

Truth, Trust, and Democracy

Michael Hannon
(University of Nottingham):

Insincere Discourse in Politics

📅 26. 5. 2026

🕒 16.45 - 18.00

📍 Seminarraum I (Theologie) | Karl-Rahner-Platz 1

Political partisans frequently disagree about basic political facts, but it remains unclear whether these disagreements reflect sincere belief or expressive behavior. In a survey experiment with 888 U.S. participants, we examine how accuracy incentives affect responses to factual political questions. We find that incentives reduced partisan gaps in factual reporting, but this effect was driven almost entirely by Republicans. Democrats and Independents showed little change in their responses when offered incentives. When Republicans were incentivized, they became more accurate on questions favoring Democrats but less accurate on questions favoring their own party, with no overall improvement in accuracy. If incentives were simply causing respondents to think harder, we would expect accuracy to improve across the board, which it did not. These patterns are instead consistent with expressive responding but are also compatible with strategic responding, where participants adjust answers to match perceived researcher expectations. Our findings also suggest that aggregate reductions in polarization under incentive conditions can obscure important asymmetries across partisan groups and question types, complicating what incentive-based designs can tell us about what citizens actually believe.

CV

Michael Hannon is an Associate Professor of Philosophy at the University of Nottingham and Director of The Aristotelian Society. For the 2025–26 academic year, he holds a British Academy Mid-Career Fellowship for the project *Lies of the Electorate: The Role of Insincere Discourse in Politics*. He is also a Visiting Fellow at Mansfield College, Oxford. Previously, he was a Fellow-in-Residence at the Edmond and Lily Safra Center for Ethics at Harvard University (20223), as well as a Faculty Fellow in the Center for Ethics at the Murphy Institute at Tulane University (2021-2). Before joining Nottingham in 2019, he served as Deputy Director of the Institute of Philosophy in London.

