Filtering Truth

Epistemic Bubbles, Echo Chambers, and the Spread of Misinformation

Epistemic bubbles and echo chambers are socio-epistemic environments that filter our access to information and manipulate our epistemic attitude. In these environments, people are primarily exposed to information that aligns with their own beliefs, whereas opposing views are not easily accessible or actively sought out. For example, someone who follows only like-minded friends on social media may not come across contrary political opinions, even though they are not deliberately avoiding them.

While epistemic bubbles are relatively fragile structures that control the flow of information, echo chambers are constructed around some strongly ingrained convictions that affect the epistemic agent's attitude toward external sources of confirmation or disconfirmation. Echo chambers can be more insular and extreme, as members only engage with those who share and amplify their viewpoints while dismissing others as unreliable or malicious.

Both environments deploy epistemic filters, meaning they select and channel information, trust, and epistemic credentials to manipulate the formation and circulation of beliefs. Since individuals only encounter information confirming their beliefs, they may inadvertently accept falsehoods as truth because they have no reason to question the information they receive.

So, are epistemic bubbles and echo chambers inherently bad? Are some echo chambers more dangerous than others? And is it possible to »pop« an epistemic bubble or break into an echo chamber by introducing true information into environments where misinformation thrives? If so, how?

Why is this topic so intriguing, and why should you care?

1. We can investigate more generally how social structures – such as social media networks, political affiliations, or ideological communities – play a role in determining what information we seek and trust.

2. We can foster an understanding of how misinformation spreads in epistemic bubbles & echo chambers, which might be vital in combatting its harmful effects (false beliefs about climate change, vaccine hesitancy, election fraud

claims). We can also dive further into the nature of misinformation & conspiracy theorizing.

3. Gain insight into the role epistemic bubbles & echo chambers play in driving political and social polarization by creating insular communities (also online). This might help us work towards solutions that foster critical thinking, open dialogue, and informed decision-making.

Introductory reading

Nguyen, C. T. (2020). »Echo Chambers and Epistemic Bubbles«. In: *Episteme 17(2)*, 141-161.

Further literature

Ahlstrom-Vij, K. (2013). »Why we cannot rely on ourselves for epistemic improvement«. In: *Philosophical Issues 23(1)*, 276-296.

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Furman, K. (2023). »Epistemic Bunkers«. In: *Social Epistemology 37/2)*. 197-207.

Gunn, H. (2021). »Filter bubbles, Echo Chambers, and Online Communities«. In: Michael Hannon & Jeroen de Ridder (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology*. New York: Routledge, 192-202.

Harris, K. (2018). »What's Epistemically Wrong with Conspiracy Theorising?«. In: *Royal Institue of Philosophy Supplement 84*, 235-257.

——— (forthcoming). »Beyond Belief: On disinformation and manipulation«. In: *Erkenntnis*, 1-21.

Jamieson, K. H. & J. N. Cappella (2008). »Echo Chamber: Rush Limbaugh and the Conservative Media Establishment«. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Lackey, J. (2023). »Criminal Testimonial Injustice«. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pariser, E. (2011). »The Filter Bubble: What the Internet Is Hiding from You«. London: Penguin.

Santos, B. R. G. (2020). »Echo Chambers, Ignorance and Domination«. In: *Social Epistemology*, 1-11.

Sheeks, M. (2023). »The Myth of the Good Epistemic Bubble«. In: *Episteme 20/3,* 685-700.

Woomer, L. (2019). »Agential Insensitivity and Socially Supported Ignorance«. In: *Episteme 16/1*, 73-91.

Possible keynote speakers

Jennifer Lackey, Keith Harris, Quassim Cassam, Kristoffer Ahlstrom-Vij, C. Thi Nguyen, or Kathleen Hall Jamieson