

TRUST AS A TWO-PLACE RELATION¹

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How should we think of trust? It has become normal, at least in anglophone analytic philosophy, to think of it as fundamentally a three-place relation with an infinitival component: A trusts B to do C.² Here we aim to question that idea. We don't deny that this three-place relation exists, expressed in a perfectly natural English idiom, with a useful role to play. Rather, we explore the idea that, in giving an account of trust, this three-place relation provides us with the wrong place to start, and that we should start instead with the two-place relation, A trusts B, and work from there. Likewise, we suggest, for three-place relations that put something else in the third place: A trusts B with C; A trusts B in the role of C. These too we deny are fundamental.

What do we mean by the 'wrong place to start'? A few parallels—more or less apt—might help fix ideas. Some think that we should understand knowledge as built out of belief and truth and something else. Others object that this is the wrong place to start, that with those ingredients we will never arrive at an account of knowledge. Some think that we should understand enduring persons by starting with time-slices and joining them together with relations of psychological connectedness or the like. Others object that this is the wrong place to start; with such ingredients we will never arrive at an account of persons.

We suggest that the same is true of trust. If we start with a three-place relation, and try to understand the two-place in terms of it, we will not succeed. There are other concepts where no one would deny such a claim. No one—or at least, hardly anyone—

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² There are many instances. In the earliest discussion we know of, Horsburgh (1960) distinguishes two- and three-place trust, but goes on to prefer the former. For an early endorsement of the primacy of three-place trust, see (Hardin 1992) For one that has been influential on at least one of the current authors, see (Holton 1994). In his defence though, Holton does in that piece talk about the importance of 'trusting relationships'. Baier, although explicitly working with a three-place account, rather than a two-place, worried that this might be 'forced and wrong': 'For there are some people whom one would not trust with anything, and that is not because one has considered each good one might entrust to that one and rejected that possibility. We want then to say that unless we first trust them we will not trust them *with anything*. I think that there is some truth in this, which my account has not captured.' (Baier 1986, 258–9).

thinks that we should understand what it is for Antony to love Cleopatra in terms of the three place relation ‘Antony loves Cleopatra for her ___’, or in terms of any other three-place relation. Likewise hardly any one thinks that we should understand the two place relation of friendship in terms of some underlying three-place relation (here we don’t even have any natural English expressions for the two-place). To this extent at least, we suggest that trust might be like love and friendship.

Rather than providing support, these last two comparisons might be taken to show what is wrong with the two-place account of trust. For unlike love and friendship, trust can be partial: we can trust people in some ways and not others. In time we will need to accommodate this. But not yet. We start, instead, with some positive reasons for embracing the two-place account.

Arguments for the Two-Place account

To warm up, we begin with some linguistic considerations.

1. *Other languages.* In English, as we have accepted, the three place construction with an infinitival third component is completely natural. But in core Romance languages—Latin, Italian, French—it is not readily available. In French ‘J’ai confiance en toi pour X’ is colloquial, but not in the dictionaries; in Italian ‘Ho fiducia in te per X’ is simply unacceptable, as is the equivalent in Latin ‘Fidem habeo alicui ut X’. It is of course possible that the fundamental trust relation cannot be expressed directly in these languages, and so has to be expressed in roundabout terms (typically in terms of counting on someone to do something, although that suggests something closer to mere reliance). It is also possible that the English notion of trust cannot be translated into these languages. But we suggest that a more plausible claim is that the anglophone accounts of trust have been unduly influenced by a construction that is available in English, but that even there should not be seen as central.

2. *Distrust.* Katherine Hawley (2014) has usefully pointed out that most accounts of trust have made no mention of distrust. We follow her in thinking that distrust is a contrary, not a contradictory, of trust: to distrust someone is not simply to fail to trust them. Moreover, it is not merely a dispositional state. If we distrust someone, it is not just that we would react in some particular way if certain circumstances arose; rather, we are, in some way that needs elucidation, thinking *badly* of them. As the OED says of the related notion of mistrust, it is ‘to suspect [their] actions, intentions, or motives.’ Strikingly though, even in English there is no three-place syntactic construction of distrust. We do not say that we distrust someone *to do something*. We simply distrust, or mistrust, a person.³ But if distrust is in some important way a contrary of trust, and so inherits the basic form of trust, that suggests that trust itself is primarily an attitude to a person.

