

MEDIA: [Do Americans trust the news?](#)

John Dickson (Studio)

That's a clip from the Pew Research Centre, looking at how the changing media landscape has affected levels of trust among Americans.

It's sobering stuff.

It's not just the media they're distrusting. Trust generally is taking a hit.

The Atlantic recently reported that back in 1972 a study found that 45 per cent of Americans saw others as *generally* trustworthy. And by 2006 the number had dropped to 30 per cent.

You think of recent contested elections, global conflicts, pandemics, and the rise of social media ... and it's easy to conclude the next major study will find that trust has dropped even further.

But here's a surprise ...

According to the Edelman Trust Index, updated in 2024, the most trusting population is ... China!

79 per cent of Chinese respondents said they generally trusted government, media, and business organisations.

India, the United Arab Emirates, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia rounded out the top five most trusting countries.

Meanwhile, Australia came in 15th, the United States 22nd, South Korea at 24th, and our pessimistic cousins in the UK 27th! Perhaps it's the weather!!

These numbers matter because trust underpins loads of systems and institutions that are vital for a functioning society: think hospitals, transport, banking, law enforcement, and so on.

When trust breaks down, the ripple effects are huge.

Of course, trusting in the *wrong* thing can disastrous ...

MEDIA - [FTX Collapse explained](#)

John Dickson (Studio)

That's the *Wall Street Journal* covering the dramatic collapse of the Crypto trading platform FTX in 2022.

The founder of FTX Sam Bankman-Fried had been one of the youngest billionaires in the world.

But, just before Christmas 2022, news broke that Bankman-Fried had used customers' money to prop up one of his other companies when it was in trouble. \$8 billion of customer funds - their life savings in many cases - simply ... vanished.

Bankman-Fried was arrested and eventually found guilty of fraud and conspiracy to launder money. It earned him a 25-year prison sentence.

This wasn't just a case of rich investors losing money. Ordinary, hard-working people had placed their trust in FTX - and it went terribly wrong.

So, is trust a bad thing, maybe?

My guest today has explored this question more than just about anyone. And he reckons we can't do without trust — it's just a fact of life; we're stuck with it. It can be good. It can be bad. It all depends on what we're putting our trust in.

I'm John Dickson, and this is Undeceptions.

INTRODUCTION

This season of Undeceptions is sponsored by our friends at Zondervan Academic. You can get discounts on their special MasterLectures video courses and free chapters of many of the books we talk about here on the pod by going to zondervanacademic.com/undeceptions.

Every episode of Undeceptions explores some aspect of life, faith, history, science, culture, or ethics that's either much misunderstood or mostly forgotten. With the help of people who know what they're talking about, we're trying to 'undeceive ourselves', and let the truth 'out'.

John Dickson: I know your focus is on, uh, trust between, you know, humans, the relational dimension of trust.

Um, but I also want to talk about societal and governmental and, I mean, here we are in a school of government at, at Oxford University. So you must have lots of things to say and, uh, having read your book, I know you do.

Um, practically speaking, you got into this, uh, industry of trust. Um, With a bank that, uh, wanted to assess trust.

Can you tell us that story of how you got into the kind of

Tom Simpson: Yeah, so actually it was an individual banker in the summer. I just finished my master's degree. I was in a holding pattern really waiting to apply for my PhD. I was a grad student.

John Dickson (Studio)

That's Tom Simpson, a Royal-Marine-turned-Oxford-Academic.

He traded his career as a soldier for a gig as Associate Professor of Philosophy and Public Policy at the Blavatnik School of Government, at Oxford. He's a real warrior-scholar!

Tom teaches and researches moral and political philosophy, with a special focus on trust.

He released a book on the subject in 2023, called *Trust: A Philosophical Study* – details in the show notes.

It was an experience working in the corporate world kick-started his interest in trust.

Tom Simpson: I was delighted to be invited to do some research assistance work for, for a Christian banker in the city of London. And we kind of, you know, I batted around ideas and, and he was interested in faith

in the marketplace, I was beginning to be interested in trust, faith and trust seem related really importantly.

If you think about, uh, credere, the Latin, Latin credere to, to believe the origin of the term credit, you know, which is what banking is ultimately all about. So, so he said, yeah, great, you know, go and do some work on faith and trust in the marketplace. What's his, what's his contribution. So I started, I went off and started doing some reading, obviously I was very excited and.

But this was the summer of 2008, which was the credit crunch. So, um, financial crash and crisis that arose as a, as a, um, during that time. So I remember very distinctly sitting, listening to the radio, hearing the journalists and the presenter discussing whether we would have a payment system that afternoon, and hearing the genuine nerves in their voice that that might not be the case.

And really 'cause it would be a crisis of, ultimately, of trust in the heart of the banking system that people were no longer able to believe the assurances of the credit worthiness of, um, ultimately some homeowners in America. That was where the subprime crisis started. But the, the, the, the kind of loss of confidence then spread right.

Throughout the whole system. So, so absolutely this institutional crisis of trust was, was kind of one of the animating things now. So this was 2008 and I, I was. Beginning, I was like, trust, whoa, this is like the underlying phenomenon all, all round. And I, I was really delighted to get, um, research funding for my doctorate from Microsoft Research, which, which is the Microsoft Research subsidiary, they're European labs in Cambridge, for a project on trust on the internet.

I was like, huh, you know, trust just, trust just seems to be everywhere. And then in 2009, um, here in the UK, we had the, uh, MPs expenses scandal where a series of, a very high number actually of MPs were found not to have reported their expenses correctly and many lost their jobs as a result. And this was articulated at the time as a crisis of trust.

