



Time to Get Emotional: Trust, Rationality and the Spectre of Manipulative Mentality

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Abstract

This article will engage with the growing literature on the subject of trust in international politics by pointing out remaining problems and contradictions in recent critiques against the rationalist mainstream. Although it finds itself in agreement with these critiques it will argue that despite its more nuanced conception of trust this critical scholarship does not quite succeed in either leaving the rationalist conceptions behind or in achieving a more substantial account of the role and nature of trust. In order to do so the article will first challenge the remaining methodological framework in which trust scholarship is couched. Secondly, the article will proceed to show how the emotive element in acts of trust can be highlighted when approached through a phronetic lens and how the introduction of emotion into trust scholarship in IR will allow a richer and thicker study of the phenomenon of trust in international politics. Centrally, the article will claim that any study of trust which ignores the elementary emotional component will automatically repeat the mistakes rationalist accounts have made over the last decades.

Keywords:

Trust, Rationality, Emotion, Uncertainty

Trust is a widely discussed concept in sociology, philosophy, economics and law and to an increasing degree in IR (Baier, 1995; Booth and Wheeler, 2008; Fierke, 2009; Gambetta, 1988; Hardin, 1993; Hollis, 1998; O'Neill, 2002; Wheeler, 2009a). It is a commonplace to state that trust is one of the central backbones of any societal or political association and lies at the heart of many interpersonal and inter-societal relations (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 229; Hollis, 1998: 1; Lahno, 2001: 172; Lewis and Weigert, 1985: 968; Seligman, 1997: 13). Unsurprisingly then, many conceptualisations exist, expressing agreements and disagreements relating to the nature, function, structure and emergence of trust (for a representative selection see for instance Baier, 1995; Gambetta 1988; Hardin 1993; Hollis 1998; Holton, 1994; Kydd, 2000; Kydd, 2007; Sztompka, 1999; Wright, 2010).

This article will engage with the growing literature on the subject of trust in international politics by pointing out remaining problems and contradictions in recent critiques against the rationalist mainstream. As will become clear in the following sections, this article finds itself in agreement with the critique of rationalist approaches to trust with its conception of the trusting agents as rational egoists whose actions can be abstractly grasped through instrumental rationality (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 233; Hollis, 1998: 44-46 and 59-62). Beyond this agreement, however, the article will argue that despite its more nuanced conception of trust this critical scholarship does not quite

succeed in either leaving the rationalist conception behind or in achieving a more substantial account of the role and nature of trust. By foreclosing a broader praxis-based analysis and presenting trust as a choice open to agents in specific interactions, these approaches still fail to differentiate substantially between different forms of trust and overlook the central role of emotions in acts of trust (Jones, 1996; Lahno, 2001). The outcome is an internally incoherent account that on the one hand rejects rationalist conceptions of trust and on the other still adheres to most of their fundamental assumptions thereby sidelining a serious engagement with the emotional side of trusting.

The main elements of this critique will first challenge the remaining methodological framework in which trust scholarship is couched. Rather than relying upon an approach that still shares considerable elements with rationalist accounts this article will argue for the relevance of a phronetic-phenomenological approach which is able to highlight the central non-rational elements in occurrences of trust which so far (due to methodological bias) have been sidelined and overlooked. Secondly, the article will proceed to show how the emotive element in acts of trust can be highlighted when approached through a phronetic lens and how the introduction of emotion into trust scholarship in IR will allow a richer and thicker study of the phenomenon of trust in international politics. Centrally, the article will claim that any study of trust which

ignores the elementary emotional component will automatically repeat the mistakes rationalist accounts have made over the last decades. A radical break with the prevailing methodological and theoretical apparatus in IR seems necessary even if this necessitates the abandonment of a manipulative mentality (Euben, 1990: 16) which structures many approaches in IR in its predominant pursuit of systematisation, replicability, controllability and ‘practical relevance’.

The notion of trust in international politics

In the same way as the pervasiveness of trust in social and political relations is a widely acknowledged phenomenon, so is the presence of many different meanings of the term ‘trust’ itself (Wright, 2010: 615-6). Initially we can at least differentiate between three different uses of the word trust. First, it is used to describe a relation between an individual or group and an abstract system or principle (Pettit, 1995: 204; Seligman, 1997: 17-8), e.g. the trust in democracy or the trust in the nuclear non-proliferation regime. Secondly, trust is used to describe a purely functional relation between individuals, e.g. the trust in a doctor to treat my illness correctly (Pettit, 1995: 204; Seligman, 1997: 17-8). Finally, trust describes a quality in personal relationships which exceeds pure functionality and exhibit a stronger emotive and multi-dimensional basis, e.g. trust between friends or family members (Seligman, 1997: 17-8). To make things even more complicated these three faces of trust are not mutually exclusive; in fact they

are very often intertwined. If my doctor is also my friend, all three dimensions of trust might come together: I trust him personally, I trust him in his role as doctor and I might have a general trust in the health care system due to his so far successful treatment of my illness (which bears witness to a high professional standard) and his access to the latest medicine and equipment.

