

We trust countless numbers of people. Many of them, we do not know. To us, they could just as well be aliens, but we trust them nonetheless. We trust a handful of politicians to run our country and to make decisions that could easily affect our lives. We trust the doctor that says we have some disease whose name was chosen to be unpronounceable. We trust that another country will not decide to send a nuclear missile headed our way. We trust that a passerby will not take out a gun and shoot us. Compared with the number of things we trust, there are a pitifully small number of things we distrust. But therein lies many problems. We still distrust too much, bringing agony and destruction to ourselves.

Trust is reliance or confidence in someone or something while distrust is the opposite. Trust is relying on someone or something to fulfill some expectation. Without trust, we would have to rely on ourselves to do everything. Trust and distrust are important themes in the Twilight Zone episodes “To Serve Man” and “The Monsters Are Due On Maple Street.” In these episodes, aliens manipulate trust and distrust to control or destroy humans, showing the power behind trust and distrust. But the problems of trust and distrust are not confined to the realm of the twilight zone. Even though both trust and distrust can be dangerous and destructive at times, however, trust is the lesser of the two evils. It is better to have trusted and been betrayed than to have never trusted at all.

Sometimes, trust may seem to bring many problems. The episode “To Serve Man” showed the potential destructiveness and power of trust. Aliens, called Kanamits, manipulated the trust of the humans to destroy or rather to eat man. Under the cloak of friendship, the aliens helped the humans to end war, to fix agricultural problems, and to solve other problems that man could not solve by himself. The Kanamits seemed trustworthy. “There is no ulterior motive,” says their representative and lie detector tests seem to confirm the human’s trust. The misplaced faith and trust of the aliens lead to a disastrous betrayal. After the Kanamits had the trust of the humans, a group of humans, expecting nothing but the best, left with the Kanamits for their world, only to learn that they will become dessert for the Kanamits.

Although trust may led to betrayal, distrust can be even more destructive as shown in “The Monsters Are Due On Maple Street,” which can be viewed as an allegory for the Cold War. A neighborhood, where all power is gone and cars will not start, is soon struck by a powerful blast of

paranoia and distrust, similar to the paranoia of the McCarthy era. The distrust began when a young, innocent kid, Tommy, told a fantastic tale about aliens being among them. At the beginning, everyone in the neighborhood was skeptical at Tommy's fantasy, laughing at him. Yet a small seed of suspicion began to grow in each person, that soon turned into distrust and then full-fledged paranoia when things began happening that they could not explain. People started believing what they had all originally thought to be foolish and childish. Similarly, Joseph McCarthy was responsible for starting much of the paranoia of the Cold War, by accusing government officials and other famous and important people of being Communists. Certainly, there were aliens just as there were Communists, but the aliens did as little to the neighborhood, as the Communists had done to the U.S. during the Cold War. Distrust and suspicions can destroy people as well as any nuclear weapon that the Communists may have had.

But once the distrust had begun, and the sense of paranoia set in, there was not much that anyone could do to stop the paranoia from destroying themselves. Any scapegoat, anyone and everyone that could be accused was accused, both on Maple Street and during the Cold War. Once one was accused, the only way to redeem oneself was by naming names and pointing fingers at others. Mr. Goodman was accused of being an alien because he had insomnia and looked up into the sky at night. Steve was accused because he had a radio no one had ever seen. Charlie's fatal shooting of another neighbor only pushed the neighborhood to further destruction. During the Cold War, McCarthy accused some people of being Communists with similarly little evidence or proof. Even Tommy, perhaps a symbol of the truly innocent, was not spared from the accusations and destruction. The U.S. was torn apart from the inside by the paranoia and distrust just as the neighborhood on Maple Street was. The danger from within is a more potent force than any danger from without.

Unfortunately, the problem of trust and distrust is not limited to hungry aliens looking for a tasty meal. Is trust or distrust a greater threat? It is not possible to live without trusting anything. Human relationships would not exist without trust. Without trust, we would not be able to trust the air that we breathe or the ground we walk on. Nothing anyone says could be trusted; we would have to experience everything for ourselves. But if trust leads to betrayal and distrust only begets paranoia, what reasonable

choice is there left? Either we become dessert for some alien or we “eat each other alive” as Steve had foreshadowed for the neighborhood on Maple Street. Complete trust blinds and paralyzes, while complete distrust hinders and destroys.

A balance between trust and distrust seems to be a viable alternative. But how do we come upon a balance? Instincts, experience, and even science, possibly represented by the lie detector, were not successful in finding a good balance for trust and distrust in the twilight zone. Do we invite aliens to manipulate us until we find a balance that suits us? However, any balance that can be found must involve some distrust, which is the source of many problems. Distrust allows for the formation of that first seed of destruction, similar to what destroyed Maple Street. Distrust is very contagious and spreads quickly. A seemingly insignificant amount of distrust or suspicion can quickly become much more dangerous as illustrated in the Twilight Zone episode.

If any amount of distrust can lead to paranoia, then the best alternative is unconditional and complete trust. The humans in “To Serve Man” were right in trusting the Kanamits. The fault perhaps lies in the Kanamits for their betrayal, but the fault, wherever it lies, does not lie in the United Nations or in their trust. But does trusting too much open one up to the possibility of exploitation? If gaining trust and betrayal is as simple as the “recipe” that the Kanamits used, then one must expect it to happen relatively frequently. Unfortunately, few things in this world are perfect, such as hungry aliens or manipulative people who enjoy using other’s trust to their benefit. Problems must be solved one at a time. Distrusting for fear of a breach of trust only creates problems before a problem exists.

Between distrust and dessert, dessert is the lesser evil, even if we happen to be the ones being devoured. Distrust propagates quickly and is self-defeating. Distrust isolates individuals, while trust brings people together. If our duty should be to serve the monsters, then let those who wish to eat us do so, but we should not destroy ourselves first with distrust. After we can trust each other, then we can see if monsters actually exist. Perhaps our fear of monsters and betrayal is only fear and nothing more. But to find out, we need to trust wholeheartedly first. Trust me.