Workshop "Sources of Trust – Navigating the fragility of certainty"

Heidelberg, March 22-23, 2024

In recent years various kinds of uncertainty (epistemic, normative, or existential) have been the subject of philosophical debates. In particular, the recently witnessed social, political, and technological transformations as well as multiple crises have fueled the need to reflect on how to cope with the growing dissolution of certainties that results from the suspension of established distinctions, norms, and standards of evaluation.

A key means of mitigating perceived uncertainty is to draw on sources of trust. However, recent societal developments and transformations precisely concern the shift in dispositions, standards, and objects of trust and trustworthiness. The increasing erosion of epistemic authorities, fragmentation of life scripts, and the entrenched social polarization are also accompanied by uncertainty about who can be trusted and in what respect. The very structures that usually help to overcome or navigate the uncertainties of life are themselves in flux and require new responses— from the individual and from society as a whole.

Pivotal questions at the heart of these challenges emerge: What is trust and how does it fan out into different forms of reliance and confidence? What are legitimate sources of trust and how can they be rationally evaluated and identified? In what different ways are trust and trustworthiness established?

Of particular importance is the social embeddedness of trust and trustworthiness. What counts as a legitimate source of trust is not up to the individual but depends largely on socially transmitted standards. Moreover, practices of trust involve different people, so they can only be established by more than one individual. That trust is mostly – if not intrinsically – a social phenomenon is also manifest in how individuals often respond to crises of uncertainty: e.g., compensating uncertainties by tending to biased perceptions of trustworthiness, ascribing far more credibility to agents and institutions than is justified, or on the contrary, by completely losing their trust in institutions and society as a whole.

Thus, sources of trust and standards of trustworthiness themselves seem to be fragile and occasionally in need of justification, reassurance, and repair. To better understand the related processes and the interpersonal aspects involved, the workshop aims to address the following main questions:

(1) What are phenomenological aspects of trustworthiness? Are there specific expressive signatures that are perceived as trustworthy? What behavioral patterns in interpersonal interactions support or undermine the development of trust? How do specific existential conditions, personal concerns, motivational factors, or psychological character traits feed into perceptions of trustworthiness and propensities to trust?

(2) What is the role of the body in establishing, maintaining, and repairing trust as a form of coping with uncertainty?

(3) How do persons evaluate trustworthiness in situations of uncertainty? What are more fine-grained criteria for assessing these evaluations under non-ideal epistemic and normative circumstances?

(4) To what extent do dispositions to trust and perceptions of trustworthiness depend on the stability and informational transparency of interpersonal, sociopolitical, and cultural factors?

We welcome submissions from a wide array of disciplines, among others, philosophy, psychology, cognitive sciences, sociology, or political sciences, and are particularly interested in phenomenological, 4E-cognition, or interdisciplinary as well as empirically-informed approaches to the following non-exhaustive list of topics:

- Uncertainty (existential, normative, epistemic) and its relation to trust
- Uncertainty and psychological vulnerability
- Shared affectivity and trust
- Narrative scaffolding of trust
- Trust and (collective) irrationality
- Maladaptive sources of trust
- Epistemic injustice and trust
- Experiential dimensions of trustworthiness
- Media-specific epistemic and affective opacity (e.g., deep fakes; social media) as impediments of trust
- Implicit bias and trustworthiness
- Trustworthiness and motivational reasoning
- Institutional scaffolding of trustworthiness
- Embodied and contextual factors engendering trust (e.g., in collective rituals)
- Trusting relations as interactional processes
- The relation between sustaining trust and probing trustworthiness

Please send anonymized abstracts of not more than 500 words with the subject line "Sources of Trust" to Miriam.Feix@med.uni-heidelberg.de by December 1, 2023. Please include also a separate title page with title, name, contact email, and institutional affiliation. We welcome submissions from researchers at all career stages and particularly encourage PhD students and early-career researchers to apply.

You will receive feedback on whether your application was successful by December 15, 2023.

This Workshop is part of the DFG-project "Dynamics of Oikeiosis. Familiarity and Trust as Basic Elements of an Intersubjective Anthropology and Their Significance for Psychopathology" (Project number: 513696000, PI: Thomas Fuchs).

Scientific Organization:

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