

3

TRUST AND DISTRUST

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3.1 Preliminaries: Trust, Distrust and in between

Trust is commonly described using the metaphor of an invisible “social glue” that is conspicuous only when it is absent. It is initially tempting to think of distrust as the absence of the “glue” of trust. But this way of thinking oversimplifies the conceptual relationship between trust and distrust. Not trusting a person is not tantamount to distrusting a person. Distrust is typically accompanied by feelings of insecurity, cynicism, contempt or fear, which distinguishes it from the agnostic mode of “wait and see” (Hardin 2001:496). So, trust and distrust do not exhaust the relevant options: they are contraries rather than contradictories (Govier 1992b:18).

While trust and distrust are not mutually exhaustive, they do seem to be mutually exclusive. I cannot simultaneously trust and distrust you, at least not in the very same domain or with respect to the very same matter (Ullmann-Margalit 2004:60). Distrust rules out trust, and vice versa. If I do not trust you this could either mean that I positively distrust you, or that I neither trust nor distrust you (Ullmann-Margalit 2004:61). Indeed, I may decline to consider something to be a matter of trust or distrust for reasons that are orthogonal to my assessment of your trustworthiness. I may simply recognize that you prefer not to be counted on in a particular domain, and I may respect that preference. Making something a matter of trust or distrust can be an undue imposition. As Hawley (2014:7) notes, “Trust involves anticipation of action, so it’s clear why someone might prefer not to be trusted to do something she would prefer not to do. But that does not mean she wants to be distrusted in that respect.”

Just as distrust is not the absence of trust, so also distrust is not the absence of reliance. You may decide not to rely on someone for reasons that have nothing to do with distrust. Reliance, like trust, can sometimes be a burden, and you may have reason not to so burden someone. Moreover, a judgment that someone is untrustworthy is very different from a judgment that it is not wise to rely on them. As Hawley (2014:3) points out, a fitting response to the discovery that I have wrongly distrusted you includes remorse, apology and requests for forgiveness. Such responses need not normally accompany mistaken judgments about reliability. For example, if you are reliably gregarious but I don’t pick up on this, there is no need to apologize to you for my mistake all things being equal. To apply the label “untrustworthy” is to impugn a person’s

moral character. But to recognize that someone is not to be relied on in a particular domain need not have any moral valence at all. For example, if I recognize that you are not to be relied on to be gregarious, no insult to your character is implied. Distrust has a normative dimension that non-reliance often lacks.

To distrust a person is to think badly of them (Domenicucci and Holton 2017:150) and for the most part people do not want to be thought of in this way. But even if a person prefers not to be distrusted, they may, quite consistently, also prefer not to be trusted in that same domain (Hawley (2014:7). For example, you might enjoy bringing snacks to faculty meetings. But just as you prefer not to be trusted to do this (since you do not want your colleagues to *count on you* to bring snacks), so also you would not want to be *distrusted* in this matter (or to be perceived as *untrustworthy*). So, not being distrusted is something that is worth wanting even in circumstances in which you prefer not to be trusted.

The view that trust and distrust are contraries rather than contradictories is widely endorsed (e.g. Govier 1992b:18; Jones 1996:15; Hardin 2001:496; Ullmann-Margalit 2004:60). But in recent work Paul Faulkner (2017) argues that this orthodoxy is premised on a problematic three-place conceptualization of trust, “X trusts Y to \emptyset ” where X and Y are people and \emptyset is a task. According to Faulkner (2017:426), on this “contractual” view of trust, “a lack of trust need not imply distrust because there might be a lack of trust because there is a lack of reliance.” On the other hand, “Where trust is the background attitude – where it is two-place [X trusts Y] or one-place [X is trusting] – if trust is lost what remains is not merely its lack but distrust.” He maintains that when “it can no longer be taken for granted that [a person] will act in certain ways and will not act in others what is left is distrust” (Faulkner 2017:426). However, Faulkner’s observation shows only that the *undoing* of trust results in distrust (the key phrase is *no longer*). This observation does not cast any doubt on there being a state in which we neither trust nor distrust, simply because we, for instance, lack evidence of moral integrity, of competence or of a track record in a salient domain. I neither trust nor distrust my colleagues in the domain of financial planning. In this circumstance, the absence of the attitude of trust does not indicate distrust (D’Cruz 2018).