³ There is an obsolete usage in which ‘mistrust’ does take a three-place construction; but here it means something very different, something along the lines of ‘to suspect’: ‘He said he was taking his Way to Boston, but is mistrusted to be going to Long or Rhode Island’ (OED)

3. *No sense of incompleteness.* Many relations are genuinely, fundamentally, three-place: consider 'to give' and 'to tell'. Even if, as in the latter case, the expression syntactically accepts a two-place construction—'Jules told Jim'—this leaves a question in the air: 'What did Jules tell him?' Or consider reliance, a state that has been widely taken to have strong affinities to trust. If you simply say that you rely on some individual, then the immediate question arises: rely on them in what way, for what? Trust is different. If Jules tells us that he trusts Jim, no parallel question is pressing. In fact, if we do ask it—'You trust him to do what?'—we raise a question mark about the trust itself; by suggesting that it is partial, we suggest that it is not the full thing. (Use of the present continuous—'I am trusting him'—is rather different in most dialects of English, in that it does suggest incompleteness. We return to this below.)

So, we have three broadly linguistic considerations that point towards a two-place account of trust. But even taken together, they are little more than suggestive. To go further we suggest that we think about the purpose of trust; about the role that it plays in our lives.⁴

It has often been contended that trust involves a form of vulnerability of the part of the person trusting; and often this is developed as a kind of ignorance. In some accounts this is understood as ignorance of whether the trust is well-placed: we trust in so far as we cannot be sure that the person trusted will not let us down. That, however, is implausible: on such an account, as our knowledge of a person grows, so our trust in them must diminish. We suggest that the idea of vulnerability should be developed in a rather different direction. In our view, trust centrally involves a preparedness to grant a certain power or control. In trusting, we grant discretion, whether to act, or to judge, or even just to feel. Granting such discretion is not all there is to trust; indeed it may not even be necessary: we will discuss the role of reactive attitudes shortly. But it is central.

If this is right, then there is a good reason why trust cannot in general be understood as a three-place relation, with the third place taken by an action. For very often one grants discretion exactly because one doesn't know what action should be taken: either one doesn't know how things will turn out, or even if one does, one lacks the expertise to know how to respond. That's the point about complete trust: the kind of trust we might have in a parent, or a partner, or a child who is old enough. It is not that we envisage a particular action that we trust them to perform. We trust them simpliciter. Could we be said to trust them to act in our best interests? Not necessarily, since there may be cases in which they rightly judge that our interests aren't paramount. Could we at least be said to trust them to do whatever is best? Even that is too specific. Perhaps they will simply do what is good enough (we don't have to think that they are angels) and that will be good enough for our trust to have been respected. Perhaps there are things that we would not trust them to do, even though we do trust them. Most likely, especially if the relationship is a healthy one, we haven't even thought these things too much. The fundamental fact is that we trust them. Exactly how that would translate into particular actions is something on which we need have no view.

⁴ For a presentation of that general approach, see (Simpson 2012).

(The analogy is not perfect, but there is again a parallel here with love. Insecure lovers sometimes play the *Would you love me if ...* game: Would you love me if I lost my beauty? Would you love me if I lost my money? Would you love me if I became a fascist? Notoriously, the revelatory returns are poor. Since love is not built out of affection for particular features, little is shown by asking whether it would survive the loss of those features. Trust, we are suggesting, is much the same.)

It might still be insisted that that the two-place relation is really some form of generalization of the three-place: 'I trust you' is shorthand for 'I trust you to F, for some class of F'. Perhaps the speaker has not fully worked out the range of the quantification, but if pressed they could say something.

