Political Epistemology

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1. Introduction

Epistemology is the study of knowledge and political philosophy the study of political institutions and values. At their intersection is *political epistemology*, which we define as the study of knowledge in political contexts specifically. While it can sometimes seem that philosophers perennially ask the same questions—both Plato and John Rawls inquired about the nature of the just society—many of the questions political epistemologists ask are genuinely novel. Why does fake news spread? How ought we respond to increasing polarization? Is partisan deference rational?

Political epistemology is a rapidly growing field. There are currently two volumes exclusively dedicated to it (Edenberg and Hannon 2021; Hannon and Ridder 2021b). The purpose of this entry is to offer a very brief introduction to the main topics and debates in this nascent field. We break down the field of political epistemology into three subfields: the *micro level*, which focuses on the beliefs of individuals in their capacity as participants in politics, the *macro level*, which focuses on the relationship between political institutions and knowledge, and the *meso level*, which focuses on intermediate institutions such as social media networks and other online ecosystems.

2. The Micro Level

At the micro level, political epistemologists are interested in the beliefs of individuals in their capacity as participants in politics. We can roughly break this into two distinct sets of questions: questions about voter ignorance and irrationality, and questions about polarization. The former is more well-trod ground, the latter less so. We overview both sets of questions in this section.

Initial research on the beliefs of voters concluded that they tend to be profoundly ignorant of pertinent political information. As Ilya Somin (2013: 17) describes the literature: "the reality that most voters are often ignorant of even very basic political information is one of the better-established findings of social science." One of the landmark studies in this area was Michael X. Delli Carpini's and Scott Keeter's (1996) book *What Americans Know about Politics and Why It Matters*. Here are some representative findings: only 30 percent of citizens know how long a term in the House of Representatives is, 39 percent can define free trade, 27 percent can name two branches of government, 42 percent know who sets interest rates, 20 percent can name two rights implicit in the First Amendment, and 46 percent can define "liberal" and "conservative" (Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996: 70–71).

What explains this? The classic answer is the theory of rational ignorance, originally proposed by Anthony Downs (1957: 298). The basic idea is this. A voter is confronted with the decision to acquire political information or not. What is the benefit of acquiring political information? Very little. If she acquires political information, then she can be a better voter, but being a better voter doesn't really help her. After all, the chances of her vote deciding the outcome of an election are very small. What are the costs of acquiring political information? Pretty high. She will have to read newspapers, watch the evening news, perhaps she will have to

learn some economics and political science, and so on. By a simple cost-benefit analysis, then, it is rational for the voter to remain ignorant.

Some philosophers have challenged the theory of rational ignorance. Jeffrey Friedman (2019) argues it is based on unrealistic assumptions. In saying that voters perform a cost-benefit analysis when deciding whether to inform themselves, rational ignorance presumes individuals know the probability their vote will decide the election. Friedman rejects this. According to him, "neither voters nor nonvoters seem to have realized … that the odds against their votes being decisive are astronomically high. Therefore, they cannot very well have decided to underinform themselves because of those odds" (Friedman 2019: 279). Voter ignorance is not rational but *radical*. Voters voluntarily don't decide to be ignorant. Rather, they don't know what they don't know. Adam Gibbons (2023) offers several compelling criticisms of Friedman's position and a defense of rational ignorance.

Another reason to doubt rational ignorance is that it generates predictions at odds with empirical realities. It is true that voters have a lot of false beliefs. Yet, if voters were truly ignorant, we would expect their errors to be random. Analogously, if you gave a group of students a multiple-choice question on a topic that they were completely ignorant about, then you would expect roughly 25 percent to guess A, 25 percent to guess B, 25 percent to guess C, and 25 percent to guess D. This is not what we find. Voters make *systematic* errors (Caplan 2007: 9-10, 103). Bryan Caplan has documented this in detail for voters' beliefs about economic issues specifically. For instance, if you asked truly ignorant voters whether outsourcing contributes to poor economic performance, you would expect about half of them to say yes and half to say no. In fact, they overwhelmingly say yes, even though expert economists overwhelmingly hold the

opposite view (Caplan 2007: 66). Not only are voters' errors not random, but in some cases, they are *worse than random*.