Indeed, we can even imagine circumstances where trust is *lost*, but where the resulting attitude is agnosticism rather than distrust. Suppose you learn that your evidence of a solid track record has defeaters (maybe you learn that a person had no other feasible options but to be steadfastly reliable). You may then decide that your previous appraisal of her trustworthiness is now baseless. But this does not mean that you will or ought to adopt an attitude of distrust toward the person, or that you will or ought to stop relying on the person. So, trust and distrust remain contraries rather than contradictories even when they are conceived of independently of the act of relying on a person to perform an action.

What of Faulkner’s skepticism that distrust has the three-place structure, *X distrusts Y to \emptyset* ?¹ Following Faulkner, Domenicucci and Holton (2017:150) also maintain that there is no three-place construction of distrust: “We do not say that we distrust someone to do something. We simply distrust, or mistrust, a person.” I think there is something right about this. But it also seems right to say that we might bear a more specific attitude than trusting or distrusting a person *globally*. Perhaps there is a third option. Just as trust may be understood in terms of “X trusts Y in domain of interaction D” (Jones 1996, D’Cruz 2018) perhaps distrust could be analyzed in terms of “X distrusts Y in D.” The plausibility of this proposal depends on whether it makes sense to distrust a person in a delimited domain of interaction, or whether distrust characteristically infects multiple, or even all, domains of interaction.

It would seem that the basis of distrust – whether it be skepticism about quality of will, integrity or competence – has a bearing on this question. Distrust based on skepticism about competence may be confined to a particular domain of expertise. I may distrust you when it comes to doing the wiring in my house but not when it comes to doing the plumbing. But even this competence-based distrust has a tendency to spread across domains. If I *distrust* you regarding the wiring (in contrast to simply not trusting you in the agnostic mode), that is likely because you have invited me to trust you and I have declined the invitation. My refusal might be based on the suspicion that you do not know the limits of your competence. So, not only do I not trust you with the plumbing, I do not trust you to reliably indicate the spheres in which you can be responsive to my trust.² If in addition I think that you are liable to invite my trust recklessly, then the breadth of my distrust is widened. If I think that you extend an invitation to trust recklessly because you simply do not care enough about my well-being (rather than because you are too full of bravado), then my distrust of you is broad indeed. Distrust based on skepticism about quality of will seems by its nature more general. If you think a person is indifferent to the fact of your vulnerability, or that a person is hostile to you, then you will distrust them across multiple domains of interaction.³ Even so, such distrust may not cover *all* domains of interaction. For instance, you may think it reasonable to rely on a person to perform certain tasks related his work even while harboring profound skepticism about his good will or moral character. But the fact remains that while trust can be easily confined to a relatively narrow domain of interaction, the same is not true of distrust.

Many of the above considerations indicate that having an adequate account of trust does not straightforwardly give us an adequate account of distrust. Indeed, there is a case to be made for considering distrust *first*. Although philosophers are apt to intellectualize trust, in ordinary life we generally only scrutinize our trust explicitly when we suspect that *distrust* is called for (“Is it a mistake to trust?”), or in contexts where it becomes salient that we are wrongly distrusted by others (“How could they so misjudge me?”). We think explicitly about whether we trust when we suspect that there might be grounds for distrust, and we think explicitly about whether we are trusted when we suspect that we might be distrusted.

There is still much work to be done in giving a perspicuous characterization and taxonomy of distrust, as well as in specifying the analytical connections between trust and distrust. In what follows I describe what I take to be the state of art and I lay out some of the challenges ahead.

3.2 The Concept of Distrust

Although there are many theories of trust, few theorists of trust in the philosophical literature have elaborated explicit theories of distrust. A recent account due to Katherine Hawley (2014) is a notable exception.⁴ “To understand trust,” Hawley (2014:1) writes, “we must also understand distrust, yet distrust is usually treated as a mere afterthought, or mistakenly equated with an absence of trust.”

As has been widely noted since Baier (1986:234), one may rely on a person’s predictable habits without trusting them. Hawley (2014:2) offers as an example relying on someone who regularly brings too much lunch to work because she is bad at judging quantities. Anticipating this, you plan to eat her leftovers and so rely on her. Hawley observes that if one day she eats all her lunch herself, she would owe you no apology. Disappointment on your part would be understandable, but feelings of betrayal would

be out of place. Just as trust is richer than reliance, distrust is richer than non-reliance. In another example, Hawley (2014:3) observes that even though she does not rely on her colleagues to buy her champagne next Friday, it would “wrong or even offensive, to say that [she] distrust[s her] colleagues in this respect” or to think that they are untrustworthy in this regard. If her colleagues were to surprise her with champagne, it would not be appropriate for her to feel remorse for her non-reliance on them, or to apologize for not having trusted them.

