

PHIL S350/HUMS S332/PLSC S281: TRUST – AND MISTRUST  
2024 Yale Summer Session, a-term, MWF, 9:00-11:15 A.M.  
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Trust involves a tension. On the one hand, we must build trust on the basis of its absence. On the other hand, trust is best built when a measure of it already exists between those who are trying to strengthen it. What is trust, such that violations of it yield a sense of betrayal rather than mere disappointment? What is the relation between epistemic and practical trust? When, if ever, is it rational to place one's trust in someone, some group or some thing – or to mistrust them? Can philosophers be proponents of the value of trust without ceding our role as critical, skeptical, even mistrustful thinkers?

The topic has timely social and political implications. Sometimes authorities and institutions deserve to be mistrusted because they have proven themselves untrustworthy. Yet liberal democracy depends upon citizens trusting that they share a common world and set of institutions enabling them to negotiate differences fairly. The aim of enemies of democracy is to sow doubts in the public so as to undermine trust in democratic institutions. This invites a consideration of phenomena such as populism, polarization, epistemic bubbles, echo chambers, conspiracy theories, "fake news," "truth decay," and even the idea of "a post-truth culture."

In the face of these challenges, how can we hope to rebuild trust in one another and democratic institutions?

### Texts

1. **Readings** will be available in a packet you must order immediately from TYCO at 296 Elm Street (across from the Yale Co-op). Each day's assignment has a cover page with 1) questions for thought and discussion and 2) suggested essay topics (if you choose to "post" for that day). I shall distribute readings for the first week in class. But all readings starting from Monday, 6/3 will be contained in your packet. You must bring this to class so that we are working from the material in common.
2. Assigned **videos** will be available through links provided in the published syllabus.
3. Yale provides students free access to the **New York Times** and **Washington Post** which are, in my judgment, the U.S.'s best newspapers. A big part of our course will involve applying our readings to what's going on in the world right now. Here are links outlining the steps you need to take to get access. For easy access, copy these resources to your computer's bookmark bar.

- <https://web.library.yale.edu/access-nytcom>
- <https://web.library.yale.edu/access-washington-post>

4. Among the best American magazines for "think pieces" on contemporary issues are: The Atlantic, The New Yorker, and Vox. Podcasts I listen to include: the New York Times Daily, The Ezra Klein Show, The New Yorker Radio Hour, The Axe Files, and Stay Tuned with Preet.

### Course Requirements (% of grade for each requirement is indicated in red)

1. **Faithful preparation, class attendance, and participation** in our discussions. (15%)
  - a. Because we only have 15 meetings, any one absence is equivalent to missing an entire week during a regular, 15-week semester. Each unexcused absence will reduce your grade by one level, e.g., from 'A' to 'A-.'
  - b. A pattern of helpful participation in class will help your grade.

2. **Written work** will consist of 3 posts, a detailed outline of your final essay, and the essay itself:

- a. Three approximately 800-word **reading responses**, one for each of the first three parts of the course. You may choose which day to write a response, and the response will be on the reading (or viewing) assignment for that day. I'll provide a number of "prompts" for each day, helping you with the structure of an argument. Your response is due by midnight before class. **(45%)**

Use our course website on **Canvas** for the purpose of reading responses.

- i. Start by creating a file of your response on your desktop.
- ii. Next, upload it to the "Assignments" page on Canvas, and press "Submit."
- iii. I will provide comments and a grade as soon as possible.

In the event of difficulties with Canvas, you can always send your posts as an attachment directly to me via e-mail. Be sure to put your name on the title line of your post!

- b. A detailed outline of your **final essay** with your central question, thesis, an outline of steps in the argument, and a bibliography of sources is due on Canvas: Sunday, 6/22 at noon. **(10%)**
  - i. We'll have time to discuss the outline for your final paper in class on Monday, 6/24.
  - ii. You must post your **final essay** (approximately 2,000, carefully edited words) on Canvas by 8:30 A.M. on our last day: Friday, 6/28.
  - iii. In class, on 6/28, you should be prepared to make an 5-minute **oral presentation** outlining the central question, thesis and argument of your final paper. I see this as a "philosophical party," where we have a chance to celebrate what we've done during our brief semester. **(30%)**

### What do we expect from your READING RESPONSES?

Posts will help you prepare well for our class discussions and warm you up for your longer final essay. Here's an **example** of how to "post" a reading response.

Imagine the following disagreement:

- "Mistrust is the opposite of trust."
- Kathleen Hawley: "No, it isn't. There are plenty of cases where I don't trust someone, but I don't mistrust them either."