Rational ignorance seems to have trouble explaining this, so what does? Caplan (2007: ch. 5) develops the theory of *rational irrationality*. The basic idea is this. Individual voters are confronted with the question of what to believe about a specific political issue. In some cases, holding a certain belief can be "comforting, flattering, or exciting" (Caplan 2007: 116). I might flatter myself by believing that I am smarter than I actually am. In many cases, we do not believe things merely because they are flattering, for false beliefs can hurt us. I might flatter myself by believing that I can hop from one rooftop to the next like James Bond, but if I am wrong, I will get seriously hurt. In the case of politics, however, a voter's false beliefs have nearly zero marginal impact on electoral outcomes. Who cares if I believe Democratic party elites belong to a secret pedophile ring? Believing this makes me feel good and basing my vote on it changes nothing. So, in the case of politics specifically, it is rational to adopt false beliefs that make us feel good. To explain the specific systematic biases that he finds in the survey data, Caplan (2007: 10) posits that people tend to have antimarket, antiforeign, make-work, and pessimistic inclinations; they thus adopt political beliefs to satisfy these inclinations.

Some have criticized rational irrationality on strictly philosophical grounds. For instance, Spencer Paulson (2024: 4, 12) argues rational irrationality is "conceptually incoherent" because it requires individuals to have mental states that are "reflectively unstable." There are also empirical reasons to doubt it. The theory seems to predict that voters' beliefs should remain stable. If believing that free trade and immigration are bad for the economy makes me feel good because I have antimarket and antiforeign inclinations, then I should keep believing these things in perpetuity. But voters' beliefs change. In particular, they change in response to the platforms

of political parties. Voters follow their leaders (Holcombe 2023). For example, when supporters of Donald Trump are told Trump supports raising the minimum wage, they say they do as well; when they are told Trump does not support raising the minimum wage, they oppose the policy (Barber and Pope 2019).

What explains this? What we shall call the *identity theory* says voters choose policy positions and party identification to "align themselves with the appropriate coalition of social groups" (Achen and Bartels 2016: 307). On this view, the standard view of how we think democracy works is backwards. Typically, we think voters determine their stance on policy issues, then embrace the parties and candidates who most align with their predetermined values. The identity theory says the opposite is true. Voters "first anchor into an ideological tribe (because of family, peers, or a single issue), adopt the positions of the tribe as a matter of socialization, and only then invent a story that ties all of those positions together" (Lewis and Lewis 2023: 6). Why did Republican voters embrace free trade before 2016? Because that was the official position of their tribe when Mitt Romney and Paul Ryan were its leaders. Why did they embrace protectionism after 2016? Because Trump changed the official position of their tribe, so they changed their position as well.

The identity theory has led some to suggest that voters don't really have what should be considered *beliefs* in the first place (Hannon 2021; Hannon and Ridder 2021a). When voters make outlandish statements—for instance, when they affirm one of Trump's obvious lies—we should instead interpret them as merely expressing allegiance to their identity group. They aren't telling us what they believe, they are telling us who they root for. This theory is analogous to the one public choice economists Geoffrey Brennan and Loren Lomasky (1997) developed to explain why people vote. When confronted with the paradox of voting—why do people vote

given how unlikely it is they will affect the outcome of an election?—Brennan and Lomasky respond: to express support for their political team.

A different philosophical take on identity theory says that the partisan deference it identifies is, in fact, epistemically rational (Rini 2017; Lepoutre 2020). The basic idea is that when it comes to complicated issues (such as those found in politics) we must rely on the testimony of others when forming beliefs, and it is rational to assign higher credibility to the testimony of those with whom we share identity affiliations. It is rational to go along with the political party you identify with because they have already gotten things right on the big normative questions, so they will probably also get things right on related policy matters (Rini 2017: 51). It is rational to go along with other identity groups such as those who share one's race, gender, or religion because members of this group share a similar social perspective. Thus, "shared group membership gives one a pro tanto epistemic reason to think that their political judgment is trustworthy" (Lepoutre 2020: 49). Recent work challenges the rationality of partisan deference (Joshi 2020; Woodward forthcoming).

Regardless of the specific theory we adopt, it's safe to say that voters do not behave in ways seemingly required for successful democratic governance. What are the normative implications of this? In response, many have proposed alternatives to democracy. While these alternatives differ significantly, what they all have in common is that they seek to limit the influence ignorant and irrational voters have on politics when compared to the democratic baseline. Somin (2013) suggests we should limit and decentralize government power. Alexander Guerrero (2021) suggests we should eliminate elections all together and select political leaders by lot. An innovative group of scholars seeking to revive Confucian moral and political theory argue that we should embrace nondemocratic forms of political meritocracy, where instead of

elections political leaders are selected by examination, acts of service, and peer groups (Bell 2015; Bai 2020). Anne Jeffrey (2018) argues we should hand more authority to expert bureaucrats.