Most importantly for our purposes, however, and this is where the focus of scholarship on trust in IR lies, seems to be the nature and emergence of trustful relations between agents in the international realm. Using the above descriptions we will have to assess both ‘functional trust’ as well as ‘personal trust’ in due course in respect to their nature and role in the international realm. Trust in abstract systems or principles will be excluded in this article for purposes of parsimony.

Given its widespread use in social and political contexts, it is surprising to see that trust has hardly ever been explored in any meaningful depth within the discipline of IR (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 231; Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010a: 71; Wheeler, 2009d: 3).¹ Trust did appear in some studies in IR but compared to much of the literature outside the anarchical cage it took the disfigured and reductionist shape of an epiphenomenal by-product of cooperation among sovereign units in the international system (Leach and Sabatier, 2005: 491, McGillivray and Smith, 2000: 810). But even here trust is never

treated as a central variable since it is neither necessary nor sufficient for cooperation as Axelrod in his seminal work on cooperation in international politics has pointed out (Axelrod, 1990). Deriving their treatment from a broadly game theoretical perspective these rationalist accounts arrive at a somewhat mono-dimensional description of the nature and emergence of trust. Basically, they rely on two core assumptions which produce a specific understanding of trust. First, they consider trust in relation to a narrow conception of instrumental rationality (Hollis, 1998: 14) which reduces the specific agents in question to rational egoists which react to external preferences in their environment (Hollis, 1998: 14; Kydd, 2007: 6-12; Ruzicka and Wheeler 2010a: 72-73). Secondly, they consider these agents as entities representing certain systemic roles with given expectations about their preferences and subsequent behaviour (Hardin, 1993: 514-515). The agents which perform the actions in question are reduced to rational blueprints whose actions can be deduced and projected when contextual incentives are aligned with given preference structures and objectives of the respective decision makers (Hollis, 1998: 14-18; McGillivray and Smith, 2000: 813-817). The concomitant conception of agency portrays a rational mono-dimensional actor whose behaviour is calculable if sufficient information about incentives, objectives and preferences are known. In order to get this information rationalist approaches posit certain unalterable interests and preferences connected to the specific roles the decision makers represent. So, for instance, it is assumed, that a leader of a state prefers state survival over state

disintegration. Some of the preferences are not compatible with others and require a preference ranking in order to show the value attached to specific preferences over others (Hollis, 1998: 14-18).

The individual actor is interchangeable here as long as these external factors are stable and trust in these cases is basically reduced to a question of reliability (Hollis, 1998: 10-14) It becomes epiphenomenal since the explanation for a specific behaviour does not lie with the presence or absence of trust but rather can be derived from the combination of preference structures, incentives and objectives and connected to the systemic context and concomitant role expectations of the actors involved (Bluhm, 1987: 335; Hollis, 1998: 22 Seligman; 1997: 22-24). Trust, if it is referred to at all, simply describes successful cooperative behaviour – hence the realist conclusion that trusting is a dangerous strategy in an anarchical international system (Gralnick, 1988: 176; Mearsheimer, 1990: 12; Mearsheimer, 1994/95: 11); or, to say it with Martin Hollis, in this conception it becomes irrational to trust actors that act rational (Hollis, 1998: 10).

Recently, however, scholars in IR (most prolifically among them Nicholas Wheeler) have begun to treat trust as a central element in the political sphere, criticising the lack of scholarship and the poverty of purely rationalist accounts in IR so far (Booth and Wheeler, 2008; Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010a). They have realised that a conception of trust that relies on the reduction of individual actors to rational egoists who are solely

guided by external factors derived from a naturalised conception of international anarchy does not only miss the complexity of decision-making but also ignores the inter-personal nature of trust relationships. Lewis and Weigert (1985: 968), for instance, have pointed out that trust is a property of an interaction rather than a psychological state of mind. The person with whom we interact is more than a rational machine calculating costs and benefits. (also Wheeler and Ruzicka, 2010a: 70) Leaving aside psychological and emotional components central to the act of trusting and reducing the actors involved to rational egoists impoverishes and misconstrues a highly complex behaviour as a mere strategic choice.