Hawley proposes that what distinguishes reliance/non-reliance from trust/distrust is that the latter attitudes are only appropriate in the context of commitment. It is only appropriate to trust or distrust your colleagues to bring your lunch if they have a commitment to bring you lunch; it is only appropriate for you to trust or distrust your colleagues to bring champagne if they have a commitment to bring champagne. In generalized form,

To trust someone to do something is to believe that she has a commitment to doing it, and to rely upon her to meet that commitment. To distrust someone to do something is to believe that she has a commitment to doing it, and yet not rely upon her to meet that commitment.

(Hawley 2014:10)

But what about people who rely on the commitments of others cynically, like Holton’s “confidence trickster” (Holton 1994:65)? Consider the case of a person who tries to fool you into sending him a \$1,000 payment to “release your million-dollar inheritance.” Even though he relies on you to keep your commitment, it would be odd to say that he *trusts* you to do this. (Consider how ridiculous it would be for him to feel betrayed if you see through his scheme). Or consider a variation story involving non-reliance. The confidence trickster starts to worry that you will not follow through on your commitment, and so decides not to rely on you to send the payment. Surely it does not seem right to say that the confidence trickster *distrusts* you. The example and the variation suggest that reliance or non-reliance, even when combined with belief in commitment, do not amount to trust or distrust.

Hawley (2014:12) anticipates this challenge. She points out that the confidence trickster does not believe that you have a *genuine* commitment; rather, he relies on your mistaken belief that you are committed: “Although you don’t realize it you do not have a genuine commitment, the trickster recognizes this, and this is why he does not trust you.” Presumably Hawley could say the same thing about the trickster who anticipates you won’t follow through: he does not believe you have a genuine commitment, and so his withdrawal from reliance does not amount to distrust.⁵

Hawley’s response to the confidence trickster objection is a good one. But we may still wonder whether the commitment account is sufficiently comprehensive. What if you (correctly) believe that someone is committed, but you also think that they lack the necessary *competence* to carry through on their commitment? For example, imagine that you face a difficult court case, and your nephew who has recently earned his law degree enjoins you to let him represent you. Despite your confidence that he is fervently committed to representing you well, you decline his offer simply because you think he is too inexperienced. Does this show that you distrust your nephew despite your faith in his commitment? There is still theoretical work to be done on how we should understand withdrawal from or avoidance of reliance based on skepticism about competence as opposed to commitment. On certain ways of filling out the story, your

attitude *does* seem to be one of distrust. For example, if you suspect your nephew is just using you to jump start his new practice, distrust of him certainly seems appropriate. What if your nephew invites you to rely on him without ulterior motives, but you surmise that he ought to have a better reckoning of his own capacity to carry off the work? This, too, seems grounds for distrust if you think he is flouting a professional duty to know the limits of his own expertise. In each of these cases, you may have no doubt about his commitment.⁶

Belief in commitment, even when paired with non-reliance, may not be sufficient for distrust to be an appropriate response. Suppose you decide not to rely on a person, and you *hope* that person will not meet his commitment. Here's an example: A financier buys insurance on credit defaults, positioning himself to profit when borrowers default. The financier seems to satisfy the conditions for distrust: he believes (truly) that the borrowers have a commitment, and yet he does not rely on them to meet that commitment, because he believes that they will fail. Does it seem right to say that the financier *distrusts* the loan holders even though the borrowers' lack of integrity represents for him a prospect rather than a threat? For those who are moved to say that this falls short of distrust, it is worth asking what the missing element is. Perhaps distrust is essentially a *defensive* stance that responds to another person as a threat. This practical, action-oriented aspect of distrust is explored in more depth by Meena Krishnamurthy (2015).⁷

