

A background image showing several people rock climbing a steep, dark rock face. The climbers are positioned vertically, with ropes visible. The background behind the rock is a dense green forest under a blue sky.

# Advanced Theory of Knowledge

Philosophy 5750  
Fall 2021

The class starts by getting some epistemological concepts and concerns on the table with a look at several papers on the nature of the warrant or justification for perceptual belief. The main focus of the course, however, is the epistemological literature on testimony and the moral psychology of trust. The aim is to develop a properly epistemic notion of trust. This will require looking also at some recent work on the nature of obligations that are in some sense owed or directed to others.

Suppose that you are familiar with a speaker's extensive track record of true utterances. On some occasion, you hear the speaker say something and, on the basis of the track record, you believe them. Do you trust them? It might seem not. For one, the fact that you base your belief on the evidence provided by the track record seems to suggest that at least in some sense you don't really trust them. But if that's right, is it ever reasonable to trust someone? And even if it were reasonable, would it be rational in an epistemic (as opposed to practical) sense?

Some authors hold that trust is conceptually linked to the possibility of being let down by the individual in whom trust is vested. If I trust you on some matter and you don't follow through, then you let me down; you wrong me in some sense. This points to another worry about the track record idea; if I trust the speaker on the basis of his track record, and he doesn't come through, maybe it's *my* fault for not picking up on subtle aspects of that record. Perhaps I was too hasty to believe on this occasion. *He* didn't let me down; I let myself down. And that suggests that I didn't trust him in the first place, but instead trusted my own powers of observation and induction.

Suppose that it is essential to trusting another that it involves the possibility of being let down, of being wronged by them. What does this sort of wronging involve? This is an issue raised in the moral literature associated with directed duties, such as that of promissory obligation. But it's not clear that this has any direct epistemic significance. Might this be a further reason to think that trust should not figure in epistemology? Or might there be a distinctively epistemic notion of letting down or wronging? We will try to get a clearer understanding of the nature of directed duty with the aim of making sense of the epistemic significance of trust.

For readings go to: <http://u.osu.edu/roth.263/courses/>

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