Trust is, I mean, it's a really interesting thing to work on, particularly as an academic, because so many philosophy topics, people, the truth is just, their eyes glaze over when you start talking about it. But this is one where I say I'm working on trust, and actually there's usually not a follow up question, usually there's an observation from their own experience or life about, Oh, you know what?

This is the question of trust that I was debating, and some of that's at a personal, interpersonal level in, you know, um, immediate relationships, and then some of it is a, is a kind of macro level. So, so many of our collective public controversies, anxieties, concerns are, are articulated in these terms. And that original research project, the bank had disappeared for a little while, didn't answer your emails.

John Dickson: Were you starting to doubt?

Tom Simpson: Absolutely. So it was itself an exercise in trust. He, he, exactly. So he wasn't answering my emails or phone calls. Now, uh, it turns out he had absolutely more important things on his plate and he was as good as his word and I was paid and I was very grateful for it.

John Dickson (Studio)

Tom had to trust a *lot* in his old-day job.

In the Royal Marines he served in Northern Ireland, Baghdad, and Helmand Province, Afghanistan. Knowing who to trust was sometimes the difference between life and death.

He now uses this experience to advise the British government on issues like the ethics of using certain weaponry, cyber-security, and even the use of unconventional force.

Trust has ethical and geopolitical implications.

But ... what is trust?

MEDIA - [Good Will Hunting](#)

John Dickson (Studio)

That's Robin Williams in the beautiful *Good Will Hunting*.

He plays a psychologist who tries to help a gifted ex-prisoner piece his life together. It's one of Williams' most critically acclaimed performances.

That scene, toward the beginning of the film, sets up beautifully what the rest of the film makes clear. Trust might be hard to define, and hard to earn, but it is essential to human health.

John Dickson: What is trust in the sense that you're meaning it? And how does it differ from mere reliance, like my reliance on the pushbike I use to get here to your office?

Tom Simpson: Okay. So, um, the distinction between trust and reliance is going to be a very important one, and one way to illustrate it, the very famous illustration, Uh, it was given, um, by someone called Annette Byer, a contemporary philosopher.

She remarks on, uh, the story, it may be myth, of Immanuel Kant, who was reported to be so reliable in the timing of his walk to work each day that the, the washerwomen of Königsberg would set their watches by it.

John Dickson (Studio)

Immanuel Kant, the 18th-century German philosopher, is known as the father of modern ethics.

He's also been called *possibly the most boring person who ever lived* because of his rigid daily routine.

Every day, he left for work at the same time, taught the same subjects at the same university, took his lunch at the same time, and walked the same route home through the same park. He'd have dinner with the same friend every evening and go to bed at 10 pm. His schedule was so consistent his neighbours used it to set their clocks!

Tom Simpson: Okay, so, Kant, you know, gets up, walks out every day at the same time, 8.30 or whatever. And, uh, now, suppose Kant has a lie in, completely contrary to all past performance, and he, he doesn't take a walk, and, and the watchwomen of Königsberg set their watches incorrectly as a result.

What to make of that? Well, they, uh, are they entitled to be angry at Kant for that? for that kind of change of pattern? Probably not. You know, it doesn't look like he's, he's, he's made no promise to them. He's made no commitment. He hasn't invited them, they have relied on him, but he hasn't invited that. So it looks like, whereas had he made that promise, they may feel so entitled.

So, um, and it looks like this may track a really significant distinction between what it is to trust someone and what it is to rely on someone. So it seems characteristic of my trust of someone that I'm entitled to feel betrayed

if they let me down. People sometimes talk about the reactive attitudes, the sense of sometimes resentment that you might experience as I say at someone's betrayal.

Whereas reliance is simply acting in such a way that if the other person or the other thing, um, uh, they can let you down, you depend on them for positive outcomes.

John Dickson (Studio)

CS Lewis has a wonderful passage on just this thought—part of a speech he gave at the Oxford Socratic Club in the early 1950s:

READING

To love involves trusting the beloved beyond the evidence, even against much evidence.

No man is our friend who believes in our good intentions only when they are proved.

No man is our friend who will not be very slow to accept evidence against them.

Such confidence, between one man and another, is in fact almost universally praised as a moral beauty, not blamed as a logical error. And the suspicious man is blamed for a meanness of character, not admired for the excellence of his logic ...

It is one thing to discuss in a vacuum whether So-and-so will join us tonight, and another to discuss this when So-and-so's honour is pledged to come and some great matter depends on his coming.

In the first case it would be merely reasonable, as the clock ticked on, to expect him less and less. In the second, a continued expectation far into the night would be due to our friend's character if we had found him reliable before.

Which of us would not feel slightly ashamed if one moment after we had given him up he arrived with a full explanation of his delay? We should feel that we ought to have known him better.

John Dickson (Studio)

Lewis is, of course, employing this as an analogy for Trust *in God* ... but his point beautifully applies to Trust in general.

Trust is key not just to friendship—or relationships in general—but also to epistemology, the theory of *how we know what we think we know*.

Much of our knowledge comes to us by trusting others.

Tom Simpson: One way of thinking about it is the epistemology of testimony is a. Um, is the full turn of the screw, if you like, from the very early days of Enlightenment philosophy.

So, if you look at Descartes central project, um, he is trying to found human knowledge on premises that he can identify for himself with, uh, indubitable certainty.

So it's the rejection, it's the fundamental rejection of depending on what other people tell you.