Furthermore, it remains open to question what role trust actually plays in such strategic exchanges. If the behaviour of the agents is driven by their assessment of incentives what does trust add to the explanation of behaviour? As Mercer (2005: 99) has pointed out, trust as a concept becomes redundant in such accounts. “Rationalists drain the psychology from trust by turning it into a consequence of incentives. Emphasising incentives as the basis for trust eliminates both the need for trust and the opportunity to trust” (Mercer, 2005: 95).

In order to take trust more seriously and arrive at a more substantial and fruitful conceptualisation recent scholarship moves beyond the instrumental rational actor model and aims at incorporating a wider and more complex array of factors to

understand the emergence of trust. In this vein, recent accounts broadly identify two different ways in which trust emerges or can be built. First, trust can develop spontaneously as for instance in the case of the end of apartheid (Wheeler, 2007: 3; Both and Wheeler, 2008: 242-243; Wheeler, 2009b: 477; Wheeler, 2009c: 2; Wheeler, 2009d: 16-18) or it can develop through a process of small strategic exchanges (Wheeler, 2009d: 9-15) at the end of which trust emerges as an outcome of increased reliability and confidence and decreased uncertainty as in the case of Argentina and Brazil (Wheeler, 2009a, Wheeler, 2009b: 477; Wheeler, 2009c: 2; Wheeler, 2009d: 19-20).

Within such a conceptualisation, Nicholas Wheeler for instance (Wheeler, 2009a: 436; see also Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 232), calls for a “multidisciplinary approach rooted in a fuller appreciation of the human factor” (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 234) that rational accounts of trust simply ignore. Wheeler even goes so far as to argue that “[t]rust will remain elusive if we fail to grasp its emotional basis” (Wheeler, 2007: 6). As we will argue below, however, the ‘human factor’ as well as the ‘emotional basis’ within trust-relationships remains elusive even within these new critical accounts.

The Remnants of Rationality

Whereas the notion of the ‘human factor’ in cases of trust provides a welcome and central addition to existing scholarship on trust, its conceptual contents, however, is far from clear. Wheeler describes it variously as “feelings and attachments” (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 232), “empathy and the acceptance of counter-fear”, and the “emotional base” of trust. These three conceptualisations, however, are far from interchangeable and imply very different notions of what the ‘human factor’ might be and how it influences occurrences of trust. This lack of clarity in relation to the concept of the ‘human factor’ can most clearly be observed in the abovementioned two ways in which trust can emerge – a ‘leap of faith’ (Wheeler, 2009d: 16-18; see also Pettit, 1995: 216) on the one hand and a ‘policy of small steps’ (Wheeler, 2009d: 9-15), on the other.

s for the first, spontaneous ‘leaps in the dark’ are not a precondition for constituting or building trust (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 235) but rather are expressions of already present trust. If these spontaneous occurrences really show a plunge which embraces vulnerability with no safety nets then the leap does not build trust but expresses the already taken on trustful attitude of the one who makes the leap (Lagerspetz, 1998: 38-39). Rather the decision to make such a leap is expressive (not constitutive) of an already assumed trustful attitude. It might maintain trust through this decision but it did not emerge *because of* it. In these cases the question how and why trust emerged remains yet to be answered.

The policy of small steps seems equally problematic as it still harbours the functionalist undertones that were initially criticised in rationalist accounts of trust. The policy of small steps stipulates that in the absence of trust among two or more political actors we can try to reduce uncertainty and suspicion by initiating a series of exchanges which are low-risk but could build confidence in the respective other (Wheeler, 2010: 325-326). Over time these steps involve ever greater risks and confidence and reliability between the parties evolve up to a point where they are able to trust each other (Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010: 74, see also Hardin, 1993: 515). The argument assumes that trust becomes an option or choice or simply occurs if through a number of exchanges with increasing risks reliability and confidence have been increased (Wheeler, 2009a: 436-439). This line of reasoning clearly hints at an underlying rationalist logic since the explanation for how trust was constituted relies upon a sequence of events which influence the decision-making process of the actors involved in such a way that incentives are created which transform the so far irrational option into a rational one, i.e. trust becomes possible given the newly arisen circumstances and the changed nature of the risks involved in strategic exchanges.

