

Summer School

Bullshit, Lies, and Disinformation

August 18-22, 2025



Contact:

mb-workshop@hu-berlin.de

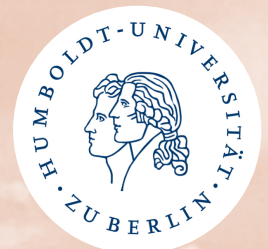


Table of Contents

Welcome	01
Summer School Schedule	02
Formats	03
Program with Abstracts	03
Speaker Bios	06
General Information	07

Welcome

The call for combating disinformation regularly skips fundamental theoretical questions about the nature and normativity of disinformation. This summer school aims to provide basic philosophical concepts to gain an understanding of agent-centered phenomena related to disinformation, e.g., lying, bullshitting, and deceiving. The format of the summer school will include a theoretical introduction, group work on philosophical texts, and sessions in which students discuss contemporary research articles (pre-read) with the authors.

Summer School Schedule

	Monday 18/08/2025	Tuesday 19/08/2025	Wednesday 20/08/2025	Thursday 21/08/2025	Friday 22/08/2025
09:30 – 10:00	Registration, Group Assignment	AMS Preparation	AMS Preparation	AMS Preparation	Group Prep
10:15 – 11:45	Slot 1 Intro 1/6 V. Wagner <i>Bullshit, Lies, Dis-information—and Beliefs</i> S. Stapleford <i>Bullshit and Evidentialism</i>	Slot 4 Intro 3/6 S. Rippon <i>Propaganda and the Epistemology of Democracy</i>	Slot 7 AMS 3/5 J. Baum <i>Emotional News Affects Social Judgments Independent of Perceived Media Credibility</i>	Slot 10 Intro 6/6 B. Guilielmo <i>Epistemic Insouciance, Nonsense and Foolishness</i>	Slot 13 Student Group Presentations
11:45-13:30	<i>Lunch Break</i>	<i>Lunch Break</i>	<i>Lunch Break</i>	<i>Lunch Break</i>	
13:30-15:00	Slot 2 Intro 2/6 K. Harris <i>Beyond Belief: On Disinformation and Manipulation</i>	Slot 5 Intro 4/6 R. Woodward <i>Fakes vs. Fictions: Semantics, Pragmatics, and Style</i>	Slot 8 Intro 5/6 H. Neth <i>Calling Bullshit</i>	Slot 11 AMS 5/5 V. Wagner <i>Intentionally Off Topic: A Theory of Fake Answers</i>	
15:00-15:30	<i>Coffee</i>	<i>Coffee</i>	<i>Coffee</i>	<i>Coffee</i>	
15:30-17:00	Slot 3 AMS 1/5 S. Goldberg <i>Fake News and Epistemic Rot: Or, Why We Are All in This Together</i>	Slot 6 AMS 2/5 K. Harris <i>Video On Demand: What Deepfakes Do and How They Harm</i>	Slot 9 AMS 4/5 S. Rippon <i>Evidential Incognizance</i>	Slot 12 Student Group Session	

Formats

The schedule of the summer school consists of three types of sessions, each designed to foster different modes of learning and interaction:

1. Author Meets Students (AMS)

In these sessions, participants engage directly with the authors of selected academic papers.

Preparation: Students will (i) read the assigned paper(s) in advance and (ii) collaboratively plan a structured discussion in group meetings held in the morning prior to the session.

Session: In a 90-minute slot, students will discuss the paper with the author, raising questions, challenges, and insights developed during their group preparation.

2. Introductory Sessions (Intro)

These sessions provide foundational knowledge on key topics relevant to the summer school theme.

Lecture: A 45-minute lecture by an expert offering a clear and accessible introduction to the topic and its background literature.

Discussion: A 45-minute open discussion with the students to deepen understanding and clarify key concepts.

3. Group Sessions and Student Presentations

These sessions are designed for students taking the lead. Working in small groups, participants will:

Preparation: Collaboratively explore a specific topic over the course of the summer school.