We doubt that this is right. As evidence against it, consider again how the logic of trust differs from that of a true three-place relation: again we take reliance as our foil. Suppose that Jules asks Jim if he might borrow his car. Jules hesitates for a moment (it is a rather nice car), and then replies:

(1) Ok, I trust you. You can borrow it.

That is a perfectly normal thing to say. In contrast, if Jules had said:

(2) Ok, I rely on you. You can borrow it.

we would conclude that he probably wasn't a native speaker of English. Why the difference? It's not that we couldn't put in three place constructions here. Both of the following are acceptable:

(3) Ok, I trust you to take good care of it. You can borrow it.

(4) Ok, I rely on you to take good care of it. You can borrow it

Since we can't start with (4) and convert it to (2) by simply eliding the third place and implicitly generalizing over it, why think that that is what is happening in the move from (3) to (1)? Instead (1) seems to work in a radically different way. Talk of trust is used to explain or justify lending the car. It's as though Jules had said 'I trust you, *therefore* you can borrow it'.

One further observation lends force to this interpretation. The three-place uses with 'rely', and equally those with 'count on', are more natural if their aspect is changed to the present continuous:

(5) Ok, I'm relying on you to take good care of it. You can borrow it

(6) Ok, I'm counting on you to take good care of it. You can borrow it.

The implication is that the state of reliance is something that will *accompany* the borrowing of the car. Unlike the state of trust that is referred to in (1), it is not something that is antecedent to the borrowing, and thereby able to justify it. We can use a parallel present continuous construction with 'trust':

(7) Ok, I'm trusting you to take good care of it. You can borrow it.

This does seem to be an essentially three-place construction. The two-place ‘I’m trusting you’, unlike ‘I trust you’, does cry out for completion: ‘Trusting me to do what?’ is the natural response. How then should we think of the three-place trust relation exhibited in sentences like (3) and (7)?

Three-place trust surely bears some connection to the corresponding three-place reliance: if you trust someone to do something you rely on them to do it. So a first thought might be that you trust A to F iff you trust A, and rely on them to F. That does ground three-place trust in two-place, but it doesn’t seem right. Trust looks to be partial, in that one can trust an individual, but not trust them in all areas; we will discuss how this is possible in a two-place account shortly. If that is right, then one might rely on someone in the areas in which one does not trust them; but then three place trust cannot be simply trust plus reliance. More plausible is the idea that three-place trust arises when the reliance is embedded within the trust: you rely on A as part of the trust that you show them. Again, the two-place relation is fundamental, and the three-place is constructed out of it. Seen in this way, it is not surprising that some languages (such as English) have a distinct locution for the particular complex phenomenon of three-place trust, while others (such as Italian) do not.

Trust, Reliance and Reactive Attitudes

Let us think more broadly about the relation between trust and reliance. This has been the subject of much philosophical scrutiny. Many have attempted to build trust conjunctively out of reliance: if one trusts, then one relies, *and* some other condition obtains. But if we are right that reliance is at heart a three-place relation, whilst trust is at heart two-place, they cannot fit together in quite this simple way. The point comes out when we think of the role of the reactive attitudes: the role of attitudes such as gratitude and betrayal in an account of trust. We agree with those who have argued that such attitudes do mark a significant distinction between trust and mere reliance.⁵ Whilst we might rely on a machine to perform some task, we do not feel anything approaching gratitude when it does, nor do we feel betrayed when it does not.⁶ A conjunctive account might try to account for this by saying that to trust someone is to rely on them to do something, and then to invest this reliance with the reactive attitude —a readiness to feel grateful or betrayed depending on how things go. That, however, is to read trust as implicitly three-place.

In contrast, on the two-place account that we are exploring, when one trusts, one primarily takes a reactive attitude towards the person. As a result there will typically be instances of three-place reliance, and of three-place trust, which will indeed result in a sense of gratefulness or betrayal depending on how things transpire. But these do not exhaust the characteristics of trust, nor are they necessary for it. There may be

⁵ For the notion of reactive attitudes, see (Strawson 1962); for its application to trust, (Holton 1994).