The most prominent response to voter ignorance and irrationality, however, is *epistocracy*. Epistocracy comes in many flavors—restricted suffrage, plural voting, enlightened preference voting, etc.—but the basic idea is that "in some way votes are allocated or weighted according to some measurable form of knowledge and competence" (Brennan 2023: 247). Epistocracy's main proponent is Jason Brennan who defends the view in *Against Democracy*, but it has other able advocates (e.g., Gibbons 2022). There are three core arguments for epistocracy. The first is purely instrumental: because voters exhibit so many epistemic shortcomings, better outcomes will be achieved if we limit voting to those who lack these flaws (Brennan 2016: 16). The second appeals to an analogy: just as it is wrong to subject a defendant to an ignorant and irrational jury, so too is it wrong to subject citizens to ignorant and irrational electorates (Brennan 2016: ch. 6). The third also appeals to analogy: just as we should paternalize ignorant and irrational consumers in markets, so too should we paternalize ignorant and irrational voters in democracies (Freiman and Brennan 2022). There are numerous criticisms of epistocracy (e.g., Kogelmann 2023; Kogelmann and Carroll 2024). The literature is large and growing. The verdict on epistocracy is still out in our view.

Beyond looking at the beliefs of individuals, political epistemologists are interested in the *distribution* of beliefs across society. This brings us to polarization. It is not uncommon to hear that the United States is more polarized now than any time since the Civil War, but what this means is not clear. One comparative advantage of philosophers is their conceptual clarity. To this end, one team of researchers identifies *nine* different definitions of polarization deployed by

social scientists (Bramson *et al* 2017). For our purposes, we shall highlight what we think are the two most common.

Ideological polarization means that individuals' ideological orientations are concentrated on the extreme ends of the right-left ideological spectrum (McCarty 2019: 10). Absent ideological polarization, there are many moderate Republicans and Democrats. In an ideologically polarized environment, more Republicans are characterized as ultra-conservative and more Democrats as ultra-liberal; there are fewer moderates. The research suggests that political elites are more polarized in this sense, but whether ordinary voters are remains unclear (McCarty 2019: ch. 3-4). A different sense of polarization is more focused on affective attitudes. Lilliana Mason calls this *social polarization*, which is defined by "prejudice, anger, and activism on behalf of that prejudice and anger" (Mason 2018: 4). When we are socially polarized, we see "each other only as two teams fighting for a trophy" (Mason 2018: 4). Social polarization may accompany ideological polarization, but it need not; we can be socially polarized without being ideologically polarized. When this happens "we act like we disagree more than we really do" (Mason 2018: 4).

Beyond conceptual clarity, how do philosophers contribute to our understanding of polarization? There are two ways. First, some examine the rationality of polarization. Can groups polarize in a manner consistent with norms of epistemic rationality, or does polarization imply irrationality of some kind? Perhaps surprisingly, several argue that polarization can be rational (Singer *et al* 2019; Dorst 2023). A second avenue of research examines polarization's normative implications. What (if anything) is bad about polarization? If there is something regrettable about it, how should we respond?

Kevin Vallier worries about polarization because of its impact on social trust. Social trust is incredibly important; it is positively correlated with democracy, economic growth, equality, the rule of law, tolerance, and many other good things (Vallier 2021: 2). Trust and polarization are connected. The *distrust-divergence hypothesis* says that "social and political distrust and partisan divergence are mutually reinforcing" (Vallier 2021: 9). If we are polarized, then we trust each other less; if we trust each other less, then we grow more polarized. Thus, if we are polarized, then there will be less trust between us, and if there is less trust between us then we will lose out on all the good things associated with it. Robert Talisse worries about the impact of polarization on democracy. According to Talisse, ideological polarization leads to an "intensification of *negative* assessments of opposing groups, their members, and their beliefs" (Talisse 2019: 118). Ideological polarization, in other words, feeds into social polarization. This social polarization is bad for democracy, because democracy demands that "citizens must be able to access each other's reasons and engage in processes of exchange that include criticizing, arguing, questioning, and objecting to one another's views" (Talisse 2019: 123). If we harbor deep animosity towards one another then we probably can't do this.