John Dickson (Studio)

Tom's talking about 17th-century French philosopher Rene Descarte—whose base certainty was summed up in the famous expression, "I think. Therefore I am."

Around the same time as Descartes, the Royal Society was founded - the oldest scientific academy in continuous existence. Its founding motto was: 'Nullius in verba', "On nobody's word!" For more on it, check out episode 123 *True Science*, with **the** Alistair McGrath.

The idea of believing nothing on 'authority' held sway for 300 years, right up until the 1990s!!

Tom Simpson What, suddenly what happened in the 90s was this realisation that our life is deeply dependent on trusting other people. for what they tell us, um, and the practice of science fundamentally depends on this. So you, you go out and conduct a scientific experiment.

You, you measure, you analyze, you test your hypotheses. But then you report that. The, and the reporting is tested by peer review and then it's published. And the great majority of the people who then rely on that work do so on the basis of trust in science. In the probity and the integrity of the publication process.

So it's a social system that's fundamentally dependent on trust.

John Dickson: Yeah, so you could be a world class biologist, and most of what you know about Big Bang cosmology You are simply trusting brilliant physicists whose works you've read.

Tom Simpson: And this is true for all of us all the time. So you think about just our knowledge of the world, knowledge of world events. We're fundamentally dependent on media, institutions and ecosystems to report what's going on. Our knowledge of what's happening down the road. You might go and find out for yourself, you might just find out on social media. So we're always dependent on trust of what other people tell us.

John Dickson: And I wasn't sure we'd get to this question, because I have it just at the back as an addendum, but we're already here. History, the study of history, which is my academic discipline, Um, it really, not just relying on the testimony of other scholars who have done the work, I'm, I'm doing that all the time, you know. I haven't dug up Palatine Hill myself, so I have to rely on those who have done it. But actually, I'm trusting the testimony of all these ancient sources to get going in the discipline. Is, is this the same kind of thing? Um, I mean history is basically trust in testimony.

Tom Simpson: Yeah. So, uh, obviously I'm not a historian, so I wouldn't want to comment on, on how historians work, but, how do we know that Julius Caesar existed, if we can't, at some fundamental level, trust our documentary sources?

So, so I take it that the method, method of the historian is to, you start with documents, And then you test one against each other. You test them for internal coherence, test them for external attestation with inscriptions and other forms, and you come to a judgment about who's reliable. So the historians are kind of making assessments to who is a reliable witness. So the, the. The character of the testifier becomes significant for thinking about the justification I have for believing what they, what they say.

John Dickson (Studio)

Yeah, that's basically how history works. There are some hard facts – coins, buildings, and so on — but most history is built on the testimony of our sources. We might not trust everything in the sources, but without some level of trust we can know almost nothing about the past. But this is true for most subjects for most of us. I mean, unless you're an actual astronomer observing the cosmos, virtually everything you know about the universe you know because you trust those who told you about it.

Anyway, two dominant approaches to trust have emerged in recent centuries, and to help us understand them, Tom has two more enlightenment thinkers for us: David Hume and Thomas Reid.

Tom Simpson: David Hume, obviously a famous critic of, uh, religion, Christianity in particular, um, and he has this very significant essay called *Of Miracles* in his *Inquiry Concerning Human Understanding*.

And Hume's claim in that is, uh, he's, he, he says, the wise person, or the wise man in the language of the time, proportions his belief to the evidence. And because of this, he then, um, uh, claims that it is always more rational to believe that someone is lying to you than that miracle

John Dickson: “No testimony is sufficient to establish a miracle unless its falsehood is more miraculous than the miracle”. Yeah. Amazing.

Tom Simpson: So, so what he's doing is he's, he's, he's got a particular claim about what is rational or not to believe in questions of directly, um, theological. Significance and practical significance to our lives. Based on a theory of, uh, how you should govern your belief, actually in general, but

also specifically in relation to testimony. And then Thomas Reid comes along and makes exactly the point that we've just been discussing, which is how could life exist if we weren't able to, um, Have a, in reading terms, a default assumption of trust in what other people say.

Now, Hume says you start with the evidence and then you build up and take someone on their word. Reid says you start with trust and then this is defeasible according to counter evidence. And this is really a debate between what's come to be called reductionist versus anti-reductionist theories of testimony.

Different contexts will also impact this process, so some contexts, like the courtroom, there's no offence, there's no sense of interpersonal offence in the courtroom if my testimony is scrutinised and tested. In fact You expect it to be. That's the point of the courtroom environment. An academic seminar similarly, you expect to be tested.

You don't expect simply to be taken at your word. Um, and then there are other contexts in life where actually there is a, there's a, there's a sense of expectation that when I give my testimony to call that into doubt as to call me into doubt is to, is to kind of question my character and prity at that, at that

John Dickson (Studio)

It's weird.

Hume's idea that we should be sceptical from the start about testimony is super common at the superficial level. But, at the more fundamental level, hardly anyone operates that way in daily life. Instead, most of what we claim we know — about history, science, our friends and family, and the daily news — we picked up by trusting others.

So, stay with us as we try to solve the trust-dilemma ...

BREAK 1

MEDIA - [Flat earther accidentally proves his own experiment](#)

EDITORIAL 7

That's from the hit 2018 film *Behind the Curve*, a fly-on-the-wall documentary that follows the lives of flat-earth activists.

This is a guy trying to prove the earth is flat by shining a torch through two holes at distance at precisely 17 ft above the ground. The light doesn't shine through the next hole, because the earth is curved, and 17ft at one point on earth is NOT a straight line to 17ft at another point.