Presentation: On the final day, each group will give a presentation on their topic, followed by Q&A.

Monday, August 18th, 2025

Mandatory literature for the day ([LINK](#) to papers)

- Goldberg: Fake News and Epistemic Rot
- Goldberg: Fake News and Bullshit

09:30–10:00 Registration

Please arrive on time to register and be assigned to a group.

10:15–10:30 Welcome by Verena Wagner

10:30–11:45 Introductory Lecture by Scott Stapleford

Bullshit and Evidentialism

This lecture introduces evidentialist epistemology. The main claim is that the evidentialist thesis imposes a normative constraint on belief. The implication is that we are not entitled to believe just anything we want. A few thoughts on the relevance of this result to our handling of bullshit are laid out at the end.

11:45–13:30 Lunch Break

13:30–15:00 Introductory Lecture by Keith Harris

Beyond Belief: On Disinformation and Manipulation

The concept of disinformation has become increasingly prominent in both academic and public discourse, but what exactly is disinformation and how does it differ from related phenomena like misinformation and fake news? In this introductory lecture, I present a series of accounts for disinformation, as well as some strengths and shortcomings of these accounts. Then, I present an account of disinformation that, I argue, neatly distinguishes disinformation from related phenomena while also satisfying several desiderata for an account of disinformation.

15:30–17:00 AMS with Sanford Goldberg

Fake News and Epistemic Rot: Or, why we are all in this together

Fake news poses an interesting test case to theories of the epistemology of testimony. If they are to illuminate the nature of the epistemic challenges and harms fake news poses to (members of) a community, the theories themselves must move beyond several overly simplistic models of communication. After developing and criticizing some of these, this chapter goes on to offer a more nearly adequate model. The distinctive feature of the theory presented is that it goes beyond the reporter (speaker) and recipient (hearer), postulating several other roles people (and technology) play in communication. The upshot of these reflections is a case for thinking of epistemic responsibility in *distinctly social terms*—in terms of *what we owe to each other* as creatures who are both information-seeking and highly social.

Tuesday, August 19th, 2025

Mandatory literature of the day ([LINK](#) to paper)

- K. Harris: Video On Demand

09:30–10:15 AMS Preparation

10:15–11:45 Introductory Lecture Simon Rippon

Propaganda and the Epistemology of Democracy

This class will introduce the problem of democratic citizenship: are normal citizens capable of governing a large and complex society? We will encounter epistocratic challenges to democracy that answer "no". To try to support a contrary, positive answer, we will consider the roles of expertise and trust in a functioning democracy. Finally, we will discuss how propaganda may threaten this system.

13:30–15:00 Introductory Lecture by Richard Woodward

Fakes vs. Fictions: Semantics, Pragmatics, and Style

The contrast between information and disinformation is often glossed in terms of the contrast between fact and fiction. In this session, we'll examine the contemporary debate about the nature of fiction, with a view to clarifying how the fictitious differs from the factual. Along the way, we'll think about mockumentaries, digitally altered photography, biographies full of lies, and why you can learn a lot about the real world from made up stories.

15:30-17:00 AMS with Keith Harris

Video On Demand: What Deepfakes Do and How They Harm

This paper defends two main theses related to emerging deepfake technology. First, fears that deepfakes will bring about epistemic catastrophe are overblown. Such concerns underappreciate that the evidential power of video derives not solely from its content, but also from its source. An audience may find even the most realistic video evidence unconvincing when it is delivered by a dubious source. At the same time, an audience may find even weak video evidence compelling so long as it is delivered by a trusted source. The growing prominence of deepfake content is unlikely to change this fundamental dynamic. Thus, through appropriate patterns of trust, whatever epistemic threat deepfakes pose can be substantially mitigated. The second main thesis is that focusing on deepfakes that are intended to deceive, as epistemological discussions of the technology tend to do, threatens to overlook a further effect of this technology. Even where deepfake content is not regarded by its audience as veridical, it may cause its viewers to develop psychological associations based on that content. These associations, even without rising to the level of belief, may be harmful to the individuals depicted and more generally. Moreover, these associations

may develop in cases in which the video content is realistic, but the audience is dubious of the content in virtue of skepticism toward its source. Thus, even if—as I suggest—epistemological concerns about deepfakes are overblown, deepfakes may nonetheless be psychologically impactful and may do great harm.