Given polarization's problems, how should we respond? Vallier (2021: 16) argues that more liberal rights and institutions—freedom of association, private property, adequate social welfare programs, a democratic constitution, and participation in elections—buttress social trust and thus decrease polarization. This proposal is curious, because Vallier (2021: 1) notes that social trust has been falling in the U.S. since the mid-twentieth century, and arguably the country has gotten *more*, not *less*, liberal since then. Talisse offers several proposals to combat ideological and social polarization. First, we can participate in "cooperative social endeavors that are fundamentally non-political in nature" (Talisse 2019: 131). Second, we need to "recognize

the vulnerability of our political commitments to *reasonable criticism*" (Talisse 2021: 25). And third, we need to "secure certain kinds of distance from the throes of politics" (Talisse 2021: 133). Finally, in a recent paper Adam Lovett (2023) explores our ethical duties in cases of *asymmetric* polarization: when one side of the political spectrum grows more extreme, how should the more moderate side respond?

3. The Macro Level

At the macro level, political epistemologists are interested in the relationship between political institutions and knowledge. We can roughly break this into two distinct sets of questions: questions about how political institutions generate knowledge, and questions about the knowledge individuals must have for political institutions to function well. Both sets of questions are covered in this section.

Democracy has traditionally been defended on egalitarian grounds. Historic movements to universalize the franchise pointed to the injustice of excluding members of the public due to their social class, race, or gender. *Epistemic democracy* is a novel approach to understanding and defending democracy. The central claim is that democracy produces good collective decisions. In a bit more detail: there are procedure-independent truths about what policies societies ought to adopt; democracy is more likely to select policies in line with these truths when compared to alternative political institutions (Landemore 2013: ch. 8).

Why think democracy selects good policies? Epistemic democrats propose two mechanisms: deliberation and voting. In terms of deliberation, epistemic democrats argue that democracy is preferable to the alternatives because it is deliberatively *inclusive*. Intuitively, when

confronted with difficult questions (as frequently happens in politics) we want a diverse range of arguments and considerations at our disposal; an insular set of arguments and considerations would seemingly lead to poor decisions. To buttress this intuition, epistemic democrats appeal to a mathematical result known as the Hong-Page theorem (Landemore 2013: ch. 4). The theorem says that, under certain assumptions, groups with greater perspectival diversity outperform (on average) more homogeneous groups, even when the latter contain greater average individual ability (Hong and Page 2004).

In terms of voting, epistemic democrats argue that universal franchise, by aggregating the judgments of all citizens, taps into the wisdom of crowds, thereby producing sound judgments. To substantiate this claim, they appeal to Condorcet's famous jury theorem (Landemore 2013: ch. 6; Goodin and Spiekermann 2018). The theorem posits that if each member of the public has an independent probability over 0.5 of making the correct decision on a binary question, then as the size of the group increases, the probability that the majority decision is correct approaches 1. The result has been expanded beyond binary choice options (List and Goodin 2001). The theorem has been expanded in several interesting directions more generally (Dietrich and Spiekermann 2021).

We don't want to spend any more space discussing epistemic theories of democracy because there already exist very capable literature reviews on the topic (Schwartzberg 2015; Min and Wong 2018; Siscoe 2023). Instead, we turn our attention to a different approach to generating political knowledge. This approach emphasizes *experimentation*.

The experimentalist approach is closely related to the idea of *polycentricity*. According to Paul Dragos Aligica and Vlad Tarko (2013: 737) a polycentric governance system consists of the following features:

Multiplicity of Decision Centers, where there are distinct and overlapping units of governance that compete with one another.

Overarching System of Rules, which defines the limits of a polycentric governance system and specifies how separate governance units relate to and interact with one another.

Spontaneous Order, which is the result of the polycentric order, generated by competition among distinct and overlapping governance units.

The multiplicity of decision centers is the defining feature of polycentric governance structures. Instead of a single set of rules coming from a single centralized authority, there are multiple sets of rules coming from multiple authorities that overlap and compete with one another. Polycentricity's second defining feature is the overarching system of rules. This overarching system of rules not only serves to define what is and is not part of a polycentric order, but also how different units of governance within the order must relate to and interact with one another. And finally, the spontaneous order element characterizes the resulting states of affairs produced by polycentric orders: they are the result of human action, but not of human design. Examples of polycentricity include federalism and the American constitutional order more generally (Ostrom 2008) as well as metropolitan governance (Ostrom *et al* 1961).