This guy accidentally proves himself wrong!

You gotta love empirical testing.

Except in this case, the guy refuses to accept his results. He's a flat-earther to the end!

(By the way, just something for your back pocket: IT is not the case that people in ancient and medieval times ignorantly believed in a flat earth. Some did. But most did not. Most accepted the calculations of ancient Greek philosophers—centuries before Christ—that the earth was

spherical—this includes greats like Augustine and Aquinas. It's an ignorant modern myth that people were flat-earthers until contemporary science.)

I'm glad to get that off my chest. Back to the question though. Is trust/faith the opposite of accepting things by evidence?

John Dickson: Okay. So, um, can we wind back a bit you, you make a really, um, interesting and I think to some counterintuitive point about the relationship between evidence and trust. Because people often use trust like they use the word faith to mean believing something contrary to evidence. So, like, or at least without any evidence. Um, but you, but the principle thesis of your book is, and I'm quoting here, *“normally your trust should follow the evidence so that you trust the trustworthy and not the untrustworthy”*.

So can you unpack that? I mean, really that is to ask you to unpack an entire thesis that you've developed over a couple of hundred pages. But can you unpack it for my audience?

Tom Simpson: So I don't at all dispute the observation that people will sometimes use trust in that kind of almost quasi faith like manner to express, you know, I'm taking a leap of faith, a leap of trust, but I, I think the, um, the awareness that sometimes trust is a leap of faith should not disguise from us the fact that the, as with a substantial body of situations in which we find ourselves are ones in which when we trust someone. We want it to be the case that they prove trustworthy for us. They actually, they actually come through.

That's the, that's the, that's one of the points of trust. It's the key point, it's the key point of trust. And I think actually part of what makes trust really interesting as a concept is that it, One of the reasons which we trust people is because, it enables us to do things that we wouldn't otherwise be able to do.

So we trust each other, we trust each other in market transactions, in, in personal relationships, in work relationships, all, all sorts of contexts.

And we trust people for the answers. And the other reason that we trust people is because, um, trust is a way of forming relationships that matter to us. So this is, this is, it's distinctive of those relationships. That. Think of a friendship. It's distinct for friendship that I trust my friend, my friend trusts me.

And it's not a friendship if we don't trust each other. So the kind of respect and, if you like, interpersonal value is the term I use to describe it, is another reason for which, um, uh, for which we trust people. So, I mean, really, what I'm, what I'm trying to explore is, I think this gives rise to tensions, very practical tensions.

So we have situations where, um, Most obviously we feel compelled for reasons of respect or, you know, desire to build a relationship with another person to trust them. But, but, uh, but we're just not sure if they're trustworthy. So that, those are very real practical dilemmas that arise all the time. Um, actually there's also the converse.

So there's also situations in which we've got excellent evidence that someone is, is in some sense reliable. They're going to come through on their commitments. But we feel restless about trusting them because of the, the influence precisely expression of respect that that shows to the other person.

We may feel they don't deserve that or we don't want. So think of someone who's betrayed you, uh, or maybe in a corporate context someone's broken the contract. And, uh, but you know they've paid the fine and they've got another business proposition and there's a great contract here and in purely mercantile terms it might be the right thing to go back into business with them but, you know, they've, they've, they've just let you down in some important sense.

John Dickson: But can you put your finger on the relation between evidence and trust and why they're actually not opposites?

Tom Simpson: So, the, the key the key point that I'm trying to work through is that the, um, I think that the normal reason that we trust other people is because **doing so enables these positive outcomes, these valuable outcomes.**

So we, we have a general permission for that. So I give an example, the thought experiment that I use most prominently as someone who's preparing to trek to the South Pole of the Antarctic.

And contracts with Catherine, who's an old Antarctic hand, for her to drop supplies at the, at the pole. So in deciding whether to trust her, he really does trust her, but he should make that decision on the basis of the evidence that she will be trustworthy. If she doesn't, he will die. So the stakes really, really matter in that

Tom Simpson: Um, so he should take account of evidence in deciding whether to trust. Now the deep, the deep connection with, uh, why this is normally the case, and it goes to this question of our attitudes when trust is betrayed. So, the willingness to feel resentment, the, the social, we feel that because it's a, it's a response to what someone else deserves for how they treat us, but the social utility of that is that it preserves a culture, a context in which someone gives their word on something, someone makes a commitment, and we thereby have reason to believe.

that they will follow through on what they've said. So if enough of us are willing to feel resentful at being betrayed and let down, we create an environment in which the normal thing for someone to do, the normal, in the sense that this is what the practice is directed towards, is for people to keep their word.

So what I'm giving is a, is a kind of evidentiary based reason explaining the rational under, undergirding for why it's normally the case that we trust what

someone says. So just in the terms that we were discussing earlier, I'm giving a, a, an anti reductionist construal of trust. We have a default assumption of trust, a legitimate default assumption of trust.

Trust is normal, but we have excellent undergirding evidential reasons for why that's the case.

John Dickson (Studio)

So the whole thing is pretty complicated. It isn't just that trust is good or bad. There is a trust-matrix, you might say. When a community highly values trustworthiness and, conversely, socially disdains untrustworthiness, people in that community tend to act more trustworthily, and so we trust them, and so we reap the benefits of trusting. And that benefit is massive. It means you don't have to personally prove everything to yourself before you act. That would be a paralysing way to live. Trust is a shortcut to knowing stuff. Trusting a knowledgeable friend where to get the best coffee. Trusting Maps to get you to your destination. Trusting an ancient historian turned podcaster that Emperor Tiberius reigned from AD 14 to this death in the year 37. And so on.

