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AI TECHNOLOGY AS A HOSTILE EPISTEMOLOGY: A THREAT TO DEMOCRATIC LEGITIMACY

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C. Thi Nguyen developed the notion 'Hostile Epistemology' (2021, 2023) and defined it as "the study of how environmental features (such as people, communities, cultural practices, institutional structures and technologies) can exploit our cognitive vulnerabilities and weaknesses" (Nguyen 2023, 1). In this talk, I argue that political agents in liberal constitutional democracies should regard AI technology as an epistemically hostile environment. Not only does AI technology (generative and predictive AI) undermine clarity and trust, necessary conditions of a healthy epistemic environment, but it also enhances the seductiveness of belief systems. For example, AI-driven engagement optimisation algorithms, deepfakes, and automated bots, among other elements, amplify a hostile epistemic environment where emotionally charged content, false credentials, and manipulative narratives thrive. The implication of AI as a hostile epistemic network is that it intensifies the erosion of both institutional trust and civic trust, which undermines the democratic legitimacy of a constitutional democracy. I end the talk by discussing potential avenues for mitigation.



Dr. Paige Benton received her PhD from the University of Pretoria in 2023, funded by the Centre for Artificial Intelligence Research (CAIR). She is currently a post-doctoral research fellow at the African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science (ACEPS). She is the recipient of the Global Excellence and Stature (GES) fellowship at the University of Johannesburg for 2024 and 2025. Her research lies at the intersection of political philosophy and the politics of artificial intelligence (AI). She seeks to address the evolving challenges posed by digital, AI and emerging technologies, particularly in the context of information dissemination through social media and its impact on the stability of democratic societies. She is currently Co-PI on the 3-year project Safeguarding Democracy in the Age of AI, which investigates the effects of AI technologies on justice, democracy, and the political and epistemic agency of citizens in the Global South.

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