Polycentricity facilitates experimentation and hence the generation of political knowledge by allowing for what John Stuart Mill called "experiments in living" (Anderson 1991). Mill conceived of these experiments as ways to express individuality, predicated on the belief that individuals should have the freedom to live according to their unique beliefs and preferences, especially when these differ from societal norms. Beyond expressing individuality, experiments

in living generate knowledge (Muldoon 2015; Kogelmann 2018; Müller 2019). What is the effect of a $15 minimum wage on labor markets? Let Seattle try so we can find out. Should we legalize marijuana and other recreational drugs? We can see how things go in Colorado. Will facemasks slow the spread of COVID-19? Let's compare Texas and New York in a few months. Is school choice a good model compared to more traditional ways of providing public education? Several states in the U.S. are trying this out right now; much can be learned from watching them. By creating a multiplicity of decision centers, polycentric forms of government allow different political units to try different policies, generating knowledge about the efficacy of these policies in the process. Experiments in living can also change the perspectives of those who engage in them, which can result in further epistemic benefits (Manor 2022b).

Some have challenged the efficacy of experiments in living. Gregory Robson (2021: 69) questions how rational it is for individuals and political units to actually engage in them. After all, experiments are costly to perform, and people tend to be risk averse. In many ways, an experiment in living is like a positive externality; absent incentivization, they may be underprovided. Others point out that it is hard to actually learn from experiments in living (Gaus 2016: 89-93). In highly controlled laboratory experiments, the control and treatment groups are identical except for one variable; in real-world experiments in living, however, nothing of the kind is possible. Mississippi is different from Seattle in many ways; can the former really infer anything about what its minimum wage should be from the latter? Thus, improving the intellectual value of political experiments might require carefully controlling key variables. This thought brings into view a potential tension between the moral and the epistemic justifications for polycentric governance (Manor 2021). Many embrace polycentricity for moral reasons: it allows members of diverse societies to "live and let live" (Nozick 1974: part III; Kogelmann

2017). This suggests a rather laissez-faire approach to polycentricity where individuals can create, exit, and govern political units as they see fit. Epistemic considerations, however, point to planned polycentricity based on careful management of experimental conditions to control variables. There is thus a challenge of weighing these opposing considerations in designing and managing polycentric arrangements.

Beyond the relationship between political institutions and knowledge generation, political epistemologists are also interested in the kinds of knowledge needed for political institutions to function well. This brings us to questions of transparency and opacity in government (Kogelmann 2021a). Many believe more information is better. Jeremy Bentham was a fanatical defender of this idea (Bruno 2017). The basic and intuitive idea is that more information increases accountability. The people will not tolerate political leaders who abuse their power. Knowing this, leaders will not abuse their power if they believe there is a reasonable chance they might get caught. Transparency increases the chances of getting caught. "Without publicity," Bentham (1834: 494) tells us, "all other checks are fruitless: in comparison of publicity, all other checks are of small account."

Contra Bentham and the common view, many political philosophers have argued that greater opacity may lead to better governance outcomes. Jon Elster (1995) and Simone Chambers (2004) both make the case that political deliberation would be of a higher quality if it occurred behind closed doors. This would plausibly eliminate unproductive partisan grandstanding. Going even further than this, Brian Kogelmann (2021b: ch. 2) argues that members of legislatures ought to vote by secret ballot, similar to how citizens vote in ordinary elections. Doing so, he believes, will secure greater political equality. Two major threats to political equality are the role of money in politics and the impact of special interest groups.

Greater secrecy neutralizes both threats. If donors cannot verify that politicians carry out their bidding—which will happen if they cannot see how politicians vote—then donors will probably stop contributing to political campaigns. And special interest groups—such as the National Rifle Association—gain influence primarily through their specialized ability to monitor how politicians vote on relevant policy issues, and pressure them if they go astray. Eliminating their capacity to monitor reduces their influence.

Of course, transparency and opacity are not only relevant from the instrumental perspectives we have just covered. Several give non-instrumental reasons for why governments ought to be transparent (Manor 2022a; Mokrosinska 2024). Due to space constraints, we cannot explore these arguments in detail.