Drawing on the work of Martin Luther King, Krishnamurthy (2015) advances an account of the political value of distrust that foregrounds distrust's practical aspect. Rather than offering a general conceptual analysis of distrust, Krishnamurthy (2015:392) aims to articulate an account of distrust that is politically valuable. Krishnamurthy focuses on Martin Luther King's distrust of moderate whites to carry out the actions required to bring about racial justice. She argues that King believed that though white moderates possessed "the right reasons" for acting as justice required, he thought that fear and inertia made them passive (2015:395). According to Krishnamurthy, King distrusted them "because he believed with a high degree of certainty or was confident in his belief that they would not, on their own, act as justice required" (2015:395). Krishnamurthy reconstructs King's conception of distrust as "the confident belief that another individual or group of individuals or an institution will not act justly or as justice requires" (2015:391). King's distrust of white moderates, Krishnamurthy maintains, was a safeguard against white tyranny. Krishnamurthy describes the relevant concept of trust as narrow and normative: "It is a narrow concept because it concerns a specific task. It is a normative concept because it concerns beliefs about what individuals ought to do" (2015:392). Schematized, Krishnamurthy's account of distrust takes the form "x distrusts y to \emptyset " where distrust is grounded in the "confident belief" that X will not \emptyset . On this account distrust is isomorphic to the three-place structure of trust: "x trusts y to \emptyset " where \emptyset is some action, and the attitude of trust is grounded in the confident belief that y will \emptyset .

But is distrust always, or even typically, grounded in a belief that the distrusted party will fail to do something in particular? When we speak of distrusting a doctor or a politician, say, is there always, or even typically, a particular action that we anticipate they will fail to do? I find more plausible Hawley's view that "distrust does not require confident prediction of misbehaviour" (Hawley 2014:2). One's distrustful attitude toward a doctor, for example, might involve a suspicion of general inattentiveness, or of susceptibility to the emoluments of drug companies. But one need not anticipate any particular obligatory action that the doctor will fail to perform. While it is sometimes natural to talk of trust in terms of "two people and a task," it is not clear that this framework works equally well for paradigm instances of distrust.

Erich Matthes (2015) challenges Krishnamurthy's characterization of the cognitive aspect of distrust as "belief." He contends that understanding distrust in terms of belief does not capture distrust's voluntary aspect. There are contexts, Matthes maintains, where distrusting is something we *do*. A decision to distrust consists in a refusal to rely or a deliberate withdrawal from reliance. Matthes (2015:4) maintains that while Krishnamurthy is correct to highlight the political value of distrust, to understand how distrust may *constitute* a democratic value (rather than be merely instrumentally valuable) we must see how "to not rely on others to meet their commitments (in particular, when you have good reason to believe that they will not meet them) is part and parcel of the participatory nature of democratic society." Matthes (2015:4) concludes that "the *process* of cultivating a healthy distrust, particularly of elected representatives, is constitutive of a well-functioning democracy, independently of whether or not it happens, in a given instance, to guard against tyranny."

Distrust of government and of the state (as opposed to interpersonal distrust) plays a prominent role in the history of liberal thought. Russell Hardin contends that "the beginning of political and economic liberalism is distrust" (2002:73). On the assumption that the incentives of government agents are to arrange benefits for themselves, it follows that those whose interests may be sacrificed by state intervention have warrant for distrust. The idea that governments are prone to abusing citizens has led liberal thinkers such as Locke, Hume, and Smith and, in the American context, James Madison, to contrive of ways to arrange government so as to diminish the risk of abuse.

3.3 The Justification, the Signals, the Effects and the Response to Distrust

In addition to thinking about ontological and definitional questions of about what distrust *is*, philosophers have also addressed questions the rational and moral warrant for distrust as well as the interpersonal effects of distrust. Trudy Govier describes the conditions for warranted distrust as those in which people "lie or deliberately deceive, break promises, are hypocritical or insincere, seek to manipulate us, are corrupt or dishonest, cannot be counted on to follow moral norms, are incompetent, have no concern for us or deliberately seek to harm us" (1992a:53). The list may not be exhaustive, but it does seem representative. One thing to notice is that the basis of distrust can be quite variable, and so we should expect the affective character of distrust to vary widely as well. If distrust is based on suspicion of ill will, the reactive attitude of resentment will be to the fore. If distrust is based on pessimism about competence, then distrust will manifest itself more as wariness or vexation than as moral anger. If it is based on pessimism about integrity, it may be tinged with moral disgust.

