

British Academy Rising Star Engagement Award  
**Political Epistemology: The Role of Truth in Politics**

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31 March 2018 – 31 March 2019

**Abstract**

Our political culture is increasingly characterised by appeals to emotion, disconnected from the details of policy, and framed by the repeated assertion of talking points to which factual rebuttals are ignored. Further, the irreconcilable clash of political outlooks seems to threaten the common ground on which the collective pursuit of truth depends. As a result, an increasing number of scholars are investigating the role of truth in politics, the challenges to deliberative democracy, the epistemology of propaganda, and related topics. This project seeks to establish a 'Political Epistemology Network' that brings together social epistemologists, political philosophers, political scientists, and cognitive psychologists that work at the intersection of these fields. This network will support work by early career researchers through an international conference, a fortnightly seminar, and it will produce a podcast series titled 'The Role of Truth in Politics' that promotes the public value of research in the humanities.

**Proposal**

This project aims to promote and facilitate high quality research by early career scholars in the area of political epistemology, making it available to the widest possible audience. We plan to do this by pursuing four core objectives.

The first objective is to establish a steering committee for a Political Epistemology Network. This committee will be composed of political philosophers, social epistemologists, political scientists, and psychologists who work in relevant areas of the network.

The second objective is to create a website for the Political Epistemology Network. This website will include information about the network, its steering committee, membership details, engagement events, and will serve as a platform for the podcasts that will result from our seminar series (discussed below). It will also provide a space for generating a greater sense of community for a geographically and ideologically diverse group of people; this includes scholars from the UK and abroad, research students, and relevant organisations from outside academia such as the European Commission (which is currently establishing an expert group on fake news).

Third, the network will support an international conference on political epistemology that is intended to generate new interest and identify emerging issues at the intersection of social epistemology and political philosophy. The Institute of Philosophy at the University of London has agreed to host this event on May 10-11, 2018 and to provide partial funding.

Fourth, the Network will organise a fortnightly seminar series on the theme 'New Directions in Political Epistemology'. We intend to have 5-6 speakers per term and to hold this event in London's historic Senate House. Each seminar will involve a guest speaker who will also be invited to record a 10-minute podcast episode for a series titled 'The Role of Truth in Politics', thereby allowing wider dissemination and engagement with new research in the humanities.

This project intersects with issues in ethics, politics, epistemology, technology, and psychology, and thus it has the potential for wide impact. But envisioning paths forward requires creative discussions that form bridges between theories of knowledge and theories of political legitimacy, as well as an understanding of the capacities of actual human psychology. Establishing a formal network for scholars working in political epistemology will bring together experts from various domains into a series of close conversations, thereby generating new ideas to help make progress in the current crisis over truth. It will also provide early career researchers with the opportunity to communicate new scholarly findings through a programme of academic and public engagement events.

## **Plan of Action**

### **Establish Network Steering Committee (March 15 - April 15, 2018)**

During the first month of the award, the PI (Dr Hannon) will consult with Dr Jeroen de Ridder, the PI for a project on 'Knowledgeable Democracy' at VU Amsterdam, to identify and contact key individuals who work at the intersection of political philosophy and epistemology, as well as psychologists who work in relevant areas of political cognition. The goal is to establish a steering committee of about 8 members that will manage the Political Epistemology Network (PEN).

### **Develop Network Website (April 15 - May 10, 2018)**

The PI will create a PEN website to generate a greater sense of community for geographically and ideologically diverse individuals who work in (or are interested in) the broad area of political epistemology. The website will announce our conference calls, workshop programmes, advertise the fortnightly seminars in London, and include information about PEN and its membership. The PI has extensive experience creating and managing websites, having developed and maintained similar websites for other academic projects.

### **International Conference (May 10 - 11, 2018)**

The School of Advanced Study at the University of London will host a two-day conference on Political Epistemology, involving five talks from early career researchers and keynote addresses by Professor Elizabeth Anderson (Michigan), Professor Robert Talisse (Vanderbilt), and Professor Kristoffer Ahlstrom-Vij (Birkbeck). Details for this event can be found online at: <https://mhannon09.wixsite.com/polistemology>.

### **Create Programme for Seminar Series (May 15 - September 30, 2018)**

In the summer of 2018, the PI will consult with the members of PEN's steering committee to identify and invite speakers to participate in a seminar series titled 'New Directions in Political Epistemology'. The PI will work with his team at the Institute of Philosophy to organise the seminar and advertise it to professional scholars, research students, members of organisations outside the academy (e.g., political think tanks and journalists), and the wider public.

### **Seminar Series and Podcast Episodes (Oct 1, 2018 - March 15, 2019)**

This award will support a fortnightly seminar series titled 'New Directions in Political Epistemology', which will be held in the Senate House in Bloomsbury in the fall term of 2018 and the spring term of 2019. We expect to have 5-6 speakers per term. The initiative is intended to encourage early career researchers to build new networks, to map new directions for collaborative research, and to showcase the latest work in political epistemology at a time when challenges to truth and knowledge threaten the social fabric of democracy. In connection with this engagement activity, we will also record and produce a podcast series on the role of truth in politics. The recording of each episode will take place throughout each term of the seminar and the PI will work with members of the Institute of Philosophy who have experience producing the podcast series *Philosophy Bites*.