

Trust and Social Bonds

2020-21 Philosophy Graduate Course

Thursdays 2:30-5:30

Crucial to our well-being and survival are social bonds that allow us to depend on one another. The COVID-19 crisis has made this fact all too clear. But these bonds depend on trust, which in some societies or relationships is in short supply. *How can trust be enhanced where it is lacking or preserved where it exists, particularly during crises like the one we are currently facing?* The course will centre on this question, which is interdisciplinary. We will be focused primarily (not exclusively) on what philosophy can contribute by way of an answer. We will be asking, in particular, what *feminist* philosophy can contribute, where a feminist approach takes for granted that attitudes like trust and distrust are formed against a social background that oppresses some people and privileges others.

A key piece of the puzzle about how to promote or protect trust is to understand what trust is, which is arguably a question for philosophers. It is at least one that many philosophers have tried to answer. Most of them have understood trust to be a species of reliance and therefore something that differs from mere reliance, which we can have on things like cars and which, unlike trust, can't be betrayed. There is much controversy in philosophy about what kind of reliance trust is, if it is in fact any single kind of reliance. In this course, we'll consider how trust itself might differ depending on the types of social bonds it engenders. We will also explore how trust could be strengthened depending on what it's like in different social contexts.

We will discuss the following types of social bonds: 1) *bonds of intimacy*, including between family members, and especially between parents and children; 2) *bonds of identity*, which exist within or between members of social groups (e.g. racial or gender groups); and 3) *bonds of cooperation*, which occur between social groups or between relative strangers. There will be distinct sections of the course for each of these types of bonds, along with an additional section, 4), about *mediating influences* on the trust that makes social bonds possible. Putative examples include social institutions and technology such as artificial intelligence (AI).

Below are the types of questions we will ask in the different sections of the course:

1) Bonds of Intimacy:

- a. What is the trust like that allows for these bonds? Should we understand it in terms of the "security-based attachment" made possible by healthy intimate relationships (see Wonderly 2016, Kirton forthcoming), particularly between parents and children (McLeod et al 2019)? What is the relationship between attachment, as understood by psychologists, and people's capacity for trust or tendency to be trusting? How can prolonged isolation weaken bonds of intimacy or security-based attachments? What could governments do during the COVID-19 crisis to support these bonds?

2) *Bonds of Identity:*

- a. Often, there are special bonds among members of social groups (e.g., groups defined by race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, physical or mental ability). What is the trust like that glues these people together? What is the distrust like that excludes some people from these bonds of identity (i.e., people who are deemed to be not black enough, queer enough, etc.)? Assuming these bonds are or can be valuable, how can they be enhanced? How have they been valuable during the COVID-19 crisis?

3) *Bonds of Cooperation:*

- a. What is the trust like that occurs between people who are cooperating with one another to serve ends that one or both of them possess? Examples are relationships between professionals and clients/patients, government representatives and citizens, and experts and the public. How important is this trust? How is it important for knowledge gathering in particular (i.e., trust in the testimony of others)? How do social stereotypes and broader systems of oppression and privilege interfere with it? What could be done to shore it up during the COVID-19 crisis?

4) *Mediating Influences:*

- a. What are mediating influences on trust that are common for different types of social bonds? What about social institutions? How important is institutional trust for other kinds of trust? What about technology, especially AI which is becoming pervasive? How can AI positively or negatively mediate trust between, say, government and citizens, professionals and clients, and parents and children? How should we answer that for the AI being used to deal with challenges posed by COVID-19?

All of the readings for this course will be available online on the course's website. Like all other Philosophy graduate courses at Western in 2020-21, our meetings will also be online. I'm still sorting out what the methods of evaluation will be.

Below is a partial list of references I provided for a recent grant application about a project on trust and social bonds. Some of these papers or books will appear on our syllabus.

Courtland, R. 2018. "The Bias Detectives," *Nature* 558: 357-360. Available at:
<https://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-018-05469-3>.

Fricker, M. 2007. *Epistemic Injustice: Power and Ethics in Knowing*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Frost-Arnold, K. 2014. "Imposters, Tricksters, and Trustworthiness as an Epistemic Virtue," *Hypatia* 29(4): 790-807.

Goldberg, S. 2020. "Trust and Reliance." In Simon ed.

- Hudson, L. 2017. "Technology is Biased Too. How Do We Fix It?" *FiveThirtyEight*, July 20.
Available at: <https://perma.cc/3KAC-7CQV>.
- Jones, K. 2017. "'But I Was Counting on You!'" In *The Philosophy of Trust*. Ed. P. Faulkner and T. Simpson. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.
- Jones, K. 2012. "Trustworthiness," *Ethics* 123: 61–85.
- Kirton, A. Forthcoming. "Matters of Trust as Matters of Attachment Security," *International Journal of Philosophical Studies*.
- LaRosa, E. and D. Danks. 2018. "Impacts on Trust of Healthcare AI," presented at the conference, "Artificial Intelligence, Ethics, and Society," New Orleans, February.
Available at: https://www.aies-conference.com/2018/contents/papers/main/AIES_2018_paper_132.pdf.
- McLeod, C. 2020a. "Damage to Trust." In *my Conscience in Reproductive Health Care: Prioritizing Patient Interests*. Oxford UK: Oxford University Press.
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- McLeod, C. and E. Ryman. 2020. "Trust, Autonomy, and the Fiduciary Relationship." In *Fiduciaries and Trust: Ethics, Politics, Economics, and Law*. Ed. P. B. Miller and M. Harding. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp. 74-86.
- McLeod, C., L. Davies, N. Fice, L. Bruijns, E. Cichocki, H. Doguoglu, H. Stewart, A. Horn, J. Rekis, T. Filipovich, "Time to Attach: An Argument in Favour of EI Attachment Benefits," created for Ontario's Adoptive Parents Association and the Adoption Council of Canada, May 2019. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ab0013d2714e5098e6d300e/t/5ced7939f4e1fc6863170060/1559066976255/TTA+Report+High+Res.pdf>.
- O'Neill, O. 2002. *Autonomy and Trust in Bioethics*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Potter, N. 2020. "Interpersonal Trust." In Simon ed.
- Rogers, W. 2002. "Is There a Moral Duty for Doctors to Trust Patients?" *Journal of Medical Ethics* 28(2): 77-80.
- Scheman, N. 2020. "Trust and Trustworthiness." In Simon ed.
- Simon, J., ed. 2020 (forthcoming in June). *The Routledge Handbook of Trust and Philosophy*. New York: Routledge.

Simpson, T. 2012. "What is Trust?" *Pacific Philosophical Quarterly* 93: 550–569.

Sinclair, R. 2007. "Identity Lost and Found: Lessons from the Sixties Scoop," *First Peoples Child and Family Review* 3(1): 65–82.

West, J. 2014. "First Nations Mistrust Health System, Dalhousie Researchers Say," *CBC News*, Nov. 26. Available at: www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/first-nations-mistrust-healthsystem-dalhousie-researchers-say-1.2851414.

Wonderly, M. L. 2016. "On Being Attached," *Philosophical Studies* 173(1): 223–42.