It is noteworthy that even when we know distrust to be warranted and even when we 'feel it in our bones,' we often take measures to conceal its expression. There is significant social pressure to refrain from expressing distrust: we are awkward and uneasy when we must continue to interact with a person after having expressed distrust of them. This poses problems when we find ourselves in circumstances in which we have no choice but to rely on those we distrust. We seem to have two options, neither of them good. We can choose to reveal our distrust, which risks insulting and alienating. Or we can try to conceal distrust. But this is also risky, since our trust-related attitudes are often betrayed by subtle and non-voluntary aspects of our comportment (Slingerland 2014:Ch. 7). As Govier (1992a:53) puts it, "We are left, all too often, to face distrust as a practical problem."

Distrust that is revealed, whether deliberately or involuntarily, has the power to insult and to wound, sending a signal to the distrusted party and to witnesses that one regards the person one distrusts as incompetent, malevolent or lacking in integrity. As a result, we have weighty reason to be wary of the pathologies of trust and distrust, including susceptibility to distortion by dramatic but unrepresentative breaches of trust, and vulnerability to bias and stereotype (Jones 2013:187, see also Scheman, this volume). Over-ready trust is perilous, exposing us to exploitation and manipulation; but so is over-ready distrust, which leads us to forgo the benefits of trusting relationships and to incur the risk of “acting immorally towards others whom we have, through distrusting, misjudged” (McGeer 2002:25).

In article for *Ebony* entitled, “In My Next Life, I’ll be White,” the philosopher Laurence Thomas (1990:84) relates with bitter irony that, “At times, I have looked over my shoulder expecting to see the danger to which a White was reacting, only to have it dawn on me that I was the menace.” He relates that black men rarely enjoy the “public trust” of whites in America, “no matter how much their deportment or attire conform to the traditional standards of well-off White males.” To enjoy the public trust means “to have strangers regard one as a morally decent person in a variety of contexts.” Thomas (1990:84) notes that distrust of black men is rooted in a fear that “goes well beyond the pale of rationality.” Thomas’s case illustrates that distrust, when it is irrational, and particularly when it is baseless, eats away at trustworthiness:

Thus the sear of distrust festers and becomes the fountainhead of low self-esteem and self-hate. Indeed, to paraphrase the venerable Apostle Paul, those who would do right find that they cannot. This should come as no surprise, however. For it is rare for anyone to live morally without the right sort of moral and social affirmation. And to ask this of Blacks is to ask what is very nearly psychologically impossible.

(Thomas 1990:2)

Thomas picks out a feature of wrongful distrust that is particularly troubling: Distrust has a tendency to be self-confirming. Just as trustworthiness is reinforced by trust, untrustworthiness is reinforced by distrust. Distrust may serve to undermine the internal motivation toward trustworthiness of those who are wrongly distrusted (Kramer 1999). If the person who is distrusted without warrant feels that there is nothing he can do to prove himself worthy of trust, he will lack incentive to seek esteem.⁸ In addition, he will lack the occasion to prove *to himself* that he is worthy of trust, and thereby lack the opportunity to cultivate a self-concept as of a trustworthy person.⁹ Finally, he is deprived of the galvanizing effect of hope and vicarious confidence.¹⁰

Just as distrust confirms itself, distrustful interpretation of others perpetuates itself. McGeer (2002:28) claims that “trusting and distrusting inhabit incommensurable worlds” insofar as “our attitudes of trust and distrust shape our understanding of various events, leading us to experience the world in ways that tend to reinforce the attitudes we already hold.” This echoes Govier’s (1992a:56) observation that “[w]hen we distrust a person, even evidence of positive behavior and intentions is likely to be received with suspicion, to be interpreted as misleading, and, when properly understood, as negative after all.” Distrust’s inertia makes it both morally and epistemically perilous. Govier describes how taken to “radical extremes, distrust can go so far as to corrode our sense of reality,” risking “an unrealistic, conspiratorial, indeed virtually paranoid view of the world” (Govier 1992a:55). Such an attitude in is sharp contrast

to the strategic and defensive distrust of government described by Hardin. Paranoid distrust is indiscriminate in finding its target, and serves to undermine rather than to bolster autonomy. As we systematically interpret the speech and behavior of others in ways that confirm our distrust, suspiciousness builds on itself and our negative evaluations become impenetrable to empirical refutation. Jones (2013:194) describes how distrust functions as a *biasing* device (de Sousa 1987, Damasio 1994), tampering evidence so as to make us insensible to signals that others are trustworthy. She takes as a paradigm the frequency with which young black men in the United States are stopped by the police: “By doing nothing at all they are taken to be signaling untrustworthiness” (Jones 2013:195).