It's no wonder that research is finding that trust has a positive impact on *economic growth, democracy, tolerance, charity, community, health, and happiness*". We'll link to an article in *The Conversation* all about this.

John Dickson: Is someone's past trustworthiness, uh, a rational basis for trusting them in for some future outcome?

Tom Simpson: Absolutely. Yeah, of course.

John Dickson: How so?

Tom Simpson: Well, it's one of the core, um, kind of forms of evidence that we will have.

And so you might distinguish between, um, sort of contextual evidence for someone's trustworthiness. And when I say trustworthiness in that sense, what I'm meaning is not a General character attributes, I mean, I'm meaning the likelihood that they will actually do what they've said they'll do. So we'll have contextual evidence, and then we'll also have, uh, individual specific evidence.

Evidence about the character of a person. So, and actually I think as a, just, uh, as a matter of normal course of events, and, and rationally so, we're extremely sensitive to the character of the person. So, When I'm thinking about will someone be trustworthy, I will standardly distinguish between, uh, well they might, for them to be trustworthy they need to be competent, and they need to be motivated.

So they need, you know, I promise to give you, uh, I borrow your car, I promise to return it in a week's time. Am I actually able to return the car to you? Do I actually want to return the car to you? Okay. So I promised to build a, build a brick wall for you in your garden, right? Am I actually competent at laying bricks? Do I want to? Okay. So those two examples in the first example, competence is not really an issue. Most people can drive a car, you know, but motivation might be more salient. In the bricklaying example, it might be competence is the issue. Motivation may be, maybe less significant. So we're always thinking through this competence, motivation question.

Okay. But once you've got the distinction, you can begin to see that the competence, um, will tend, tend to be relatively domain specific. Motivation seems less restricted to a specific domain. So it seems like if you're the kind of person Who is morally committed, maybe virtuous, committed to fulfilling their commitments to doing what you said for other people. That can be

relied on, across domains. And so conversely, if we have evidence that someone's betrayed others, previously or even betrayed yourself, we're very, very sensitive to that. And that will count very strongly for us in future against placing trust.

John Dickson (Studio)

Tom then raises a crucial point. I had to stop and think about this next bit. Maybe you'll want to press pause. He asks: What is lost when trust takes a hit?

Tom Simpson: So there's two, there's two perspectives. So one perspective is, what do I forego? by failing to trust someone who's trustworthy. The second question is, um, what's the impact on the other of me not trusting them? And so one of the tragedies of society is that we can end up with individuals, or indeed groups, who are, who are distrusted more than is warranted, and that can have very powerful negative effects, obviously. You know, the withdrawal of trust is a very, um, it's a kind of ostracizing impact, and that's, and that's, um, something to think very carefully about.

John Dickson (Studio)

We're going to look at what happens when trust breaks - and what can be done about it - after this.

BREAK 2

John Dickson (Studio)

Hey ... things are about to get pretty heavy because we're going to be talking about institutional abuse within the Church.

We've put markers in the show notes for this, so if the next ten minutes isn't what you need right now, pause the show and check the description for a time code that will tell you where we resume our main interview with Tom. Be safe.

MEDIA: [Spotlight](#):

John Dickson (Studio)

That's a scene from the compelling film *Spotlight*, which tells the true story of how in 2002 a small team of reporters working for the *Boston Globe* blew the lid off an epidemic of child sexual abuse within the Boston Catholic diocese, and its cover-up by church authorities. Buff and I watched this with jaws dropped!

The initial reports led to the arrest of five priests, including serial rapist Father John Geoghan [**GAY-GAN**], who'd been reassigned to a new parish every time he committed an offence.

It was this detail - that the church knew about the crimes and continued to allow the priests to serve - that makes it all so horrifying.

The *Globe* investigations led to the resignation of Cardinal Francis Law, then Archbishop of the Boston Diocese.

Here's some more from the film, featuring Michael Rezendez (portrayed by Mark Ruffalo) arguing with his editor Walter Robinson (Michael Keaton) over whether or not the *Globe* was ready to publish their findings.

The *Globe's* coverage was a key factor in exposing worldwide institutional abuse in the Catholic and Protestant churches.

We're going to do a whole episode on this topic in a couple of seasons from now.

My point here is: Institutions – including ones that used to be highly trusted – are experiencing a crisis of trust, a crisis of trustworthiness.

Tom Simpson: There's an inevitability that, um, many of our collective concerns, which are articulated politically, will be articulated in terms of a crisis of trust, and that's precisely because of this connection between trust and betrayal.

So if you think about the fabric of our life, our shared life is one of norms and expectations, which set standards that we expect people to come up to and inevitably. People, and institutions will not come up to those standards and it's a crisis of trust when, when that happens. So it's inevitable that when things go wrong, it will be expressed in terms of trust.

So in that sense, I think it's per, I think it's perennial and that's been my reflection working on this topic for many years now. Now, that observation does not undermine the point that we may also be facing distinctive challenges to cultures of trust now, which are different to what we may have experienced at times in the past.

And, uh, Some of the strongest evidence for this comes from, um, a survey instrument called the World Values Survey, which has been administered to populations around the world.