⁶ This is also coherent with the neuroscientific evidence from (Kosfeld et al. 2005) that oxytocin, the neuropeptide that seems correlated with trust, is released when a subject is interacting with another human being, not with a machine.

instances of trust even when there is no opportunity for reliance: we do not automatically stop trusting someone when they lose the power to act in the ways in which we relied on them. Taking the reactive attitude that is characteristic of trust can involve a host of further attitudes: affective responses even in the absence of reliance; a readiness to form certain beliefs and to desist from forming others; a readiness to testify to others; an abandoning of certain lines of enquiry; and so on. We doubt that any of these is strictly necessary for trust. If enough of the others are in place we may have a case of trust, even if it is not as full as it could be. Trust is, to use an old fashioned term, a cluster concept.⁷

As an illustration, consider the place of belief. How central to trust is belief in performance? Pamela Hieronymi has argued that it is essential, at least to 'full-fledged' trust.⁸ Jules and Jim agree to meet at a restaurant. Although Jules duly arrives a little early at the appointed place, he lacks the belief—quite unreasonably we may suppose—that Jim will turn up. Jim appears right on time. Suppose he were to discover Jules' lack of belief. Then he could, says Hieronymi, 'rightly complain that [Jules'] lack of confidence betrays a lack of trust.' There is clearly something lacking in Jules' attitude; his trust could have been greater. But is it true, as Hieronymi concludes, that he didn't really trust? Change the example a little. Suppose that Jules' scepticism, although still quite unfounded, turns out in fact to be corroborated: Jim never shows up. Remonstrating later, Jules complains 'I trusted you'. Could Jim rightly respond 'No you didn't; you didn't believe that I would come'? We think not.

In the original example Jim has a legitimate complaint that he is not believed, a complaint that underpins the reasonable charge that he is not trusted as fully as he might have been. Once wronged, it's understandable that his complaint verges on the hyperbolic. But we should not be dazzled by the legitimacy of that way of voicing the complaint into thinking that belief is really a necessary condition for trust; change the aggrieved party and the intuitions change. Hieronymi draws a sharp distinction between trusting someone to do something, which requires belief, and entrusting them, which doesn't. We doubt that there is such a clear binary division, but suggest instead a continuum with many factors.⁹

We say much the same about distrust. Here again we have a reactive attitude, and one with multiple parts. Again there is a sense of betrayal when any (perhaps unavoidable) reliance is disappointed, although here it is coloured with grim expectation rather than with surprise. There may be gratitude when reliance is upheld, perhaps with a sense of guilt at having misjudged the person, or of cynicism if the initial judgment is maintained. More commonly there will be a set of actions and attitudes connected with avoiding any possible reliance, persuading others to do likewise, and perhaps plotting revenge. And again, whilst there may be a belief that the person distrusted will

⁷ See (Jones 2004) for some similar ideas. We agree with Jones that the account in (Holton 1994) was too focussed on betrayal.

⁸ (Hieronymi 2008).

⁹ Again the neuroscientific evidence, such as it is, suggests that belief is not terribly central. A higher level of oxytocin, which seems correlated with a higher readiness to trust, appears not to increase the subject's *beliefs* that the risks will be rewarded.

act, or fail to act, in certain ways, this is not essential. These considerations reinforce the syntactic evidence that we mentioned earlier: trust is primarily an attitude to a person.

The Extent of Trust

We have sketched a positive case for the idea that trust is centrally a two-place relation. We now address the obvious objection.

A two-place account need not imply that trust is all or nothing: if we are right that it is a cluster concept, trust will come in degrees. It might or might not involve certain reactive attitudes, might or might not involve belief, etc., and the degree of trust will change as these factors change. But the two-place account does seem to imply that, to whatever degree one trusts someone, the attitude will be uniform with respect to whatever they do. Yet that goes against the common-place observation that our trust can be different in different spheres: that someone might trust their partner, except where alcohol is concerned; or that they might trust their plumber to fix the hot water system, whilst not trusting them with their bank details, or their car, or their children.