Jones (2013) identifies two further distorting aspects of distrust understood as an affective attitude: recalcitrance and spillover. Distrust is *recalcitrant* insofar as it characteristically parts company from belief: “Even when we believe and affirm that someone is trustworthy, this belief may not be reflected in the cognitive and affective habits with which we approach the prospect of being dependent on them. We can believe they are trustworthy and yet be anxiously unwilling to rely” (Jones 2013:195). Distrust exhibits *spillover* in cases where “it loses focus on its original target and spreads to neighboring targets” (Jones 2013:195). Distrust easily falsely generalizes from one particular psychologically salient case to an entire group. It is distressingly familiar how this aspect of distrust can be leveraged by those seeking to stoke distrust of marginalized groups such as refugees and asylum seekers by fixating on dramatic but unrepresentative cases.

Consideration of distrust’s susceptibility to bias and stereotype, together with its tendencies toward self-fulfillment and self-perpetuation, may lead us to be distrustful of our own distrustful attitudes.¹¹ Gandhi (1951/2005:203) advocated in his *Delhi Diary* for a comprehensive disavowal of distrust: “we should trust even those whom we suspect as our enemies. Brave people disdain distrust.” But a natural worry about this stance is that a broad policy of disavowing distrust will have the effect of exposing vulnerable parties to hazard. What right do we have to be “brave people” on the behalf of others whose positions are more precarious than our own? How confident can we be that our trust will inspire trustworthiness?

H.J.N. Horsburgh develops Gandhi’s views to formulate more precisely a notion of “therapeutic trust” whereby one relies on another person with the aim of bolstering that person’s trustworthiness and giving them the opportunity to develop morally: “it is no exaggeration to say that trust is to morality what adequate living space is to self-expression: without it there is no possibility of reaching maturity” (1960:352). Horsburgh’s stance is more carefully hedged than Gandhi’s. But one might worry whether strategic “therapeutic trust” is merely pretense of trust.¹² If it is, therapeutic trust seems to rely on obscuring one’s true attitudes, possibly providing warrant for *distrust*. This worry is particularly acute if we are skeptical about the possibility of effectively concealing doubts about trustworthiness. Hieronymi (2008) points out that whether or not the person relied-upon is inspired by such reliance would seem to depend, at least partially, on whether the person perceives the doubts about her trustworthiness as reasonable. If such doubts are perceived as reasonable, then the decision to rely may well inspire someone to act so as to earn trust. On the other hand, if feelings of distrust are perceived as unreasonable, then the attempt to build trust through reliance may well be perceived as high-handed (Hieronymi 2008:231) or even insulting.

Hieronymi (2008:214) articulates a “purist” notion of trust according to which “one person trusts another to do something only to the extent that the one trustingly believes

that the other will do that thing.” In contrast, McGeer (2002:29) maintains that “it irresponsible and occasionally even tragic to regard these attitudes as purely responsive to evidence.” But this stance gives rise to a sticky problem: if the norms of trust and distrust are not purely evidential, how should they be rationally assessed? Can they be evaluated as they would by a bookmaker coolly seeking to maximize his advantage? According to McGeer (2002:37), the desire for this kind of affective neutrality is the mark of a narrowly self-protective and immature psyche. The alternative paradigm of rationality that she espouses foreswears this kind of calculation. Reason “is not used to dominate the other or to protect the self; it is used to continuously discover the other *and* the self, as each party evolves through the dynamics of interaction.” Rather than offering fortification against disappointment and betrayal, reason provides “the means for working through and moving beyond disappointment when such moments arise.”

Both Hieronymi (2008) and McGeer (2002) focus their analyses on norms relevant to the person who trusts or distrusts. It is worth noting that the moral and practical point of view of the subject who is trusted or distrusted is comparatively under-explored in the philosophical literature.¹³ Relevant questions include: What is the (or an) appropriate response to being wrongfully distrusted? How do moral and practical norms interact with each other in crafting and evaluating such a response?

