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The Attitude of Trust is Basic

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Most philosophical discussion of trust focuses on the three-place trust predicate: X trusting Y to φ. This paper argues that it is the one-place and two-place predicates – X is trusting, and X trusting Y – that are fundamental.

Almost without exception, philosophical discussion of trust focuses on the three-place trust predicate: X trusts Y to φ (see, for instance, Baier 1986, Holton 1994, Jones 1996, Faulkner 2007, Hieronymi 2008 and Hawley 2014). And then understands the two-place trust predicate – X trusts Y – derivatively. So Hawley analyses X trusts Y to φ as X relies on Y to φ because X believes Y has a commitment to φ (2014: 10). And two-place trust is then "reliance on someone to fulfil whatever commitments she may have" (2014: 16). There is no question that three-place trust is central to our engagement with others. We trust one another to act in various ways – to turn up on time, return our goods, give a fair quote and so on – but, it is the contention of this paper, that this form of trust, its *contractual* form one might say, is *not* fundamental. Rather, the fundamental forms of *trust* are purely *attitudinal*: they are X trusting, and trusting Y. Whilst our relying on others to do things can permit all sorts of explanations, the fundamental explanation of why X trusts Y to φ is simply that X trusts Y or merely that X is trusting. Two-place and one-place trust – our trusting and trusting others – are the basic forms of trust.

That the two-place and one-place trust predicate should be taken as basic can, I think, be supported by five independent pieces of evidence.

The first piece of evidence comes from everyday language. First, both the two-place predicate 'X trusts Y' and the three-place 'X trusts Y to φ' have unique and irreducible meanings. It is true that sometimes we use 'X trusts Y' as shorthand for 'X trusts Y in some particular way'; for instance, asked why she left her diary visible on the desk, X might reply that she trusts Y, and by this mean that she trusts Y not to read it. However, this is not the most straightforward use of 'X trusts Y', which is that of a description of X's attitude towards Y as a trusting or trustful one, see Becker (1996: 44-5). And by implication that Y, the object of X's attitude of trust, is someone, as X takes it, who can be trusted. By contrast, 'X trusts Y to φ' is a metaphysically hybrid

notion insofar as it describes an action – X's relying on Y to φ – and says of that, that it is done with, and because of, a certain attitude, which is best described as trusting. That is, if it reports the fact of X's reliance and X's attitude to relying, then it is not a direct description of X's attitude and so does not carry the implication that X thinks Y is someone to be trusted. Now while 'X trusts Y' might imply a disposition to rely on Y in various ways, and one to rely on Y to φ, it cannot be reduced to such a disposition and formalised as '∀φ, X trusts Y to φ'. For 'X trusts Y' might be true, while '∀φ, X trusts Y to φ' will almost certainly be false: there is always a limit to what we will trust others to do. Moreover, this does not seem to be merely a quantification issue, since there is no restricted range of φ, R, for which '∀φ ∈ R, X trusts Y to φ' stands as an adequate formalism of 'X trusts Y'. For while it might be true that a complete lack of willingness to rely on Y would falsify the claim that 'X trusts Y', there is no particular way in which X must rely on Y for this claim to be true. However, while 'X trusts Y' and 'X trusts Y to φ' are unique statements, there is some implication from the former to the latter but not the other way round. If X does trust Y, then there must be some φ for which X trusts Y to φ. But that X trusts Y to φ does not, in any way, imply that X trusts Y more generally, even if this would often also be true. Thus, of the two predicates, the two-place one is arguably more fundamental.

Similar things may then be said when comparing the one-place predicate 'X trusts' – or maybe the grammatically better 'X is trusting' – with the two-place predicate 'X trusts Y'. The former equally seems to have a place in everyday language: "we *do*", Uslaner observes, "speak of 'trusting people' generally" (2002: 22). And this form does not seem reducible to '∀Y, X trusts Y' for similar reasons. It will not be that X trusts *everyone*, and there is no determinate range of people that X's trust must range over. Rather, 'X is trusting' seems to make a different claim: that X has faith in people, in some "generalised other", as Uslaner says, not faith in any specific person or description (2002: 24). But again, while 'X is trusting' and 'X trusts Y' seem to be different and unique statements, there is some implication from the former to the latter but not the other way round. So of the two predicates, the one-place predicate is arguably more fundamental. Thus, *the heart of our notion of trust seems to be simply an attitude of trust, which may, but need not, take specific persons as its object, and which can support, but need not, the act of relying on persons.* This is what is meant by the claim that the attitude of trust is basic.