4. The Meso Level

Above the level of individuals and their beliefs yet below the level of states and governments is the *meso level*. Here political epistemologists focus on the epistemic properties and problems of social media networks and other online ecosystems. Due to space constraints, we cannot examine this literature as fully as we would like. Nonetheless, we shall try to cover some of the major questions and contributions in this section.

Perhaps the most important paper in this area is C. Thi Nguyen's (2020) work on epistemic bubbles and echo chambers. It is common to hear that social media platforms create echo chambers, information silos, and the like, but what this actually means is unclear. Nguyen provides conceptual clarity. An *epistemic bubble* is an online ecosystem "which has inadequate coverage through a process of exclusion by omission" (Nguyen 2020: 143). For instance, you are

in an epistemic bubble if everyone you follow on X is a Republican. An *echo chamber* is an epistemic bubble that also "creates a significant disparity in trust between members and non-members" (Nguyen 2020: 146). You are in an echo chamber if everyone you follow on X are proponents of the QAnon conspiracy and *also* give you reason to not trust anything anyone outside the QAnon community says. Nguyen's distinction is helpful because it explains when and why interventions will or won't work. Popping epistemic bubbles is easy; all you must do is present those inside a bubble with missing information. Getting people out of echo chambers is harder because those inside them, by definition, will not believe the information you present to them. To get people out of echo chambers, outsiders must cultivate trust with those inside them before challenging their beliefs.

Ever since the 2016 election the term "fake news" has entered our political lexicon and philosophers have had much to say about it. One important question is how we should understand what fake news is on a conceptual level (Mukerji 2018; Pepp *et al* 2019). Is it just news stories that are false, or is there more to it? A plausible (though contested) definition of fake news says it is a news story "that purports to describe events in the real world, typically by mimicking the conventions of traditional media reportage, yet is known by its creators to be significantly false, and is transmitted with the two goals of being widely re-transmitted and of deceiving at least some of its audience" (Rini 2017: 45).

Given the sheer implausibility of many fake news stories, why do they spread? Why do people believe them? Philosophers have offered several explanations. According to Regina Rini (2017: 47-48), the infrastructure of social media confuses our norms of epistemic testimony. As we have already noted, given the complexity of the modern world, we must rely on the testimony of others to form beliefs. On social media, people offer testimony without *really* offering

testimony. By sharing a news story on X, one does not commit to the story's verity, but others might interpret you as endorsing the story's verity. Social media allows people to offer testimony without accountability, so on the margin they will share more questionable content. Neil Levy (2022: 112) tells a different story. He agrees that we often must rely on the testimony of others to get by. The problem, according to him, is that it is too easy for disreputable sources to mimic reputable ones; an environment where this mimicry runs rampant, he calls "epistemic pollution." An X account that spouts propaganda and fake news can easily cloak itself in the veneer of a credible news organization.

Daniel Wiliams offers a demand-driven account of how fake news spreads. In line with some of the empirical work discussed in §2 above, Williams begins with the premise that we often want to consume media that confirms our preexisting beliefs and inclinations. This gives rise to a "market for rationalizations" where producers "seize this opportunity and devote time, energy, and other resources to producing information useful for justifying beliefs that people want to hold for non-epistemic reasons" (Wiliams 2023: 108). On the flipside, Jason Stanley tells a supply-side story. Propaganda spreads because "the education system as well as the news media will become an organ of the positively privileged group" (Stanley 2015: 237). This is a Marxist account of how misinformation spreads. According to Karl Marx (1978: 172), the proletariat embrace the bourgeoisie's false ideology because "the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production." Recent work has defended demand-side over supply-side accounts of misinformation (Kogelmann forthcoming).

Fake news seems increasingly prevalent. Is this a cause for concern? If so, what should be done about it? This brings us to the ethics of fake news. In a recent paper Megan Fritts and

Frank Cabrera (2022) argue that markets for fake news are *noxious markets*, which means they cause individual harms, societal harms, they weaken the agency of individual participants, and they prey on the vulnerable. Noxious markets cry out for regulation. What should be done for fake news markets in particular? According to Fritts and Cabrera (2022: §5), we should make it easier to sue social media companies; thus, if a fake news story spreads on X and ends up causing harm, those harmed ought to be able to hold X liable. What to do about fake news may be one of the most important research areas philosophers can contribute to. A solution is desperately needed, yet any solution adopted must be exquisitely sensitive to other competing and important values, such as free speech and free association. Philosophers' knack for clarity in the face of complexity can be of great use here.

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