Trust, Truth, and Social Bonds

Pathways to Peace Program

In contemporary societies, the erosion of shared truth undermines not only institutional legitimacy but the very possibility of **genuine social bonds**. Truth is not a mere abstraction: it is the medium through which people **recognize one another**, share meanings, and engage in cooperative life. When truth becomes fragmented – through the proliferation of disinformation, deep fakes, and algorithmic echo chambers – **trust** – both in personal relations and in institutions – **collapses**, and along with it the moral tissue that binds communities.

A particularly troubling trend is the rise of **selective trust** on political figures or online communities, which often challenge factual or scientific truths. Such disregard for scientific truth, often in name of common sense or superior truths, presents itself as a correction, in the name of the people, of "truth-regimes" that supposedly advance particular interests. Yet, by subordinating truth to power in this way, we give way to **epistemic tribalism**, and erode the common social ground that makes cooperation and solidarity possible.

Drawing from classical and contemporary sources – including reflection on the social virtues, social epistemology, and current analyses of the digital media environment – this seminar explores the conditions under which **truth and trust can once again become the foundation of civic friendship and peace**.