the other, a heterogeneous online public treating Mangione as an emblem of defiance against corporate power. What distinguishes this case is not merely the clash of interpretations but the explicit contest for collective attention – a struggle over what should count as relevant, urgent, and emotionally charged. The Mangione case qualifies as an instance of competing propagandistic attentional operations, in the sense established above, not because either narrative was straightforwardly false, but because both functioned primarily by organizing what a population jointly noticed and emotionally invested in rather than by inviting deliberative assessment of competing evidence. The mainstream media messaging centered certain saliences (individual criminality, law and order) and suppressed others (structural healthcare grievances). The official narrative – articulated by police briefings, press releases, and conventional news media – functioned as a centripetal attentional structure. It pulled public focus toward a single, coherent frame: individual deviance and the restoration of social order. Lexical choices such as *'senseless act'* and *'tragic violence'* are predominantly attentional cues, signaling which aspects of the event should dominate and which should fade as irrelevant. Official channels were effective in ignoring structural grievances such as healthcare inequality, which many took to be what the killing was *about*. The counter-narrative on social media operated in reverse, mobilizing an opposite, centrifugal attentional dynamic. Here Mangione became, in the eyes of many, a hero, a symbolic figure in the fight against historically extreme economic inequality. Memes, short videos, and ironic slogans proliferated, despite supposed efforts by larger media houses to develop a certain narrative. That both narratives contained elements of factual accuracy is what makes the case interesting, because it illustrates how propaganda operates through management of collective salience and not through telling truth or lies. Propaganda defines what is worthy of collective attention and what must remain peripheral.

4.3. Conspiracism

The past decade has seen an undeniable boom in scholarship on conspiracy theory, fueled by resurgent public fascination. Surveying the resulting literature is nearly impossible. References to conspiracy theories have populated public discourse at least since the mid-twentieth century – Watergate, Kennedy, the moon landing, 9/11 – and the label has since become a fixture of everyday political rhetoric. Recall Blair's biographer John Rentoul dismissing the claim that Blair had privately committed Britain to the Iraq war a year before the invasion as "a conspiracy theory of the antiwar crowd" (Leftly 2016). Such examples show that "conspiracy theory" has long functioned both as accusation and as diagnosis, a way to demarcate rational citizens from supposed fantasists. Precise definitions of the term "conspiracy theory" either elude us, or such attempts at definition have not yet built a consensus around them. What follows is a heuristic account designed for the present purpose: to identify conspiracism as a kind of pathology of collective attention.

The definitional confusion is partly disciplinary. Philosophy, psychology, political science, sociology, and cultural studies each approach conspiracy theories from different angles, often without much cross-talk. Psychology explains belief in conspiracies through cognitive bias and motivated reasoning (Gebauer *et al.* 2016; van Prooijen 2018; Raab *et al.* 2013). Political science, following Hofstadter (1964) and Popper (1945), highlights the role of conspiratorial thinking in populist and authoritarian politics.

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Cultural studies, in turn, trace the aesthetic and narrative forms through which conspiratorial motifs circulate. Philosophy asks the stubborn question: what makes a conspiracy theory the kind of explanation it is, and can belief in it ever be epistemically justified? The result of this disciplinary heterogeneity is predictable friction – illustrated by the unfriendly exchange between a francophone group of psychologists and sociologists around Gérald Bronner (Dieguez et al. 2016) and defenders of conspiracy theorizing such as Basham and Dentith (2016; see also Orr and Dentith 2018).

Conspiracy theories can be defined, in a minimal sense, by three familiar ingredients: (1) a group of conspirators; (2) a politically significant objective; and (3) an effort at concealment (cf. Spiegel 2022 for a further developed version of this account). A surprise birthday party therefore fails the test by lacking political stakes, whereas *Flat Earth theories* count as conspiracy theories by positing a vast, global institutional deception. The political component is crucial because it binds conspiracism to the element of collective (rather than just individual) attention: these are not merely individual delusions, but socially organized attentional patterns that define who counts as a trusted source and what counts as relevant evidence. The *Flat Earth* movement illustrates this point vividly. Its adherents rarely behave like cynical provocateurs; most are sincere. The story of "Mad Mike," who launched himself 570 meters skyward to verify his convictions, demonstrates how attention once captured can have disastrous consequences (Kruse 2022: 102f.).

Traditionally, philosophers and psychologists have sometimes described conspiracy theories as epistemically deficient explanations (Barker 2022; Harris 2018; Napolitano 2021). That diagnosis remains accurate, but somewhat incomplete. Framed as a matter of collective attention, conspiracism looks different: those belonging to groups jointly believing conspiracy theories (e.g., so-called groypers) attend to the same cues, sources, and emotional triggers, while discounting "outside" information. The fact that they are not paying attention to *every* source (like reading every newspaper) is not the problem; what makes it pathological is that they are paying attention to what they *should not* and do not pay attention to what they *should*. In this way, conspiracism performs a double movement of *attention and counter-attention*: it attends obsessively to perceived deception while systematically excluding disconfirming cues. This is because conspiracy theory groups jointly detach from the external affordances that would ordinarily recalibrate their attention. Conspiracism is therefore less about false belief than about patterns of attention finding the wrong things salient.

A familiar objection holds that some conspiracy theories are in fact true, and that any general critique therefore risks collapsing into an indiscriminate dismissal of legitimate suspicion. Particularists (or minimalists) hold that each conspiracy theory must be evaluated on its own merits – that there is nothing inherently irrational about conspiracy belief, and that the pejorative use of the label "conspiracy theory" is itself epistemically suspect (see Dentith 2014; Pigden 1995, 2016; Basham 2001; see Napolitano & Reuter 2023 for an explicit critique). This point is well taken, but it does not undermine the present account. The framework developed here does not equate conspiracism with falsity. Conspiracies do occur, and there are cases in which attention to hidden coordination is not only appropriate but epistemically required. What matters, however, is mainly the structure of collective attention within which such claims are brought forth (less so the propositional content of a given claim). Even where a conspiracy theory happens (sometimes accidentally) to be true, it may still be embedded in an attentional environment that is systematically miscalibrated: one in which suspicion of "official" sources is amplified beyond what is reasonable. The pathology lies, accordingly, not in taking conspiracies to exist, but in the way attention becomes organized around that

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possibility (such that suspicion itself assumes the status of a dominant and self-stabilizing salience). Conspiracism thus remains a pathology of collective attention even where some of its outputs are true. The issue is not whether correct beliefs occasionally emerge, but whether the underlying attentional orientation remains responsive to the world. A distorted configuration of attention may, contingently, arrive at true conclusions without thereby ceasing to be distorted.

5. Conclusion

If attention is a key property through which the mind becomes oriented toward the world, then collective attention names the way in which this orientation can be social. The cases surveyed here reveal that pathologies of collective attention are not the sum of private acts of maladapted focusing but problems that pertain to social systems as well. This is where the resources of social epistemology become useful. Nguyen's (2020) account of epistemic bubbles and echo chambers is directly relevant here: one cannot escape an echo chamber simply by trying harder to attend well, any more than one can escape ideology by an act of individual will. The attentional organization surrounding the individuals itself must change.

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