It's, it's now very comprehensive. It's been going for a number of decades and they ask a series of questions in there. And one staple, so trust, trust is really, um, it's an up and coming topic in philosophy, my own discipline, but the social sciences have been absolutely alert to the significance of trust for many years, and it's a major and very central topic of of discussion.

Nobody could read all the literature on it. It's just too much of it. And one of the very central questions that The question that social scientists will ask in surveys of people is, generally speaking, do you think that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful?

So, and this is really tapping exactly, in popular terms, this, if you like, reductionist, anti reductionist debate that we saw going back to David Hume and Thomas Reid.

You know, is there a default assumption of trust or isn't there? And countries vary enormously on the proportions of people who answer yes or no to that question and to what degree. Um, so it's not a surprise to hear that Scandinavian countries in general tend to be pretty high trust. New Zealand, interestingly, has been very high, you know, your own, not quite identical, but your own part of the world.

John Dickson (Studio)

Umm ... I let that one slip, with apologies to our Aussie listeners ... and, indeed, to our Kiwi listeners!!

Tom Simpson: So that's a very high trust country historically. And many parts of the world, post Soviet countries, for instance, are very low trust on this. And this, these generalised trust attitudes turn out really to matter in lots of areas, such as the,

John Dickson: I was about to ask you, like, what is the observable cultural, societal, financial difference between a society where trust and trustworthiness are high and others where it isn't.

Tom Simpson: So one finding was that it's something in the order of 2 percent growth rates on GDP may be traceable to, to, to generalised trust attitudes. Um, corruption in public life is both a cause of lower public trust and reflective of degrees of trust, high levels of generalized trust matter in areas such as the economy, in terms of economic growth. Matter in terms of, um, public legitimacy for government, uh, and therefore support for government compliance with government orders. Matters for things like, um, compliance with the, um, um, vaccination and lockdown programs as measures in response to COVID. Now, making no presumption about what the appropriate response was, government does need to act in response to crises and high trust levels indicate how effectively a society can mobilize against, uh, uh, in, in the face of crises.

But it also matters in areas like health and well-being. So countries where there's high generalized trust will have higher life expectancy, and higher reported Health and happiness. So it has this, it's this kind of underlying feature, which then responds.

John Dickson (Studio)

The research on this is fascinating.

Australian think tank CEDA (Committee for Economic Development of Australia) recently reported that higher levels of trust are associated with higher levels of cooperation between people, more effective “enforcement of contracts”, and a lower likelihood that people would harm others by acting only in their own interests.

Then there’s Paul J. Zack, a Neuro-economist at the Claremont Graduate University. I didn’t know there was such a thing as neuro-economics, but it’s basically the study of how our brains make decisions about risk and reward in an economic setting. Anyway, writing in the *Harvard Business Review*, Professor Zack reports:

READING

Employees in high-trust organizations are more productive, have more energy at work, collaborate better with their colleagues, and stay with their employers longer than people working at low-trust companies. They also suffer less chronic stress and are happier with their lives, and these factors fuel stronger performance.

John Dickson (Studio)

For any bosses listening, this is amazing: more trust, more success.

Trust is also good for your physical health!

There’s a 2019 paper in the *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* that took 30 years of data and analysed the way trust affects mortality—it

protects against early death. We'll put it in the show notes, of course, but here's the conclusion.

“High levels of individual and contextual generalised trust protect against mortality, even after considering numerous individual and aggregated socioeconomic conditions. Its robustness at both levels hints at the importance of psychosocial mechanisms, as well as a trustworthy environment.”

Next time someone says to you in a patronising tone “Oh, you're such a trusting soul,” you should thank them and wish them a more trust-filled life!!

After all, on the negative side, this same paper remarks: “Declining trust levels across the USA should be of concern.”

Tom Simpson: There is evidence from the World Values Survey, is that there's steady incremental losses in trust, particularly in the developed world, over a multi decade period. And that is, um, that is not encouraging. So, uh, the deep question is why is that? Where does that come from?

John Dickson: Well my next question was what are the preconditions of a society where trust flourishes? And I guess the converse is what are those things that are missing? Yeah.

Tom Simpson: I'm, um, Persuaded by and seeking to articulate these, the significance of the three Fs, um, faith, family, flag as, as preconditions for, for a culture of trust.

And I think all of these institutions, so flag, um, doesn't have to be construed as the nation. I mean by that a cohesive political community, which has a sense of its own self, a sense of loyalty and belonging. And that can occur at many different levels, so it could occur. Neighborhoods, kind of more widely, regionally, the nation could be a, a, a, a locus of it.

And conceptually you could have, um, um, supernatural forms of, forms of loyalty and belonging. But it, but it matters that there are forms of, uh, community which have a sense of themselves, a sense, a sense of belonging, a sense of loyalty, a sense of shared identity. Institutions of faith and of, uh, uh, family.

So I, I think each of these contribute in different ways to, to cultures of trust. So, faith, uh, what, um, one of the contributions it makes, if you like, it's the, it's the pulpit role within a society. So every society has a moral, moral culture. It's contested what sets the, um tone, what, what's the source of moral norms within a society? Um, in historically religious context, religious majority societies, it's been the religious institution that's had that dominant role. That's clearly, uh, not straightforwardly the case in many societies nowadays. But what you're, what you're having there is a, is an authoritative claim to set the, expectations and standards for individual and collective behavior and that, and, and these should have what I call a trumping significance.

