

## Call for Papers

Where: **University of Erfurt, Germany**

When: **July 8 – 9, 2025**

Deadline for submissions: **April 22, 2025**

### **Truth Politics between Science and Society. Political Epistemologies of the 1990s Science Wars**

In light of a dwindling public trust in science (Oreskes 2019) and ambiguous calls for a ‘return to truth’ (Cain et al. 2019), understanding the relationship between science and a democratic public, the delineation of appropriate scientific practices, and how to reconcile conflicting interpretations of reality seems to be more relevant than ever. In the 1990s, struggles over these issues culminated in the Science Wars that consisted of a series of heated academic-public discussions, among them the infamous ‘Sokal Hoax’. The Science Wars represent a historic peak and intersection of academic, political, and epistemological debates that had been smoldering for decades before, leaving a contested legacy.

A fresh perspective on the Science Wars – one that acknowledges their historical complexity, moves beyond a dualistic framing, and situates them firmly in their historical moment – promises to illuminate the social, political, and cultural ramifications on academia and beyond. The workshop aims to map and historicize the shifting epistemological landscapes of the 1990s from an international perspective informed by methods of Historical and Political Epistemology.

We take the Science Wars and their reception as a vantage point to explore historical debates at the nexus of truth, science, and society. The topics may include, but are not limited to:

- debates about the relationship between religion, especially creationism, and science and education (Perez 2024);
- the “Darwin wars” (Brown 2000) or “Evolution wars” (Aechtner 2020);
- the New Atheist movement and its struggles against religious “irrationalism”;
- sceptics’ networks debunking “pseudo-sciences” since the 1970s;
- more generally, the philosophical efforts to delineate science against “pseudo-science” (Popper, Lakatos, Bunge etc.);
- the “Freud wars” against psychoanalysis;
- the “theory wars” (Bevir et al. 2020) in literary theory;
- debates about science museum exhibitions (e.g. Science in American Life, Enola Gay) etc.

In line with the perspective of Historical and Political Epistemology, the following questions might be worth considering:

- What were the socio-political effects of deploying scientific concepts, rhetorics, and arguments (e.g. truth, objectivity, rationalism, the scientific method, academic freedom) in particular historical contexts?
- What kind of political and social imaginations about the future of science and the (democratic) public informed these different positions?
- What kinds of subjectivities and narratives about science and society were re-asserted?

In particular, we invite paper proposals with an international and transnational perspective on the reception of the Science Wars and related debates, as well as similar struggles that played out in different academic cultures and national contexts. Moreover, the role of new channels of communication and media, and how they shaped debates in public-academic arenas represent an important topic to explore.

We invite colleagues to send a short CV, and a 300-word abstract of their paper (the presentation should be 25-30 minutes long). The deadline for submission is April 22, 2025. Please send these documents to [forschungsstelle.wahrheit@uni-erfurt.de](mailto:forschungsstelle.wahrheit@uni-erfurt.de). Applicants will be notified of the acceptance of their proposal by the beginning of May. As a result of the workshop, we are planning a publication.

The workshop is jointly organized by the research center “Politics of Truth/ Political Epistemologies” at the University of Erfurt, the chair for the History of Science at the University of Erfurt, the Lumina Quaeruntur project “‘Images of science’ in Czechoslovakia 1918-1945-1968”, MUA, Prague, and the working group “Political Epistemologies of Central and Eastern Europe” (PECEE). The workshop will take place at the University of Erfurt, Germany. We will cover travel and accommodation costs for the speakers.

#### **Organizing Committee:**

Martin Babička, D.Phil., Institute of Contemporary History, Czech Academy of Sciences, Prague

Johanna Hügel, History of Science, University of Erfurt

Meike Katzek, M.A., History of Science, University of Erfurt

Prof. Dr. Bernhard Kleeberg, History of Science, University of Erfurt

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