One strategy for responding to unmerited distrust that might immediately suggest itself is to try to offer proof one’s trustworthiness. As you walk into a store, you might ostentatiously display your disinclination to shoplift by zipping up your bags before entering and keeping your hands always visible. But this strategy risks backfiring because it appears too artful. We often assume that genuine trustworthiness is spontaneous and unselfconscious. But how can the wrongly distrusted person deliberately project trustworthiness in a way that appears artless? Psychologists of emotions find that the characteristic signals of sincere emotional expressions tend to be executed by muscle systems that are very difficult, if not impossible, to bring under conscious control (Ekman 2003). Drawing both on psychology and on Daoist thought, Slingerland (2014:320) describes the paradox of *wu-wei* as the problem “of how we can consciously try to be sincere or effortless ... to get into a state that, by its very nature, seems unattainable through conscious striving.” Just as trustworthiness is hard to fake, false impressions of untrustworthiness (based on, for example, one’s accent, the color of one’s skin) are difficult to counteract. Effortful behaviors aimed at appearing trustworthy are the stock and trade of confidence tricksters; when such strategies are recognized they backfire whether the person is honest or not.

Direct confrontation with those who distrust us is another possible strategy. Consider the case of an African-American customer who is conspicuously followed around a store. Challenging unmerited distrust might serve to raise consciousness as well as to address an insult. But distrust is often not demonstrably manifest, and it is easily denied by those who bear the attitude and who may be oblivious, self-deceived or in denial about their distrust. So, in many contexts it may not be wise to reveal knowledge or suspicion of the distrustful attitudes of others. Sometimes the best available strategy for the distrusted is to suppress any indication of awareness that they are insulted by wrongful distrust, and to make as if they take themselves to be trusted. Trying to appear as if you take yourself to be trusted could be easier to pull off than trying to appear trustworthy. It could also lead to the feeling that you are in fact trusted via the familiar pathway of “fake it till you make it.” This in turn might lead to being trusted, since in feeling that you are trusted you send the signals of trustworthiness in a characteristically effortless way. Doubtless, this strategy is uncertain and requires great

patience. It also relies on a kind of misdirection that depending on the individual may be personally alienating, difficult to pull off, and is perhaps also morally dubious depending on how rigorous we are about authenticity and deception.

A third avenue is to try to cultivate a kind of noble generosity in being patient with unmerited distrust. The liability of this strategy, it seems to me, is that it risks suppressing warranted indignation, stoking resentment and compromising a person's self-respect. The enjoyment of the public trust – as Thomas puts it, “to have strangers regard one as a morally decent person in a variety of contexts” (Thomas 1990:84) – is fundamental to participation in civic life and something that decent people are entitled to irrespective of race, national origin, class or gender. Surely we should be morally indignant when others are denied this entitlement. So is this indignation not also appropriate for the person who is the target of prejudicial distrust?

What constitutes an appropriate response to unmerited distrust will often depend on the basis of the distrust (e.g. – prejudicial vs merely mistaken attribution of incompetence, prejudicial vs merely mistaken attribution of criminality).¹⁴

The complexity and the context-dependence of such considerations makes the topic both daunting and ripe for careful and methodical exploration.

Notes

- 1 Krishnamurthy (2015), following Hawley (2012), adopts “x distrusts y to \emptyset ” as the explanatorily fundamental form.
- 2 Jones (2013:62) points out that “we want those who can be trusted to identify themselves so that we can place our trust wisely” and she labels this further dimension to trust “rich trustworthiness.” There is also a distinctive kind of untrustworthiness when a person is unable or unwilling to identify the limits of their trustworthiness to signal the domains in which they lack competence or are unwilling to be responsive to trust.
- 3 Naomi Scheman points out to me that such distrust may not be general in other ways. For example, I might distrust a racist police officer quite generally in his interactions with me but not in his interactions with you (because you and he are of the same race).
- 4 Another is Krishnamurthy's (2015) account.
- 5 One might think that you *do* have a genuine commitment (after all you have committed yourself!), but no *obligation* to meet that commitment. Hawley (2014:18) presents independent reasons to prefer the commitment account of trust and distrust to the obligation account.
- 6 Hawley (2014:17) notes that “part of trustworthiness is the attempt to avoid commitments you are not competent to fulfill.”
- 7 Karen Frost-Arnold (2012) offers an account where trust involves taking the proposition that someone will do something as a premise in one's practical reasoning.
- 8 Cf. Pettit (1995).
- 9 Cf. Alfano (2016).
- 10 Cf. McGeer (2008).
- 11 In this vein, Ryan Preston-Roedder argues that having a measure of faith in humanity is central to moral life (2013) and articulates a notion of “civic trust” that involves interacting with strangers without fear while relying on their goodwill (2015).
- 12 Cf. Hieronymi (2008).
- 13 But see Potter (2002:12).
- 14 Thank you to Naomi Scheman for directing my attention to these issues.

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