So deontological claims, claims about your duties should take precedence over what it's convenient to do, what, what maximizes the social welfare, what maximizes my personal egoistic welfare. These claims of duty, these expectations have to, have to trump these other, these other concerns. And institutions of faith play another role as because they, uh, it, it wouldn't. You know, in my case, when you go to church, you know, you don't just hear the sermon from the pulpit. You also do so as a congregation of people who support each other, and actually hold each other to account on how you ought to conduct yourself, how you ought to behave. So there, there's a standard setting that comes from that.

John Dickson: Yeah, so it really matters that, um, I think. Others in my community value humility, compassion, honesty, et cetera. Absolutely.

Uh, so there also, there needs to be a sort of shared moral narrative for trust to really flourish. Yeah, that makes sense. But what about family?

Tom Simpson: So family plays a more directly, I mean I think of faith and family as formative institutions, so they play a role. So family is the core context in which obviously children are born and grow up and um, and in which you're disciplined. You know, you learn how to discipline your own desires, you learn how to be a constructive, contributing person.

member, first, you know, to the household economy, and then, and then ultimately the wider, the wider economy, you know, that, that's not the goal of the family. The goal of the family isn't to prepare workers to be productive, but it's to, it's to teach people habits of self discipline, self reliance that enables them as individuals when they grow up to then play that contributing role in society generally.

John Dickson (Studio)

Words like “Family, Flag, and Faith” will raise a few eyebrows—especially for US listeners. They sound like a conservative political slogan (not that there's anything wrong with that, of course!).

But that's not Tom's vibe, at all.

He's just noting what the research is suggesting. The preconditions of trust are a functional family life, a coherent polity or political community, and a vibrant spirituality.”

I had to ask him about the last of these ... because some would say that spirituality or faith is a kind of disfunction. It's the epitome misplaced trust.

John Dickson: I can't resist asking you about, uh, trusting God. Mm. Um. Um, you know, as an aspect of that faith dimension, um, is trust in God akin

to the trust we might have in interpersonal relationships or is it a different category because it's a highly controversial topic in our mainstream world.-I think there'd be plenty of listeners who think trust in God. Is, is basically, um, blind faith. That, that the quintessential, um, example of why trust is junk is people that believe in God.

Tom Simpson: Okay. Yeah, good. So, um, so obviously it's, it's, uh, you know, there's much discrement, robust and, and, um, you know, entirely as to be expected in a liberal society, that there should be discrements about whether trusting God is a, is a rational attitude or not to have.

Um, absolutely. Um, I think, I think as an attitude, I, I take it to be Fundamentally continuous trust of God, trust of other people. I don't see any deep, um, deep reason to view these as fundamentally distinct. Largely arising out of the fact that, um, uh, I was going to say both are agents, both God and other people are agents, but that's really a reflection of God created us on the Christian theological story, uh, Christian theological account, God created us in his image.

Um, and so our agency reflects, reflects God's agency. Um, so, so in that sense, I think they're the same. I think, I think they're also the same in another important respect in that there's one way you can. Distinguish trusting relationships is whether, just at a human level, if I trust another person I might trust them for something specific. Um, so, you know, we met at 10am this morning, uh, I trusted you, you trusted me, that we'd both be there at 10am. So there was a particular thing that we were trusting each other for, so schematically you might say A trusts B over X, so it's a three place relation, but they're definitely very important relationships, so think of, you know, a marital relationship, intimate romantic relationship, which, where it's not really, it seems to be misdescribing the relationship to break it down as trusting them for, this, that doesn't feel quite right, it feels, you know, I, I trust my, my wife, you know, um. And I, so, and that's more like a two place trust relationship, so, you know, there might, there might be exceptions, you know.

Uh, uh, I don't know what she doesn't trust me for, but there's some very well

John Dickson: my wife trusts in me, but she doesn't trust me to do, uh, uh, do it yourself, uh, building brick walls. DIY, yeah. She does not. So there's

Tom Simpson: there's got to be sort of rationally withheld forms of two placed trust. But that doesn't undermine the general, the two placed trust relationship.

And it made me that the two placed trust is, that's the, that's the primary, that's the, when we say that relationship is trusting, that's the more important point that we're trying to make. And I think the same is true of, of the believer's trust, trust. of God, trust in God. And I think there's, when we use that locution to trust in, there's a there's a kind of emphasis, you know, there's a maybe it's existential, I'm kind of placing my whole self in someone else's hands, in God's hands in particular. Um, so I think there's a fundamental continuity.

All the important things that we want to say about faith we can capture in talking about trust. Um, and I think that really matters as well, I suppose it matters for me as a Christian that the word faith, the kind of the idea of faith in wider culture has been, um, I For good or ill, I mean, I suppose in my view, mostly ill.

It's come to be associated with, it's that famous Mark Twain quote, isn't it? Uh, faith is believing what you know ain't so. And, um, so there's, there's a kind of deliberate irrationality about believing against the evidence. And, uh, obviously I think, I think that misunderstands the nature of faith, certainly of true Christian faith. But, um, but it's very powerful there. Whereas the notion of trust, uh, It's not so attached in that way, and I think that's partly because all of us trust every single day. Like, we're instinctively aware of that, and we're aware both of our dependence, but also that our dependence is not, it's certainly not irrational, but it's also not arrived at through reasonable means, primarily when I'm dealing with another person.

[00:39:17] I might, I might, If I really wanted to, sit down and consciously articulate what the factors were. But most of it's happening instinctively, intuitively, pre theoretically. And it's completely right and appropriate that that should be so. And it's actually fundamentally a response to, to another person.

FIVE MINUTE JESUS

Let's press pause - I've got a five-minute Jesus for you.

