Third Sawyer Seminar Conference:

**The Nature of Trust**

Northwestern University
May 1st-2nd, 2015

All talks are free and open to the public.

Please **REGISTER HERE**, and contact Matthew Kopec with any questions or comments.

Schedule will be available shortly. Talks will be held from 9am to 5:30pm each day, in close proximity to our Evanston IL campus.

Sibel Adali, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

“Trust in Socio-Technological Networks: Why Context Matters”

Social psychology identifies warmth and competence as two universal dimensions of social cognition. When individuals form opinions about each other, both dimensions are considered, involving many possible interactions. Research from many different fields has pointed to the existence of distinct constructs of trust that parallel these two dimensions. This parallel has important implications on how trust and distrust beliefs impact the way positive and negative experiences are evaluated. This talk will discuss how this distinction carries over to today’s socio-technological networks, in which individuals interact with each other through computational agents that curate almost all aspects of their experience. Computational agents act both as individuals that users interact with and as new institutional contexts that define the spaces in which simultaneous interactions may occur. We will investigate how trust can be contextualized in these networks.

Karen Frost-Arnold, Hobart & William Smith Colleges

“Trust and the Epistemology of Trolling”

When online trolls pull pranks and perpetrate hoaxes, they manipulate the trust of journalists and the public. I argue that what I call ‘hoax trolling’ can be an epistemically virtuous betrayal of trust. This might seem counterintuitive, since hoax trolls spread false beliefs throughout the epistemic communities in which they operate. However, not all truths are equal. While the hoax troll’s victim may temporarily form some false beliefs, the experience of being trolled can actually help the victim learn more interesting truths and come to a greater appreciation of the dynamics of virtual trust. Thus, studying the epistemology of trolling provides insight into the applied epistemology of virtual trust and, more broadly, teaches us about what Annette Baier calls “the tough virtue of principled betrayal” (Baier 1990, 16).

Edward S. Hinchman, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee

“The Risks and Rewards of Resting Assured: An Assurance Theory of Trust”

An assurance theory of trust begins from the act of assurance – whether testimonial, advisorial or promissory – and explains trust as a cognate stance of resting assured. My version emphasizes the risks and rewards of trust. On trust’s rewards, I show how an assurance can give a reason to the addressee through a twofold exercise of ‘normative powers’: (i) the speaker thereby incurs an obligation to be sincere; (ii) if the speaker is trustworthy,
she thereby gives her addressee the reason. Each claim is controversial; my contribution lies in how I defend them together, linking the sincerity obligation to the provision of reasons. On trust's risks, I defend a popular thesis about the nature of trust – that trust differs from mere reliance in how it risks betrayal – against the objection that the thesis 'moralizes' trust. Such betrayal need not be moral, I argue, because it may derive entirely from how the assurance purports to provide a reason.

Melissa Koenig, University of Minnesota

“Children’s Testimonial Learning: Protective Mechanisms”

Much of what we know we learn from others. Learning from testimony involves at least two things: first, trusting others for the truth, and second, evaluating our sources. In this talk, I will discuss two distinct risks that testimony presents, and specify the protective mechanisms, as well as the vulnerabilities that characterize children’s responses to these risks. In response to variably competent sources, children showcase three types of protective mechanisms that buffer against such risks. First, children detect error or conflicts of information of various kinds, leading them to scrutinize sources. Second, children show enhanced memory for negatively-marked sources. Third, when children have no privileged knowledge about the speaker, they make informed epistemic inferences based on subtle properties of the testimony. Findings will be discussed in terms of the nature of trust, the precocious safeguards that emerge and as well as standing questions about how to think about children’s trust in testimony.

Theodore M. Porter, University of California, Los Angeles

“Reproducibility: Depending on Numbers”

Reproducibility in modern science is often defined in terms of measurements of error. But this is rarely limited to the repetition of the same experiment according to the same protocol. Even physical science works much harder to extend its findings than to repeat them, while in medicine and psychology, biological and behavioral variability stands in the way of precise replication. Under such circumstances, reproducibility is not a rigorous standard, but more often a loose one that depends on expertise and interpretation. Also, science that matters is often caught up in human interests. The effort to repress these by means of rigorous quantification does not often succeed, and can easily create more problems than it solves. The aspiration to base policy on data is only possible by establishing a basis of trust.

Steven Shapin, Harvard University

“Personal Experience and Expert Authority in the Modern Wine-World”

One way to hold trust at bay is to secure direct experience. If you see something with your own eyes, there's no need to trust others’ accounts. That sensibility was central to criticism of ancient authority, testimony, and hearsay in 17th-century science and philosophy, and it still has a strong grip on modern attitudes. It has recently been argued, however, that direct experience had a limited role in the Scientific Revolution; that trust was, indeed, important in the constitution of knowledge; and that it necessarily remains so. Against that general background, I invite attention to a domain in which personal sensory experience is widely available but in which expert authority is considerable, and in which one might even say that it trumps individual experience. The case I offer is the modern wine-world, especially the interplay between expert descriptions and evaluations, on the one hand, and individuals' own experience, on the other. Does this case represent something particular
to the senses of gustation and olfaction, or does it represent a way of re-thinking the opposition between trusted authority and individual experience?

Daniel Singer, University of Pennsylvania

“Votes, Talk, and Groups: Modeling Epistemic Democracy and Polarization”

Democratic institutions have epistemic virtues, and it is plausibly because of those virtues that we should trust democratic institutions. There are two well-known models of votes (how many views combine into one) and talk (how group deliberation works) in democratic institutions, the Condorcet Jury Theorem and the Hong-Page "Diversity Trumps Ability" Model. In this talk, I'll present joint research in which we show how the Condorcet result, but not the Hong-Page result, is weakened when it's supplemented with more realistic representational structures. Further, neither of these models accommodates polarized societies. But, modeling polarization is not as simple as it might have seemed. In the second part of the talk, I'll discuss "Comparative Trust Models" of polarization in which agents differentially trust people who have views close to their own. Though these models can generate some polarization, we claim they can't account for many ways in which societies can be polarized.