Wednesday, August 20th, 2025

Mandatory literature of the day ([LINK](#) to paper)

- J. Baum & R. Abdel Rahman: Emotional News Affects Social Judgements Independent of Perceived Media Credibility.
- S. Rippon: Evidential Incognizance

09:30–10:15 AMS Preparation

10:15–11:45 AMS with Julia Baum

Emotional News Affects Social Judgments Independent of Perceived Media Credibility

How does the credibility we attribute to media sources influence our opinions and judgments derived from news? Participants read headlines about the social behavior of depicted unfamiliar persons from websites of trusted or distrusted well-known German news media. As a consequence, persons paired with negative or positive headlines were judged more negative or positive than persons associated with neutral information independent of source credibility. Likewise, electrophysiological signatures of slow and controlled evaluative brain activity revealed a dominant influence of emotional headline contents regardless of credibility. Modulations of earlier brain responses associated with arousal and reflexive emotional processing show an effect of negative news and

suggest that distrusted sources may even enhance the impact of negative headlines. These findings demonstrate that though we may have distinct perceptions about the credibility of media sources, information processing and social judgments rely on the emotional content of headlines, even when they stem from sources we distrust.

13:30–15:00 Introductory Lecture by Hansjörg Neth

Calling Bullshit

In scientific contexts, bullshit (BS) often comes dressed in sophisticated trappings that obscure its lack of correspondence to the current task and its intent to mislead. In this introductory lecture, we examine scientific BS through the lens of ecological rationality, emphasizing that the ability to detect BS is a necessary first step toward exposing it. We show how complex models and selectively chosen metrics can promote deceptively simple narratives. A particularly common vehicle for generating scientific BS is the use of binary contingency counts, which permit a wide range of probabilistic interpretations. Crucially, a commitment to evidence-based practices, rigorous statistics, or transparent visualizations alone offers no safeguard against BS. Instead, we argue for a stance of enlightened skepticism, cultivated by boosting scientific literacy and adopting alternative perspectives.

15:30–17:00 AMS with Simon Rippon

Evidential Incognizance

In this article, I explore an epistemic vice I call “evidential incognizance.” It is a vice of failing generally to recognize evidence, or recognize the full force of evidence, in a domain of knowledge. It frequently manifests as a kind of unbridled skepticism or hopelessness about knowing in the domain, including (but not limited to) skepticism about expert testimony. It is epistemically vicious primarily because it leads people to overlook

valuable epistemic opportunities and thus tends to obstruct knowledge and justified belief. I believe it is of interest particularly because it tends to arise as a reaction to a certain kind of information environment and is often induced intentionally by populist candidates and authoritarian regimes. I discuss the nature of evidential incognizance, its relation to and differences from other epistemic shortcomings, its political significance, why it may have been previously overlooked in the literature, and the potential for overcoming it.

Thursday, August 21st, 2025

Mandatory literature of the day ([LINK](#) to paper)

- V. Wagner: Intentionally Off Topic: A Theory of Fake Answers

09:30–10:15 AMS Preparation

10:15–11:45 Introductory Lecture by Benoit Guilielmo

Epistemic Insouciance, Nonsense and Foolishness

This introductory lecture aims to open a conceptual investigation into two of the principal enemies of thought: foolishness and bullshit. I will map the main theories of each, clarifying their defining features and exploring their impact on our intellectual lives.