There's no doubt TRUST is at the centre of Jesus' own teaching AND the apostles' teaching *about* Jesus.

I mean, the Gospel of John ends with the words: "These things are written that you may *trust* that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by *trusting* you may have life in his name."

The Greek word is *pisteuein*, often translated 'to believe' but it is the normal Greek verb "to trust."

It doesn't just refer to thinking something is true. It means trusting in the personal sense, in the sense of relying on your friend's word because you hold them to be trustworthy.

You find the same thing on the lips of Jesus.

Just last weekend, I gave a sermon in a church in Brisbane (g'day Anne St Presbyterian!) on Mark 2. It's the account of some friends bringing their paralyzed friend to Jesus to be healed. Here's a snippet:

Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home. 2 They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room

left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them. 3 Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. 4 Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd, they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowered the mat the man was lying on.

By the way, many ancient houses had an external staircase so you could go up and repair the roof. These guys have used that to do a reverse repair. According to the account, Jesus does go on to heal the man, but first we read: “When Jesus saw their trust, he said to the paralyzed man, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

It’s the Greek word *pisteuein* again—though here in the noun, *pistis*—it means trust or faith. When Jesus saw their faith/trust, he said “Your sins are forgiven”. Not, when he saw their commitment, their friendship, their love, their ingenuity, or even love ... but when he saw their ‘trust’.

This idea of trust or faith has a very bad reputation today. As I said earlier in the episode, some people think it is the opposite of knowing stuff on the basis of evidence.

But that is a caricature. Actually, it’s more like a piece of modern propaganda. It’s not even what the original English word ‘faith’ meant. Look up the full Oxford English Dictionary and you’ll find that ‘faith’ derives from the notions of “trust, guarantee, assurance, proof, confirmation”.

Indeed, one of the definitions of Faith you’ll find there – much older than the contemporary sceptical definition – is: “Belief based on evidence, testimony, or authority.”

The paralyzed man and his friends weren’t just taking a wild stab in the dark, contrary to evidence, when they made their way to Jesus. They had heard the reports. Maybe they had met others who encountered Jesus. Perhaps they’d listened to Jesus the previous day and concluded he was trustworthy. And so they made their way to him, trusted him, and found him

to be trustworthy. And so they received the greatest gift of all, “Son, your sins are forgiven.”

Christian faith isn’t baseless. There is decent evidence. There is good testimony. There is coherent reason. (I hope over time the Undeceptions podcast has made that abundantly clear.)

But thinking Christianity is solid isn’t the ‘faith/trust’ the Gospels go on and on about. True faith, true trust, involves that but goes one step further than just thinking it’s likely true. Christian faith involves encountering this Jesus of the Gospels—his words, deeds, especially his death and resurrection—and then ... trusting ... him ... Christian faith is personal trust. It’s relying on Jesus as the source of forgiveness, true wisdom, and life. As John’s Gospel put it, “by *trusting* you may have life in his name.”

You can press play now.

John Dickson (Studio)

Professor Tom Simpson is the expert on trust.

So, I wanted to close by asking him about his own trust in the one he and I call Lord.

Tom Simpson: Jesus is saying, the fundamental question you face is, what do you make of me? Like, I present myself to you. And you have a decision, what do you make of, what do you make of me? You're forced, you're forced to a decision as you, as you meet Jesus, as you encounter Jesus in the pages of the gospel. And, and the answer to that question isn't, uh, huh, let

me talk to a professor of philosophy about the cosmological argument or the teleological argument or something like that.

That's, that is not it. The question is, you meet people all the time. And you decide whether you Trust them or not, whether you can believe what they tell you. Do you believe what I tell you? And actually, the astonishing, um, feature, I think, in this, in this case is that the claims that Jesus makes of himself are so, self aggrandizing, if they're, if they're false.

Um, certainly extraordinary. Not so much in the context in which, in which they're coming, but out See? Who is this person who makes these claims had had, like how do I, what, how do I make sense of that? What's the, and I think this is part of the beauty of the gospel, is that they give us a picture of Jesus in repeated encounters and you learn who he is and how he interacts.

And on that basis, you're then invited to make a decision of trust. And there's, there's a, there's a beautiful little perpe, a little episode in John's gospel. I think it's John four, where. Um, someone comes to him, says, says, is it his son who's ill, Jesus says, uh, go, your son has been healed, it's your son or servant. And the comment is then made, uh, Jesus, uh, rather this person's man, um, believed what he said. He goes away. discovers that what Jesus has said is true, and then he believes him. So he goes from this three place attitude of trust, believing what he has said, and then he moves to a place of two place trust, of trusting him, Jesus, the, the person, the testifier, trusting in him.

And I, and I suppose that's the movement, that's, that's the movement I made personally, and um, yeah, and, and we're all kind of invited to consider for ourselves.

NEXT EPISODE

If you want to find out more about anything you heard on today's episode, Researcher AI has some great show notes for you - all the links to the books

and shows and people we mention, and some deep dives into the more complicated stuff, and there's a transcript of the full episode, too. Head to undeceptions.com to find them – they're way too long to put in the notes in your podcast app!

AND, if you're thinking about buying a book that we've mentioned here, you'd be helping the Undeceptions project by buying it via the links in the show notes. We've started getting a very small commission from Amazon sales that come through our site. Every cent counts!

If you have questions about this episode, or any of our other episodes, you can send it my way! Send us an audio or text message via the links in show notes and I'll try and answer it in this season's Q&A episode.

See ya.

CREDITS

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