The second and third bits of evidence come from considering trust in conjunction with distrust. "To understand trust", Katherine Hawley says, "we must also understand distrust, yet distrust is usually treated as a mere afterthought, or mistakenly equated with an absence of trust" (2014: 1). The mere absence of trust might report nothing about one's attitudes but rather stem from the fact that there is no cause for reliance. The car mechanic I trust

when I don't seek a second quote, I don't trust to deliver my mail. However, my lack of trust here is its mere absence: I don't trust the mechanic in this regard not because I don't think him up to the job but because that is not his job. So I don't rely on him in this respect. Distrust, however, is not the mere absence of trust: it is an attitude in its own right, and one might expect as Hawley proposes, there to be analytic connections between the attitudes of trust and distrust; such as, for instance, that if distrust is an appropriate attitude to take, then trust is not (2014: 4). However, that there are such analytic connections is hard to maintain if the fundamental notion of trust is taken to be three-place or 'X trusting Y to φ'. Given that trust in this sense is metaphysically hybrid, any failure of trust can always be down to the failure of the action component. (My not trusting my mechanic to deliver my mail because I don't rely on him to do this.) But then trust could be inappropriate because of some inappropriateness in this action component; it would, for instance, be wrong to trust my mechanic to deliver my mail. However, this wrongness does not imply it is right to distrust my mechanic. So to keep the parallel between trust and distrust, the focus needs to be on the attitudinal conception of trust: trusting Y and distrusting Y. Moreover, this is implied by the fact that there is no three-place distrust predicate: even when distrust is appropriate, we do not say 'X distrusts Y to φ'.

Third, trust and distrust, it is often said, are contraries but not contradictories (Jones 1996: 15). And this is true all the while trust is conceived contractually, or as three-place. In this case, a lack of trust need not imply distrust because there might be a lack of trust because there is a lack of reliance; there is no contract, as it were, or *commitment* as Hawley would say (2014: 10). I don't trust my mechanic to deliver my mail because I don't rely on him doing so, he have having undertaken no commitment to do so. So all the while trust is conceived contractually, a lack of trust does not imply distrust – trust and distrust are merely contraries. However, a lack of trust can imply distrust. Where trust is the background attitude – where it is two-place or one-place – if trust is lost what remains is not merely its lack but distrust. Suppose X trusts Y. In saying that X trusts Y, were X to say this, what X describes is a basic attitude that one can take towards a person, which involves making positive presumptions about their goodwill towards oneself. Remove these positive presumptions, so that it can no longer be taken for granted that Y will act in certain ways and will not act in others and what is left is distrust. For example, you might not seek a second quote simply because you trust your mechanic, and if so, you just presume the quote is honest; you might leave your diary lying on the desk simply because you trust your parents, and if so, so you just presume they won't read it; or suppose you trust your partner, if so you will just presume they are not cheating on you; and so on. Remove trust in these cases, so you no longer presume the quote honest, the diary safe or your partner faithful and these situations are now ones of distrust.

Relatedly, we tend not to trust people *not to do things*. We can do so, I can trust you not to reveal my secrets for instance, but generally we do not so. For instance, you don't trust your partner *not to have an affair*, not because they can't be trusted in this but because such trust is peculiarly self-defeating. To trust them not to have an affair would be to draw their attention to the fact that you do not presume they will not, and so to draw their attention to the fact that you distrust them. Equally, your partner would not reassure you were they to say 'don't worry I won't be unfaithful'. This should be unspoken, part of what is presumed by mutual trust. The same goes for one-place trust, in having a non-directed attitude of trust we presume things about how people in general will behave towards us. For instance, we presume they won't be "unpromptedly aggressive", where this presumption, Williams observes, can be sustained by reasoning, "in desperate circumstances", but in "better times" we just take it for granted. And it needs to be taken for granted because "[o]ne is not likely to be reassured by someone who says, 'I promise not to murder you'" (2002: 89). Thus to give a proper account of the relation of trust to distrust – one which recognises that these can be contradictory – requires a purely attitudinal conception of trust. But once trust is conceived attitudinally, it is then hard to see how it is not this attitude that is, as Williams says, the basic form of trust "on which all social interaction depends" (2002: 88).