Not every idiomatic use of the term 'trust' refers to a relationship of trust: no one thinks that an account should capture, at least in a literal way, the dismissive 'Trust him!' that follows an not unexpected lapse. But these two examples do seem to be genuine cases of trust; they involve conceding discretion within the context of the kinds of reactive attitudes that we have already discussed. So how is the two-place approach to account for them?

The first thing to say is that the two cases we have given are rather different. The first involves a general attitude of two-place trust, with a qualification: the trust gives out when alcohol is involved. Such qualified trust is straightforwardly handled on the two place approach. The two-place attitude is still fundamental. One arrives at the qualified attitude by starting with it and then knocking something off. Other cases follow a similar pattern, motivated by a welter of different considerations about competence or motivation: 'I don't trust her when it comes to dogs'; 'I don't trust him once his relatives are involved' and so on.

The case of the plumber cannot be thought of in this way though. It is not as if one's attitude to one's plumber is like one's attitude to one's partner, except qualified in various ways (unless, of course, the plumber is one of the family). We don't start with lots of trust and then reduce; quite the reverse: we start with rather little, and then, perhaps, if things go well, we add more.

Nevertheless, we suggest that the two-place model is more revelatory, even for the case of the plumber. We still trust them, first and foremost, as a person; the variation comes from the fact that, given a typical relationship with a plumber, what is required to trust them as a person is radically less than is required to trust one's partner.

To see the advantage of this way of looking at things, note that it isn't typically true that we just trust the plumber to fix the hot water system. We trust them in a host of

other ways too, more or less closely related to their professional role. If, when they are in the attic, they notice that some tiles have come adrift, we trust them to tell us. If the cat falls into the header tank while they have the top off, we trust them to fish it out, or at least to sound the alarm.

This might suggest that our attitude to the plumber is still properly thought of as three place though; it's just that the third place, rather than being taken by an infinitival clause, should be taken by a description of their role. We trust the plumber in their role as plumber. But we don't think that that is quite right either. While their role as plumber may provide the core to our trusting relationship to them, it will not exhaust it. There will be other features that stem simply from them being an adult human being whom we let into our house; and others that stem from the particular relationship we form once we get to know them (as source, and a recipient, of opinion or advice on other topics; a source, and a recipient, of help in other areas). Could we spell all this out? The best we can say is: we trust them in the appropriate way given our relationship to them.

In short then, the relationship of trust that we have to different people is indeed relative: to reiterate, the trust one bears to one's partner is different to that one bears to one's plumber since what is appropriate for trust in those two relationships is different. Trust is thus relative to the relationship that we have to them. But once we see it like that, we have lost anything useful that can go in the third place of a three-place relation. You trust X in the way appropriate for X. What goes in the third place is just what goes in the second. Of course, this isn't static. As we get to know them better, our relationship to the plumber may change: more trust may become appropriate, or, if things have gone badly, less (although losing trust tends to be catastrophic rather than gradual). Again, an analogy with friendship may be helpful. Friendships come in degrees: some are closer than others. But we don't conclude from that that friendship is really a three place relation; it is a two-place relation of variable strength and depth.¹⁰

Some Implications

We conclude with a brief discussion of some implications of our proposal.

Thinking about the appropriate form of trust for a relationship helps explain why trust can be unwelcome. We might, for instance, not welcome the level of disclosure—of personal secrets say—with which we are trusted. For a parallel, consider the case of gifts. Some gifts are unwelcome. Often this is simply because one doesn't want the thing: it is ugly, tasteless, useless or whatever. Sometimes though it is because one doesn't want to be given it by this person. Had it arrived as the result of a mistake by a mail order company it would have been very welcome indeed. But coming from this person it signals, and tries to create, an unwelcome degree of intimacy.