1. Start with the proposition above that you agree with and explain why.
2. Then consider the objection to it, and explain why you disagree with the objection, using examples.

Notice that the structure of the argument above has **4 steps**:

1. Identify a **thesis** that you agree with.
2. Explain the **reasons** supporting this thesis.
3. Raise an **objection** to the thesis.
4. Explain why you **disagree** with this objection.

**EDIT your entry before you post it!!!!** Each reading response is due by midnight before the class for which you post. LATE READING RESPONSES MAY NOT BE ACCEPTED AS I NEED TIME TO READ THEM BEFORE CLASS.

I'd be glad to discuss your progress any time, but especially when we meet to talk over plans for your final paper.

### **What do I expect from your FINAL ESSAY?**

You can find detailed instructions in the FILES tab on Canvas.

Your final essay should build on the same structure as your reading responses: identify a thesis or philosophical claim that you endorse, explain the reasons that support it, subject it to critical examination, and conclude by answering the objections. In your 2,000-word final essay you'll have more room to develop your argument than you did in your reading responses.

### **Announcements**

Communications with the class as a whole will happen by way of the Announcement function on Canvas. It is "on" by default. Please keep it that way! If you turn this function "off" on Canvas, you will not receive announcements.

## Week #1 - Trust and Ethics: the Interpersonal

- You are required to “post” for either 5/29 or 5/31 in Part I.

### 5/27 The Importance of Trust – and Some Fundamental Questions

1. **GAME:** 2 Truths and a Lie (Groups of 4).
2. **REFLECTION** -- Take 15 minutes to write down thoughts in your notebook:
  - What interests, concerns or issues attracted you to the topic of this class?
  - What are your questions about our theme? Are they philosophical questions?
  - How many kinds of trust enabled you to arrive here? Did any kinds of mistrust get in the way (or even help you find your way)? How do trust and mistrust crop up for you on this, the first day of a new class and, possibly, in a new place?
3. **EXERCISE:** Try to imagine a world without trust, and then ask yourself:
  - How does trust seem essential and unavoidable for:
    - Our private and public lives;
    - Our pursuit of knowledge?
  - What do you mean by trust? How many different types operate in your life? What are its different contexts and conditions? What happens when you feel mistrust?
4. **READING:** “How Healthy Skepticism Builds Trust”: a Transcript of an On Point Conversation,” 12/1/22.
  - What are the differences between healthy and unhealthy skepticism?
  - Why does philosopher Sanford Goldberg argue that healthy skepticism builds trust? Are you persuaded?
  - The phrase, “Trust but verify,” arose in the context of negotiations about nuclear weapons. Is this “contractual” situation a good model for thinking about trust in general?
5. **RECOMMENDED** - The Trust Project at Northwestern University  
<https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/trust-project.aspx>

### 5/29 Trust and Moral Philosophy

1. “Adrienne Rich on the Alchemy of Human Possibility and What “Truth” Really Means,” The Marginalian, 11/13/2014.
2. Gerald Dworkin, “Are These 10 Lies Justified?,” NYT, 12/14/2015
3. Gerald Dworkin, “How You Justified These 10 Lies (or Didn’t),” NYT, 1/14/2016.
4. Annette Baier’s “Trust and Antitrust”: An Overview by Prof. Vogel
  - a. Trust and its Varieties
  - b. Trust and Relative Power
  - c. Trust and Voluntary Abilities
  - d. The Male Fixation on Contract
  - e. A Moral Test for Trust
5. Selection from J. M. Bernstein, “Trust: On the Real, But Almost Unnoticed, Ever-Changing Foundation of Ethical Life,” Metaphilosophy (July 2011).
  - a. Trust’s Priority over Reason
  - b. On First Love: Basic Trust as Recognition of Intrinsic Worth

5/31

### **Outgrowths of, and Challenges to, Annette Baier on Trust**

1. An Interview with C. Thi Nguyen - based on his essay, "Trust as an Unquestioning Attitude," Oxford Studies in Epistemology (2022).
2. Selection from Catriona Mackenzie, "Vulnerability, Insecurity and the Pathologies of Trust and Distrust," International Journal of Philosophical Studies Vol. 28, No. 5 (2020).
3. Hale Demir-Duguoglu, "Distrust, Privilege, and the Quest for Invulnerability," APA Blog, 5/3/23.

