NEW PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES ON TRUST
16-17 September 2014
Programme
Overview

Trust is central to our social lives. We know by trusting what others tell us. We act on that basis, and on the basis of trust in their promises and implicit commitments. So trust underpins both epistemic and practical cooperation and is key to philosophical debates on the conditions of its possibility.

Trust figures centrally in these debates in at least the following two ways. First, if I have answered the question “Why trust?”, I have thereby answered the question “Why cooperate?”. But because cooperation can be rational or irrational, so too can trust. Second, trust is also embedded in a nexus of rich moral concepts. When I trust and am trustworthy, I show my respect for others; so consideration of trust opens into debates on second-personal normativity. Trust thus suggests the possibility of a unique reason for cooperation, namely a moral one. The question “Why cooperate?” becomes “What do I owe you?” or “Why should I believe you?” While the attitude of trust seems to give or respond to moral reasons for cooperation, it nevertheless also seems that we can rationally evaluate trust. This awkward conjunction—of rational evaluability and moral embeddedness—is the starting point for philosophical reflection on trust. This conference explores these and related themes.

Convenors: Tom Simpson (BSG, Oxford) and Paul Faulkner (Philosophy, Sheffield)
Programme

Tuesday 16th September

9.30-10  Registration (*incl tea/coffee*)

10-11.30  Katherine Hawley (St Andrews) - Trustworthy Groups and Institutions
          Chair: Tom Simpson

         *Tea/coffee*

12-1.30  David Owens (Reading) - Trust in Speech
          Chair: Paul Faulkner

1.30-2.30  *Lunch*

2.30-4  Ted Hinchman (Wisconsin) - How Might Trust Generate Second-Personal Reasons?
        Chair: Lizzie Fricker

         *Tea/coffee*

4.30-6  Bob Stern (Sheffield) - ‘Trust is basic’: Løgstrup on the Priority of Trust over Distrust
        Chair: Roger Crisp

7.30pm-  Dinner at Malmaison Restaurant
          (*here*; or see map at end. 15-20 mins walk from 10 Merton St/University Club)

Weds 17th September

9-9.30  *Tea/coffee*

9.30-11  Ben McMyler (Texas A&M) - Deciding to Trust
          Chair: Tom Simpson

         *Tea/coffee*

11.30-1pm  Paulina Sliwa (Cambridge) - Trusting Your Evidence Only
           Chair: Alison Hills

          *Lunch*

2-3.30pm  Philip Nickel (Eindhoven TU) - Being Pragmatic about Trust
          Chair: Paul Faulkner

          *Depart*
Trustworthy Groups and Institutions
Katherine Hawley
We speak colloquially of trusting or distrusting groups (of various kinds) and institutions: people over the age of thirty, bankers, the Warren Commission, the BBC, the IMF. Such talk is central to public debate about trust and trustworthiness, whilst questions about the relationship between inter-personal and inter-group trust are central to research on trust in politics and international relations. In this paper, I draw upon recent literature in the epistemology of groups, developing an account of trustworthiness for such entities which encompasses both practical and epistemic trustworthiness.

Testimony and Truthfulness
David Owens
By making assertions, we change the normative situation in at least two respects: First assertions have epistemic significance: they change what it is reasonable for the audience to believe. Second, they have deontic significance: they change what the speaker owes to his audience. In this paper, I’ll examine two models of how they fit together. On the first, the epistemic significance of an assertion explains its deontic significance. On the second, neither is prior to the other. I suggest that neither model is adequate. One virtue of assertion which has both epistemic and deontic significance is sincerity. A sincere assertor believes what they assert, they are truthful. Truthfulness matters epistemically in that there is a way of learning from someone’s assertion which depends essentially on the idea that they believe what they are saying. Truthfulness matters deontically in that one often does wrong in being untruthful, in asserting what one does not believe. I shall argue that neither of the above models of assertion gives truthfulness the right sort of significance.