13:30–15:00 AMS with Verena Wagner

Intentionally Off Topic: A Theory of Fake Answers

This paper provides a theory of ‘fake answers’ that has the resources to unite different types of what philosophers, following Harry Frankfurt’s (1986) landmark essay, commonly label as “bullshitting”. I will show that the Frankfurtian indifferent bullshitter, often characterized by a lack of knowledge and concern, and the non-indifferent yet evasive bullshit

artist, who deliberately withholds information, share a similarity that has been overlooked thus far. I will argue that both types of bullshitters contribute fake answers to questions under discussion with the aim of concealing their individual perspective—be it their indifference, ignorance, or even knowledge. Unlike true and false answers, fake answers are not answers in the narrow sense because they do not address the relevant question but are only meant to look as if they did. Contra indifference accounts of bullshitting, I argue that the essence of bullshit contributions is that they are intentionally off topic.

15:30–17:00 Group Session

Students discuss and prepare their presentations for Friday. Specific tasks will be provided on the first day.

Friday, August 22nd, 2025

09:30–10:15 Student Prep Session

10:15–11:45 Student Presentations

Students will present their work in groups and receive feedback.

Speaker Bios

Julia Baum is a postdoctoral researcher at the Rasha Abdel Rahman Lab in Neurocognitive Psychology at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. As an experimental psychologist and cognitive neuroscientist, she investigates effects of emotionality and trustworthiness in (false) news, rumor, or gossip on information processing, face processing, and social judgments. She uses different methods, like behavioural measures, electro-physiological correlates of brain activity, eye tracking, and pupillometry.

Sanford Goldberg is a professor of philosophy at Northwestern University. He works in the areas of Epistemology, Philosophy of Language, and Philosophy of Mind, e.g., social epistemology, reliabilism, testimony, epistemic justification, epistemic normativity, self-knowledge, and skepticism, speech act theory, the semantics of speech and attitude reports, the individuation of the propositional attitudes, and externalist theories of mental content and linguistic meaning.

Benoît Guilielmo is a postdoctoral fellow in philosophy at the Universität Zürich. His main areas of research are Epistemology, Philosophy of Mind, and the History of Twentieth Century Philosophy.

Keith Harris is a postdoctoral fellow in philosophy at the University of Vienna and a member of the Project “Knowledge in Crisis”. His research is primarily focused on applied, social, and virtue epistemology. His work in this area has investigated conspiracy theories, deepfakes, misinformation, and epistemic vices.

Hansjörg Neth is a research scientist in Social Psychology and Decision Sciences at the University of Konstanz. His research interests include adaptive behavior under risk vs. uncertainty, ecological rationality, problem solving, as well as embodied and embedded cognition

Simon Rippon is Associate Professor in the Departments of Philosophy and Public Policy at the Central European University of Vienna. His area of expertise lies in moral and political philosophy, with particular interests in metaethics, epistemology, bioethics, propaganda and the epistemology of democracy, and the philosophy of public policy.

Scott Stapleford is Professor of Philosophy at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, Canada. He publishes on Epistemology and Early Modern Philosophy. His main research interests are evidentialist epistemology and epistemic requirements.

Verena Wagner is a professor of philosophy at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin and the Berlin School of Mind and Brain, working at the intersection of Philosophy of Mind and Epistemology. Her research focuses on the nature of mental states and attitudes in the vicinity of cognitive neutrality and inquiry, as well as topics related to the phenomena of deception (self or other) and disinformation. She is a member of the Programme Committee of the DFG-funded Priority Programme “Rethinking Disinformation (Re:DIS)”.

Richard Woodward is a guest professor of theoretical philosophy at Freie Universität Berlin and leads the DFG project *Fiction and Fictionality* at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. He works in a cluster of areas including aesthetics (esp. fiction, imagination), metaphysics (esp. modality, existence), the philosophy of language (esp. conditionals, indeterminacy), and epistemology (esp. belief, uncertainty).

General Information

Contact: mb-workshop@hu-berlin.de

Credit Point Acquisition

Credit points may be earned through active participation and group presentations. No term paper (Hausarbeit, essay) is possible.

Organizing Team

Verena Wagner

Gabriel Kleber (office manager)

Greta Herzig (student assistant)

Janis Kohde (student assistant)

Booklet: Greta Herzig