¹⁰ There are broader issues in the background here about whether relativity should generally be understood in terms of adding another argument place. For discussion see (Spencer, Forthcoming)

We suggest that much the same happens with unwelcome trust. If a relationship of trust comes in degrees, the degree can be changed. If both parties are in harmony, the change can be smooth. But if one wants more than the other—perhaps the other thinks they are going too fast, or perhaps they simply do not want such a relationship with this person—then the extended trust will be unwelcome.

At the lower extreme, how thin can two-place trust be? Can we have it to those we have never previously met? That is an empirical question, but there is good data on it. Since the 1950s sociologists have been asking people the question: ‘Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted, or can’t you be too careful in dealing with people?’ This is clearly two-place trust; ‘generalized trust’ as Eric Uslaner has termed it, arguing that it is essentially moral.¹¹ The findings here have been robust. Levels of generalized trust differ across generations, and within these, very slowly, across time; they are not very responsive to experience; they correlate with optimism, and are higher in societies with great equality. The findings are too consistent to be dismissed. Note though that the question asks people about their *preparedness* to trust. ‘Can most people be trusted?’ is a complex question, bridging both the descriptive—‘Are you prepared to trust most people?’—and the normative—‘Is such an approach justified?’ (‘Can I trust him?’ is normally a way of asking about the other’s trustworthiness rather than about one’s own trusting capacities.) The talk here is not really about generalized trust, but about a justified preparedness to extend it in a general way to new cases. Nevertheless it is clearly two-place trust that is at issue: what is extended is a moralized attitude to a person.

A different issue concerns the possibility of trust towards institutions: towards governments, nations, companies, banks and the like. If trust is first and foremost a two-place relation to a person, what are we to make of this? Certainly we find plenty of talk about trusting institutions. ‘We now have the trust in Greece’s government which was lost over the past months’ says Angela Merkel. Perhaps here she is just talking about reliance (‘The EU can rely on Greece to repay its loans’), but we suspect she means more than that. The banks, in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis, have asked how they can rebuild the trust that they have lost. They don’t simply want their customers to rely on them; given the realities of the financial world, the customers have little alternative. What the banks really want is that they be allowed to do what they want to do without regulation; that is, they want the kind of discretion that we give to people when we genuinely trust them. What they want is something very much like two-place trust. Can we make sense of such an attitude to a bank?

The question of trusting institutions breaks into two parts. The first is empirical. Do people in fact have the same sorts of trusting attitudes towards institutions that they have towards people? The second is normative: is it appropriate or good for them to do so?

¹¹ (Uslaner, 2002). In contrast, Uslaner takes the three-place relation ‘X trusts Y to F’ to be a mark of strategic trust: trust undertaken on the basis of a calculation of its utility. This may sometimes be how it is used, but we don’t see why the three-place construction can’t also be used to pick out a particular application of generalized moral trust.

There is some research on the first of these: some evidence that trust in institutions (most centrally the government) does not correlate very strongly with ‘generalized’ two-place trust towards people, and that it tends to be more instrumental. The lack of correlation does not by itself show that it is not two-place trust; it could just be that the people who trust individuals are different to those who trust institutions. In contrast the finding that institutional trust is more instrumental does suggest that it is of a rather different nature: offered only in return for benefit, removed if that benefit is not forthcoming, perhaps less ‘moralized’ in Uslaner’s terms (less likely to involve reactive attitudes and their ilk in ours). The role is something that may vary across different societies and different periods. We trust the grocers not to sell us adulterated bread, but do we trust them not to charge more than their competitors? Would we be indignant if we discovered that they did, or would we think it our own fault for failing to check? It seems plausible that in a market society we are more likely to take the latter view than we would in a traditional society. To that extent we have moved away from a ‘moral economy’.¹²

