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Truth and Un-Truth 2026

Posted on August 19, 2025August 28, 2025 by European Society for the History of Political Thought
University of Naples "Federico II", Naples

5-7 October 2026

Truth and Un-Truth in the History of Political Thought

Eighth Biennial Conference of the European Society for the History of Political Thought

Francisco Goya, Truth, Time and History (between 1804 and 1808)

The European Society for the History of Political Thought (ESHPT) invites proposals for its 8th international conference. The conference will focus on themes related to "Truth and Un-Truth in the History of Political Thought." It will be held at the University of Naples "Federico II" in Naples, Italy, on 5-7 October 2026.

The concepts of "truth" and "untruth," as well as the many implications linked to them, have long been central to the practice of politics and the history of political thought. Far from being a purely epistemological concern, they have consistently been entangled with the dynamics of power, legitimacy, and authority. Indeed, political thinkers have recognized that truth-claims can serve not only as a foundation for justifying or challenging a political order, but also as a tool for domination, persuasion, control, or governance. This tradition is evident in Plato's justification of the "noble lie" ("γενναῖον ψεῦδος", Republic, III), medieval theories of natural law, early modern raison d'état, modern visions of deliberative democracy, and Hannah Arendt's reflections on totalitarianism and lying, to name just a few examples.

Similarly, the management of information and misinformation has been a crucial tool in politics, both for those in power and for those who resist or oppose the government. This is no less true today, as we wrestle with media fragmentation, disinformation, and the rise of so-called posttruth politics. Nor do these issues seem likely to fade, as new digital technologies and developments in AI have given renewed urgency to the politics of truth and untruth.

With these issues in mind, the ESHPT invites proposals for its 2026 conference in Naples, Italy. We welcome papers and panels that engage with thinkers, texts, and historical episodes from all periods and places, as well as papers that offer broader theoretical reflections on epistemology and political discourse. We invite papers that approach such questions from a variety of perspectives. The following are suggestions (and are in no way intended as limitations):

Epistemological and methodological challenges for the History of Political Thought.

The concepts of "truth" and "untruth," and their conceptual equivalences, in the political thought of all historical periods: figures, texts, contexts.

Political uses of truth and untruth across history as tools of legitimacy, persuasion, and control.

Truth and reason of State: truth, untruth, secrecy, dis/simulation as arts of government.

Truth claims, power, and sovereignty.

Ideology, propaganda, and media control.

Post-truth politics and digital disinformation.

Comparative and non-western perspectives: political theories and truth concepts beyond the western tradition.

Interdisciplinary approaches, including engagement with the visual arts, literature, and other cultural representations to understand how ideas about truth and untruth are constructed and conveyed.

Proposals for individual, 20-minute presentations should be no longer than 250 words. Proposals for

panels should not exceed 1,000 words (including all constituent paper proposals). Short CVs of the speakers should be added (name, institutional affiliations, major publications – no more than five). Panels at the conference will normally last 90 minutes, with 3 papers each. (Exceptionally, panel proposals consisting of more than 3 papers may be accommodated.) Please send your proposals by 15 March 2026 to eurohpt@eurohpt (http://eurohpt@eurohpt).

Authors will be notified of paper acceptance or non-acceptance by 15 April 2026. Participation fee (provisional): 60 EUR (45 EUR for PhD students) to cover catering and organisation costs.

The fee is calculated to meet unavoidable expenses. The organising committee is making efforts to secure external funding for the conference. In case these efforts are successful, the participation fee shall be waived. By ESHPT tradition, we intend to publish an edited volume selected from papers presented at the conference in our peer-reviewed series History of European Political and Constitutional Thought published by Brill/Leiden. See ESHPT webpage:
https://brill.com/display/serial/HEPCT (https://brill.com/display/serial/HEPCT)

Organising committee: Alessandro Arienzo, Patricia Chiantera, Alberto Clerici, Adriana LunaFabritius, Adrian O'Connor, Peter Schröder

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Previous conferences:

Human Nature 2024

Central European University, Vienna
25-27 September
Humans and Nature in the History of Political Thought.
Seventh Biennial Conference of the European Society for the History of Political Thought:

Screenshot

The European Society for the History of Political Thought invites proposals for its 7th international conference on "Human Nature – Humans and Nature in the History of Political Thought", to be held at Central European University in Vienna, on 25-27 September 2024.