The fourth piece of evidence concerns the relationship between trust and trustworthiness. Its relation to the thought that the trusted is trustworthy, in part, identifies the attitude of trust. Reassurance comes from this thought. However, this connection between trust and trustworthiness is broken if trust is conceived contractually, or as three-place. Under this conception, say in a case where X trusts Y to φ, the thought that Y is trustworthy is, at least, that Y will reliably φ. However, it might be that this is not the trustworthy thing to do and, indeed, can be quite the opposite. This might be illustrated by a case where the trusting party is in error. Suppose, then, that X is set on a course of action from which no good will result, but for which he needs to borrow Y's car. He asks Y for his car keys and Y, fairly judging the consequences of handing them over, refuses. In misjudging what to do, X will equally regard this refusal as Y being blind to his need, and so as a failure of trustworthiness. *And if trustworthiness is identified by reference to trust* Y would be so. But of course, Y's response is the right and so trustworthy one. This point is made and developed by Knud Ejler Løgstrup in his discussion of trust.

> The other person's interpretation of the implication of the trust offered [that is, the trusting party Y's interpretation] ... is one thing, and the demand which is implicit in that trust ... which I must interpret is quite another thing (1997: 21).

Responding to trust cannot be "merely a matter of fulfilling the other person's expectations and granting his or her wishes" (1997: 21). This is because in the trust situation "what we are speaking of is a demand for love, not for indulgence" (1997: 21). Thus the demand on the trusted – what Løgstrup calls the *radical ethical demand* and might be called the demand that X *be trustworthy* – is generated by the fact of the trusting party's dependence. It is not generated by X's attitudes – that is, by his trust. But this is to say that trustworthiness cannot be defined with respect to trust if trust is conceived contractually, or as three-place. The analytical connection between trust and trustworthiness is preserved if trust is taken to be merely an attitude. For suppose, in this error case, that X simply trusts Y. In trusting Y, X will think that Y is trustworthy. And in thinking this, X will not place any specific expectation on Y, but will rather just expect it of Y that Y does the right or appropriate – the trustworthy – thing.

Connected to this point is Katherine Hawley's observation that trust can be unwanted. In this regard she gives the example of trusting her colleagues to buy her champagne, in a situation where, for whatever reason, she is to be honoured. Now it might be that her colleagues plan to buy her champagne but, Hawley observes, "[s]till, they do not invite or welcome my trust in this respect; instead, they want to give me a treat, not merely to act as trustworthiness requires, and certainly not to risk betraying me if they forget to buy the champagne" (2014: 7). This observation is good but her trust is unwanted, in part I suggest, because it implies the *falsehood* that the colleagues would be untrustworthy if they did not supply it. This is false precisely because trustworthiness should not be defined by reference what a trusting party trusts one to do. That is, it is not defined by reference to the three-place trust predicate. Rather, trustworthiness is a matter of doing the appropriate thing *whatever that might be*, where this might still be to buy champagne in Hawley's example. But to trust them to do this – the right thing – is just to trust in the two-place sense, and such trust would not be unwanted. What is objectionable is the implicit contract, not the background attitude.

The fifth and final piece of evidence for the priority of the one and two-place predicates over three-place one comes from a consideration of infant trust. Any account of trust, Annette Baier proposes, should accommodate infant trust. And this generates the constraint "that it not make essential to trusting the use of concepts or abilities which a child cannot be reasonably believed to possess" (1986: 244). Suppose now that X trusts Y to φ. In trusting Y to φ, X will take an optimistic view of Y and her motivations; and in so taking this view X will, at the very least, presume that Y will φ, or maybe believe that Y will φ, and X will make this presumption because X manifestly depends on Y φ-ing, or holds this belief because Y has committed to φ-ing. However, one understands trust in its contractual form, X's trusting Y to φ involves a complex of reasoning. It involves imagining the trust situation from Y's

perspective, imagining Y's recognition of X's dependence; then maybe imagining Y seeing this as a reason to do what X depends on Y doing, or maybe recognising what Y has committed to do in this particular trust situation. Now it is arguable that this kind of second personal reasoning is both prosaic and fundamental to moral thought, see Darwall (2006). However, it is not the kind of reasoning that an infant could engage in. By contrast, suppose that X trusts or trusts Y; for instance, an infant X trusts his mother Y. In trusting his mother, X need not have any further thought; the trust is no more than a confidence or faith – a trust, as we say – in his mother. This does seem to be the kind of attitude that an infant could have. Suppose then that Baier's constraint on accounts of trust is plausible. This constraint can then be satisfied simply by taking the attitudinal form of trust – the one and two-place predicates – to be basic.[1]

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