What of the normative question? This in turn appears to divide into two. First there is the question of whether it is normatively appropriate to treat institutions in such a way. It strikes us that there is no *obvious* inappropriateness involved in extending two-place trust to an institution. Institutions can be person-like in many ways: more so than most machines. They can plausibly have plans, act fairly or unfairly, show callousness or compassion. We can interact with them as though they were persons without absurd anthropomorphization. If there is something odd about trusting them it more plausibly comes from consideration about the need for reciprocity. Trust seems to lie somewhere between love and friendship in this regard. Friendship can be unequal in many ways, but it cannot be totally one-sided: to discover that no friendly attitudes are returned, is to discover that what one thought was a friendship in fact was not. Love, in contrast, can persist spectacularly in full knowledge that it is unrequited. What about trust? There is certainly something good about reciprocal trust, and something unstable about many cases in which it is one-sided. If institutions cannot trust us—if they lack the ability to have the relevant reactive attitudes—is there something wrong with trusting them? Perhaps so, although we should be cautious in moving too quickly here; certainly many streams of Christianity have thought that our relationship to God involves something like one-way trust.

Lacking a definitive answer to this first question, what of the second? Is there pragmatic advantage in trusting institutions, rather than simply making calculations as to whether to rely on them? We see two clear goods that come from trusting people: an instrumental one, that trust engenders further trust and further cooperation; and an intrinsic one, that trust between people is a good in itself. It is far from obvious that either of these apply to institutions. For instance, it seems to us that, rather than affording trust to banks, we should be monitoring more closely exactly what they are doing.¹³

¹² For that term, and much stimulating though controversial discussion, see (Thompson 1981).

¹³ For thoughts along these lines see (Warren, 2008).

But here too we should be cautious about generalizing from institutions which in many people's eyes have become villains. Take instead an institution to which people's attitudes were very different: the British National Health Service for instance. At its foundation the NHS was regarded with widespread idealism, a wonderful institution that took medical care out of the realm of profit, and offered it to everyone. The NHS certainly inspired loyalty, from staff and patients. Did they trust it? If it is right to say that of any institution it is right to say it here: they certainly gave discretion over health care to the NHS, relied on it, invested it with a wide range of reactive attitudes.

Things do not look quite so rosy now. Newspapers can lament 'the breakdown of trust that is going on between our health service and us'.¹⁴ Some will argue that there is no reason for lament: there should never have been trust in the first place, just a careful reckoning of the benefits to be gained from state-provided medicine. But as many commentators have pointed out, state provision may not be robust once many people opt out. If, as a result of a more critical attitude, a number of citizens decide to pay for private medicine rather than trusting the NHS to provide it, the political will to pay for the NHS may decline sharply.

We can focus the point with reference to Richard Titmuss's famous discussion of blood donation (Titmuss 1970). Titmuss argued that the voluntary donation of blood in the UK resulted in more and better quality blood being available to the NHS than was available in the USA under a system in which some donors were voluntary and others were paid. His argument was that UK donors were primarily motivated by altruism; once a market system was in place, such altruistic motivation would be undermined, leaving only those who were desperate for cash prepared to sell their blood.

The details of Titmuss's account have come in for some significant criticism; it certainly isn't a water-tight piece of social science.¹⁵ But there are some core ideas there that have a great deal of plausibility, and are worthy of more research. The first is Titmuss's explicit contention that altruistic donation will be undermined by a market. But behind that is the thought that the practice of voluntary blood donation Titmuss described was made against the backdrop of an institution that was well trusted.¹⁶ It may be that such institutional trust is necessary for the practice to get going; that individual altruism like this cannot effectively flourish without it. If there is so—where we think it is a genuinely open question—then we would have good reason for welcoming institutional trust. Some bodies may need it if they are to carry out their purpose.

¹⁴ *Daily Mirror*, 2nd September 2014.

¹⁵ For criticism of the methodology see (Rapport and Maggs 2002); for some evidence that the motives of donors may be more mixed than Titmuss thought see (Ferguson et al. 2008).

¹⁶ Titmuss was well aware of this: "We cannot understand the National Blood Transfusion Service without also understanding the National Health Service, its origins, development and values" p. 60. The NHS, he thought, "has allowed and encouraged sentiments of altruism, reciprocity and social duty to express themselves; to be made explicit in identifiable patterns of behaviour by all social groups and classes" (p. 292).

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