### **Week #2 - Trust and Political Life: Do We Live in a "Post-Truth" World?**

- **You are required to "post" for one of the following three classes in Part II.**

6/3

### **Trust in Democratic Societies: Hannah Arendt on the Importance of Factual Truth and the Corrosive Effect of Lying in Politics**

1. Richard Bernstein, "The Urgent Relevance of Hannah Arendt," Philosophers' Magazine, 8/19/18. <https://www.philosophersmag.com/opinion/187-the-urgent-relevance-of-hannah-arendt>
2. Hannah Arendt, "Truth and Politics" (1968), Ch. 7 in Between Past and Future, 227-264. [https://german.yale.edu/sites/default/files/arendt.truth\\_and\\_politicslying\\_in\\_politics.pdf](https://german.yale.edu/sites/default/files/arendt.truth_and_politicslying_in_politics.pdf)
3. Matthew d'Ancona, "4 'Alternative Facts' for the Post-Truth World," The Guardian, 5/12/17.

6/5

### **Do We Live in a "Post-Truth" World?: On the Distinction between Ordinary Lying, Bald-Faced Lying, Bullshitting, and Gaslighting**

1. Al Jazeera documentary - "The Truth Illusion," 5/16/22 (50 mins.) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0URbems8M>
2. Harry Frankfurt on the Difference between Lying and "Bullshit" <https://www.openculture.com/2023/07/how-to-spot-bullshit-a-manual-by-princeton-philosopher-harry-frankfurt-rip.html>
3. Paul Rosenberg, "Lies, bulls\*\*t and gaslighting: A field guide to Trump's reality-warping mendacity," Salon, 2/24/19.
4. Two Alleged Examples of "Gaslighting"
  - a. The Republican Party's "Gaslighting" about the Capitol Insurrection of 1/5/21 (8:37) <https://www.msnbc.com/the-reidout/watch/trump-allies-in-congress-engaging-in-extreme-gaslighting-regarding-jan-6-slammed-by-rep-eric-swallow-188772421906>
  - b. Donald Trump's "Gaslighting" about His Indictments (1:58) <https://www.today.com/video/chuck-todd-trump-is-gaslighting-supporters-over-legal-battles-171904069513>
5. Michael Lynch, "Power, Bald-Faced Lies, and Contempt for Truth," Revue Internationale de Philosophie, 2020.
6. Lee McIntyre, "Lies, Damn Lies, and Post-truth," The Conversation, 11/19/18

6/7

**AI: Mistrust in a World of Deepfakes, Social Media, Chat GPT, and Rogue “Actors”**

1. Regina Rini, “Deepfakes: Truth in Trouble,” The New Philosopher, 1/13/22.
2. Kevin Roose, “A Conversation with Bing’s Chatbot Left Me Deeply Unsettled,” NYT, 2/17/23.
3. Jonathan Haidt and Eric Schmidt, “AI is About to Make Social Media (Much) More Toxic,” Atlantic, 5/5/23
4. “Suspicion, Cheating and Bans: A.I. Hits America’s Schools,” NYT Daily podcast, 6/28/23. <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/28/podcasts/the-daily/ai-chat-gpt-schools.html>
5. Cade Metz, “How Could AI Destroy Humanity?,” NYT, 6/10/23.

**Week #3 - Trust and Political Life: Democracy in Crisis**

- **You are required to “post” for one of the following three classes in Part II.**

6/10

**“Tribal Epistemology” and “Weaponized Skepticism” in “the Age of Manufactured Nihilism”**

1. HBO documentary: “After Truth – Disinformation and the Cost of Fake News,” 2020 (94 mins.) <https://watchdocumentaries.com/after-truth-disinformation-and-the-cost-of-fake-news/>
2. David Roberts, “With Impeachment, America’s Epistemic Crisis Has Arrived,” Vox, 2/6/20.
3. Sean Illing, “Flood the Zone with Shit: How Misinformation Overwhelmed Our Democracy,” Vox, 2/6/20.
4. Anne Applebaum, “Social Media Made Spreading Disinformation Lies Easy,” Atlantic, 4/7/22.
5. Quassim Cassam, “Epistemic Insouciance,” APA Blog, 3/23/18.
6. Jordan Klepper’s Most Memorable Moment at a Trump Rally: “I Don’t Care” (YouTube) [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfxPxN\\_4dnU](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JfxPxN_4dnU)

Recommended: Lee McIntyre’s On Disinformation and Barbara McQuade’s Attack from Within.