How Might Trust Generate Second-Personal Reasons?
Edward S. Hinchman
This paper articulates an assurance theory of normative powers. By a ‘normative power’ I mean the power to create a genuinely normative obligation simply through an act of the will. By an ‘assurance theory’ of normative powers I mean a theory that trades on how the illocutionary acts that manifest normative powers—I’ll focus on testifying, advising and promising—amount to propositional assurances. My assurance theory of normative powers emphasizes how the assurance in each case amounts to an invitation to trust. Viewing the assurance as an invitation to trust helps us understand the second-personal structure of normative powers. When S offers A propositional assurance—say, through testimony or a promise—S gives A a reason grounded in part in the obligation that S undertakes to vindicate the trust that S invites A to place in her.

‘Trust is basic’: Løgstrup on the Priority of Trust over Distrust
Bob Stern
This paper will consider the account of trust offered by the Danish philosopher and theologian Knud Ejler Løgstrup. In his work The Ethical Demand (1956) and related writings, Løgstrup offers an important discussion of trust, in which he makes the claim that trust is somehow prior to or more basic than distrust. However, there is some unclarity over what this claim could mean, and thus what sort of priority is suggested: for example, whether this is a matter of developmental psychology, or value, or a transcendental relation where one is the necessary condition for the other. Different views on this question will be explored, and consideration will also be given to how the question relates to Løgstrup’s account of trust more generally, as essentially ‘laying oneself open’ to the other in a form of ‘self-surrender’.

Deciding to Trust
Benjamin McMyler
I argue for non-voluntarism about trust, for the thesis that, in at least a central range of cases, we cannot trust someone to do something directly at will. We cannot trust in the way that we can act, directly for practical reasons. If we could trust at will, then we should be able to trust in direct response to inducements such as offers, threats, and requests. But in many cases we cannot trust directly for these reasons. I cannot trust you to return a book for the reason that you have threatened to harm me if I do not, for example. This suggests a constraint on an adequate
theory of interpersonal trust. An adequate theory of the nature of interpersonal trust must be in a position to explain why in at least many cases trust is non-voluntary. I end by exploring some of the implications of this constraint.

Trusting Your Evidence Only
Paulina Sliwa
We generally trust some people’s word more than others’: an old friend’s more than a fleeting acquaintance’s, our spouse’s (if we’re lucky) more than our co-worker’s. What explains this variance? According to recent accounts of trust, trust concerns the nature of our relationship with the speaker. I argue that this is mistaken: trust is a matter of the evidence we have about the speaker. In doing so, I argue that the epistemology of trust is purely evidential. I defend this view against two central objections: the first is that we can choose to trust. The second is that attending to the evidence undermines our relationship with the speaker in a way that is incompatible with trust. I argue that both objections miss their mark. They rest on a conflation of epistemic norms, which govern what we ought to believe, with practical norms, which govern our actions – including our evidence gathering behavior. We can respect the word of our friends, colleagues, and spouses without disrespecting our evidence.

Being Pragmatic about Trust
Philip J. Nickel
Trust is responsive to evidence of the reliability of the trusted person. But does one have any flexibility within the limits of epistemic reason to trust or distrust to a degree not directly determined by the available evidence, for example for strategic or pragmatic reasons? In this paper I discuss three considerations that provide flexibility for trust attitudes within the limits of epistemic reason. First, in psychological and sociological explanations, the reasons of trust distinctively include beliefs about the likelihood of future interaction with the trusted, about (e.g.) prevalent moral norms involving social roles, and about the likelihood of sanctions. Second, I argue that the evidence for trust is often positive but inconclusive, so that in many cases where we are entitled to trust, we are also entitled to refrain from trusting. This latitude leaves room for non-evidential, pragmatic reasons to influence trust. Finally, I argue that it may be better to think of the doxastic dimension of trust as a predictive expectation, rather than in the first instance as a belief. I discuss the contrast between predictive expectation and belief, and between predictive and normative expectation. Taken together, these arguments ameliorate recent philosophical worries about the conflicting commitments of trust and leave room for voluntary trust within the limits of epistemic reason.