

Call for Papers: Philosophy of Propaganda

Special Issue in [ZEMO, Journal for Ethics and Moral Philosophy](#)

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Deadline: October 1, 2026

Description:

The concept of propaganda is surrounded by an aura of negativity. It is often associated with the appropriation and distortion of reality. Those who engage in propaganda are said to advocate for a particular idea, but in an improper or misleading way. The term *propaganda* is also used when the ideas being disseminated appear suspect; it is assumed that “genuine” political education or enlightenment would have to convey different kinds of content. Thus, the concept of propaganda seems to function primarily as a tool for identifying problematic forms of communication.

However, what exactly—if anything at all—is (prima facie) so problematic about propaganda? What kind of error does a person (or a state) commit when engaging in propaganda? Is it an epistemic error, or a moral one? And is it even true that propaganda is (prima facie) inherently problematic? This latter question is particularly salient because the term is also employed in positive or value-neutral ways describing communicative contributions. Without a clear account of the negative implications commonly attributed to the term, there is a risk that the word *propaganda* will be misused as a mere label of rejection.

The special issue, to be published in 2027, aims to clarify what propaganda is and how the concept might be understood in order to make it fruitful for debates concerning epistemically and morally appropriate communication. Relevant questions include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Should propaganda be understood as a value-laden concept, or rather as a neutral one?
- If *propaganda* denotes a faulty kind of behavior, what kind(s) of error does it involve?
- Should propaganda be understood as something
 - ... necessarily connected to a clear intention, such as disinformation or a clear lack of concern for truth?
 - ... that people can spread not only intentionally but also unintentionally—for instance, when they disseminate false information without realizing or intending it? If so, does this imply that engaging in propaganda may be difficult to avoid entirely?
 - ... that cannot, by its very nature, constitute a rational contribution to public discourse?
 - ... that necessarily (and deliberately) undermines democratic ideals or reinforces non-democratic ones? Or could there also be propaganda in support of democracy and human rights?
 - ... that only authoritarian or totalitarian states employ?
- Should propaganda be understood as a purely instrumental-rational (manipulative) form of communication?
- Are there meaningful differences between (political) advertising, public relations, and propaganda—and if so, what are they?
- Should propaganda and enlightenment or education be conceptually distinguished—and if so, how?

Submissions—either in English or German and with a maximum length of 9,000 words—may be uploaded via the journal’s Editorial Manager system:

<https://www.editorialmanager.com/zemo/default.aspx>