6/12

**Polarization – or Propaganda?: Alternative Accounts of Political Mistrust in the U.S.**

1. C. Thi Nguyen, “The Problem of Living Inside Echo Chambers,” The Conversation, 9/11/19.
2. Elizabeth Kolbert, “How Politics Got So Polarized,” New Yorker, 12/27/21.
3. Thomas Edsall, “We Can’t Even Agree on What’s Tearing Us Apart,” NYT, 5/25/22.
4. C. Thi Nguyen, “Polarization or Propaganda?,” Boston Review, 4/22/21.
5. Noah Feldman, “Fox News Can Be Held Accountable While Protecting Free Speech,” Washington Post, 3/18/23.

6/14

**Two Structural Sources of Mistrust in U.S. Democracy: The Collapse of “Informal Norms” and the Rise of “Tyranny of the Minority”**

1. Steven Levitsky and Daniel Ziblatt, “The Crisis of American Democracy,” The American Educator, Fall 2020.
2. Interview with Daniel Ziblatt, “Killing Democracy?: There’s a Playbook for That,” Wisconsin Public Radio, 8/13/22.
3. David Leonhardt, “‘A Crisis Coming’: The Twin Threats to American Democracy,” NYT, 9/21/22.
4. Ezra Klein, “The Doom Loop of Democracy” (Outline).

## Week #4 - Stoking Mistrust in the Era of Trump: Conspiracy Theories and “the Big Lie”

- **Time to decide on your final paper topic . A detailed outline is due Saturday, 7/29 by midnight.**

### 6/17                    **What Has Happened to Trust in Experts and Institutions?**

1. Steven Lukes, from “Power, Truth and Politics”
2. Limbaugh’s “4 Corners of Deceit”
3. Jamie Watson, “The Trouble with Expertise: Why You Should Usually Trust Experts (But It’s Complicated)”
4. C. Thi Nguyen, “Transparency is Surveillance”
5. Michael Lewis, “Why Americans Don’t Trust Experts”
6. Lee McIntyre,, “The Weaponization of Doubt”
7. Jack Izzo, “4 Ways Exxon Predicted Climate Change, But Still Denied It”
8. Martin Gurri, “A World without Trust”

### 6/19                    **Conspiracy Theories and the Goal of “Un-governing”**

1. PBS; “The United States of Conspiracy” (54 minutes)  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/documentary/united-states-of-conspiracy/>
2. Fortesa Latifi, “The 11 Most Popular Conspiracy Theories in Recent History,” *Teen Vogue*, 10/3/22.
3. Kevin Roose, “What is QAnon, the Viral Pro-Trump Conspiracy Theory?,” *NYT*, 9/3/21.
4. Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum, “The New Conspiracists,” *Dissent*, Winter 2018.
5. Russell Muirhead and Nancy Rosenblum,, “The Path from Conspiracy to Un-governing,” *Social Research* (Fall 2020), 501-524.
6. Maarten Boudry, “The Warped Epistemology of Conspiracy Theories,” *APA Blog*, 8/23/21.

### 6/21                    **Trump’s “Big Lie” and Those Who Believe It – or Pretend To**

1. “Timeline: Trump’s Pressure Campaign to Overthrow the 2020 Election,” *WaPo*, 10/7/21.
2. “Lies, Politics and Democracy” (PBS Frontline documentary, 113 minutes).  
<https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/interview-collection/lies-politics-and-democracy/>
3. Jason Stanley, “Movie at the Ellipse: A Study in Fascist Propaganda.”  
<https://www.justsecurity.org/74504/movie-at-the-ellipse-a-study-in-fascist-propaganda/>
4. Jill Lepore, “Why We Should Stop Using the Term ‘the Big Lie’”
5. Peter Wehner, “4 Forces Bind Trump’s Supporters More Tightly than Ever,” *Atlantic*, 5/24/23
6. Carolina Flores, “Are They All Stupid and Irrational?,” *APA Blog*, 3/24/21.
7. “Iowa Republicans’ Discuss Trump’s Federal Indictment, “ PBS  
<https://www.pbs.org/video/iowa-republicans-discuss-trump-s-federal-indictment-1686781482/>

**6/22**            **A detailed outline of your final paper is due Saturday, 6/22 by midnight.**

**6/24**            **In-class Workshop to Discuss Your Final Paper**

**6/26**            **Trust and Mistrust in International Politics (with Elyse Boldt)**

**6/28**            **In-class Presentation of Your Final Paper**

- In class, you'll make a 5-minute **oral presentation** outlining the central question, thesis and argument of your final paper. You'll also entertain questions from members of the class. I see this as a "philosophical party," where we have a chance to celebrate what we've done during our brief semester.

**6/28**            **You must post your final essay (approximately 1,500, carefully edited words) on Canvas by 8:30 A.M. on our last day: Friday, June 28. All work for YSS must be completed by this time!!**