Man is by nature a political animal (*anthropos physei zoon politikon*), says Aristotle in his *Politics*, inspiring millennia of reflection on the interconnection of politics and human nature. Such reflections are found in Hellenistic, Roman, Jewish, Christian, and Islamic traditions of political thought which, from early on, drew not only on Aristotle, but also on Platonist cosmology and Stoic natural law theory. However, the creationist perspective of the book religions also sparked many debates about the compatibility of philosophical concepts of nature with revelation. The Christian juxtaposition of natural state and sinful state is just one example. Nonetheless, throughout the medieval period, political theorists from all "Abrahamic" religions upheld the centrality of the concept of human nature.

Such perceptions of "human dignity" were usually based on an idea of the distinctive, even privileged status of human beings in the order of creation, on account of the gifts of the soul and reason as the foundations of the human capacity for virtue and liberty. However, at critical historical junctures, especially in modern times, this very idea came to be questioned: sceptics, modern theorists of natural law, Enlightenment classics studied humans as coequal with other parts of created nature, and their nature as contingent and historicized, developing in conjunction with those other parts. Moreover, scientific discoveries, such as blood circulation, blurred the lines between the natural and the mechanical (*l'homme machine*). Finally, evolution theories further eroded the distinctive status of man in nature. All this had important consequences for emerging notions about the constructed nature of human sociability and the civil polity. The "naturalization of man" also entailed a new interest in and new thinking about the relation of politics, civil society and the state with physical nature.

More recently, the category of human nature has come under pressure from many sides. Postcolonialism has denounced the universalist conceptions of human nature as imperial. Historical materialism, existentialist political theory (Hannah Arendt), discourse analysis (Michel Foucault), feminist philosophy (Simon de Beauvoir), and gender studies (Judith Butler) are among the many directions in political thought that explicitly seek to challenge and overcome the concept of human nature. Environmental thinking, notions of the Anthropocene or Capitalocene, epigenetics and co-evolution are setting the problem of human nature and the humanity-nature relationship in a new light.

Thus, the aim of this conference is threefold: 1) We invite papers that explore the concept of nature and its criticism in the political thought of all historical periods. 2) We encourage comparative reflections on conceptual equivalences in traditions of political philosophy and theory (Chinese, Indian etc.) that did not build on Hellenic or Hellenistic foundations. 3) We are interested in critical reflections on the continuing relevance of the concept of human nature in political thought.

Confirmed keynote speakers:

- Sarah Hutton (University of York)
- Silvia Sebastiani (EHESS – École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris)
- Milinda Banerjee (University of St Andrews)

Proposals for individual 20 minute papers (max. 250 words) and full panels (of 3 or, exceptionally, 4 papers, max. 500 words) are both welcome. Please send your proposal and a short CV with publications

(max. 1 page altogether; in case of panels, for each speaker) by 28 February 2024 to eurohpt@gmail.com (mailto:eurohpt@gmail.com). Notifications about acceptance or rejection shall be sent by 15 April 2024.

Participation fee (provisional): 60 EUR and 45 EUR for PhD students to cover catering and organization costs. The fee is calculated to meet unavoidable expenses. The organizing committee is making efforts to secure external funding for the conference. In case these efforts are successful, the participation fee shall be waived, and we may also be able to provide a small contribution to covering the expenses of participation for academics without access to institutional funding.

Participants who are not members of the ESHPT will be asked to join the society (standard rate: 30 EUR p/a, graduate students: 20 EUR p/a).

The International Society for Intellectual History (ISIH) collaborates with the ESHPT in this conference by generously offering a number of bursaries for early career researchers. For further information, please visit https://is-ih.com (https://is-ih.com/) .

By ESHPT tradition we intend to publish an edited volume selected from papers read at the conference with our partner Brill, which also supports the conference financially, in the series https://brill.com/display/serial/HEPCT (https://brill.com/display/serial/HEPCT) .

The Organizing Committee:

Erica Benner, ESHPT President

László Kontler, Central European University

Adrian O'Connor, University of South Florida

Matthias Riedl, Central European University

Tagged environment, history, philosophy, politics, science

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