



# The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread

*Cailin O'Connor , James Owen Weatherall*

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**The social dynamics of “alternative facts”: why what you believe depends on who you know**

Why should we care about having true beliefs? And why do demonstrably false beliefs persist and spread despite bad, even fatal, consequences for the people who hold them?

Philosophers of science Cailin O'Connor and James Weatherall argue that social factors, rather than individual psychology, are what's essential to understanding the spread and persistence of false beliefs. It might seem that there's an obvious reason that true beliefs matter: false beliefs will hurt you. But if that's right, then why is it (apparently) irrelevant to many people whether they believe true things or not?

*The Misinformation Age*, written for a political era riven by “fake news,” “alternative facts,” and disputes over the validity of everything from climate change to the size of inauguration crowds, shows convincingly that what you believe depends on who you know. If social forces explain the persistence of false belief, we must understand how those forces work in order to fight misinformation effectively.

## The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread Details

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## From Reader Review The Misinformation Age: How False Beliefs Spread for online ebook

### Sulpicia Cresswell says

A really excellent and readable book! Professors O'Connor and Weatherall write in a clear and straightforward manner that should be generally accessible. The book is divided into four chapters each of which employ two to three case studies which talk about one aspect of the spread of false beliefs. They draw upon formal social epistemology, but ensure that complex models are explained in clear terms. The text effectively argued that there are several ways for interest groups help propagate misbeliefs that are significantly more powerful than current checks put in place to prevent such an occurrence. The authors conclude that we need both governmental and independent safeguards which can help stem the proliferation of misinformation.

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### Jamie Showrank says

Kicks off with the vegetable lamb! Compelling examples describing how beliefs are shaped through trusted and propaganda systems. Incredibly informative and helpful for #behavioral #design. Will read again!

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### Ross says

O'Connor and Weatherall produce intuitive models to explain how information and belief move through social networks. They also demonstrate how easy it is to introduce misinformation into those networks in a way that leads to conformation and polarity. Ultimately a thoroughly depressing though important book.

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### Brian says

VERY "scholarly" and scientific - which is good, but didn't make for an exactly riveting read. Some very important points, but not much I didn't already realize. Ms. O'Connor gave a very good interview on the "Hidden Brain" podcast - search that out instead.

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### Todd says

By modeling how misinformation can intentionally and innocently weave its way through the networks of scientists, O'Connor and Weatherall offer a model for the spread of "fake news" among the general population. There's plenty of solid philosophy and sociology of science here supported by a variety of current real-world examples attempting to illustrate the underlying theoretical models. Readers familiar with Philip Kitcher's more recent work and the fantastic reporting of Oreskes and Conway in "Merchants of Doubt" will quickly recognize the niche that "The Misinformation Age" successfully fills. A Highly readable consideration of "fake news" but not without its moments of philosophical jargon.

