

DiSCourse Seminar

The Digital Science Center and the Department of Christian Philosophy
would like to invite you to the following guest lecture:

Mark Alfano
Macquarie University

“Technologically Scaffolded Atypical Cognition: The Case of YouTube’s Recommender System”

YouTube has been implicated in the transformation of users into extremists and conspiracy theorists. The alleged mechanism for this radicalizing process is YouTube’s recommender system, which is optimized to amplify and promote clips that users are likely to watch through to the end. YouTube optimizes for watch-through for economic reasons: people who watch a video through to the end are likely to then watch the *next* recommended video as well, which means that more advertisements can be served to them. This is a seemingly innocuous design choice, but it has a troubling side-effect. Critics of YouTube have alleged that the recommender system tends to recommend extremist content and conspiracy theories, as such videos are especially likely to capture and keep users’ attention. To date, the problem of radicalization via the YouTube recommender system has been a matter of speculation. The current study represents the first systematic, pre-registered attempt to establish whether and to what extent the recommender system tends to promote such content. We begin by contextualizing our study in the framework of *technological seduction*. Next, we explain our methodology. After that, we present our results, which are consistent with the radicalization hypothesis. Finally, we discuss our findings, as well as directions for future research and recommendations for users, industry, and policy-makers.

About the speaker

Mark Alfano, Associate Professor at Macquarie University and, until recently, also at Delft University of Technology uses tools and methods from philosophy, psychology, and computer science to explore topics in social epistemology, moral psychology, and digital humanities.

Date and Time: Friday, 26 June 2020, 12:00 CEST, Online

Please send an e-mail to disc@uibk.ac.at to register for this seminar by 25 June so we can send you the link to the virtual meeting room.