The role of the 'human factor' in both these instances, however, remains elusive. Firstly, it seems to be reduced to an assessment of the psychological make-up of the

decision-makers. This might overcome the abstract blue-print of agency criticised in rationalist accounts but it only adds a psychological dimension which further differentiates between psychological profiles (e.g. risk-averse loss minimisers or risk-prone gain-maximisers) within a still intact rationalist understanding of trust. It is unclear at this stage of the argument how this ‘human factor’ provides a substantial critique of rationalist accounts since it seems fully compatible with it.

Secondly, it seems the ‘human factor’ serves as a *deus ex machina* to explain instances where trust-building policies failed to deliver the expected results, i.e. in cases where despite strategic exchanges and increased reliability trust does not develop. Then, it seems, we can point to ‘individual factors’ in the psychological and emotional make-up of the actors involved. But this simply leaves the ‘human factor’ as a negative *explanans* for failed cases of trust-building without conceptualising what exactly this ‘human factor’ signifies and how and when it comes into play.

There are now two possible ways to address these conceptual shortcomings. The easy one is to deliver a more coherent conceptualisation of the human factor and link it to empirical instances to test its validity and reliability. This approach, however, although it might achieve conceptual clarity will not address the lingering rationalist components as their persistence lies with a deeper commitment in recent scholarship on trust. The

second option for further explorations into the nature and emergence of trust, therefore, lies with a more substantial reorientation of the very question and methodology with which we approach trust as a phenomenon in international politics. As we can see from current publications engaging with the phenomenon of trust, the central concern lies with the question *what we can learn from past instances of trust in international politics in order to replicate actions, circumstances or arrangements that can help to foster trust between initially antagonistic agents* (Fierke, 2009: 497 and 502-504; Hardin, 1993: 514-515; Hosking, 2009: 494-495; Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010a: 74 and 80-82; Wheeler, 2009a: 429).

In order to achieve a more substantial and thicker account of the ‘human factor’ and, concomitantly, the notion of trust we should start by problematising the appropriateness of this research question. Asking what we can learn and how we can build trust already assumes a clear stand towards the notion and nature of trust and its relation to human agency. Basically, it simply assumes that trust is something we can ‘produce’ or even ‘re-produce’ if we only understand the conditions under which it is most likely to arise. (Holton, 1994: 63; Pettit, 1995: 220-225; Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010a: 71) In this way trust is always already framed as a functional attitude human agents can and do assume in certain circumstances and if we can only re-create these circumstances we will be able to deal with the all-pervasive uncertainty in international politics in a more

peaceful and productive manner. In other words the central question raised in recent accounts of trust pre-structures the inquiry in such a way as to imply a specific nature of trust and also a specific way of studying its appearance. The nature assumed is one in which trust appears as a result of human decision-making that arises under certain conditions (Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010b). It is assumed that instances of trust are positively correlated with certain enabling conditions. The way of studying instances of trust that follows from this conception is characterised by a theoretical attitude which abstracts from concrete instances to draw broader lessons of trusting and transpose these insights onto other cases (Wheeler, 2009a: 439). The appropriateness of both assumptions – trust as a wilfully directed choice as well as the appropriateness of a theoretical attitude to study it –, however, can be questioned. As will be argued in the remainder of the article it seems necessary to study trust from a practically engaged and phenomenologically descriptive angle in order to arrive at a thicker and more substantial account of its nature and emergence in the international realm. In order to achieve this more substantial understanding of trust we need to realise that since trust as a performative action emerges in inter-personal exchanges, it is necessary to pay closer attention to the praxeological side of this exchange. Rather than starting with a theoretical and abstract definition (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 230; Ruzicka and Wheeler, 2010a: 72) and simply apply that to empirical instances we should scrutinise how the meaning of trust is connected to certain practices.

Central hereby is a closer engagement with the emotional dimension of trust. In opening ourselves to the possibility of studying trust by incorporating a central emotive element in our analysis, however, we can already see the challenges involved. Most centrally, it would mean that trust in its inception escapes attempts to study it from a purely abstract point that tries to understand it as the consequence of incentives for action. That does not suggest that trust becomes irrational. We can still give reasons for why we trust someone. The sum of these reasons, however, will not add up to a full explanation of the phenomenon in question as we can see from the fact that we certainly find many people in our lives with the same characteristics but we do not trust all of them. Equally, we can easily trust someone with only few or none of these characteristics. The emotive element in the act of trusting escapes simple attempts of rational calculation and cannot be derived from a decision-making process in which we simply judge the risks and opportunities involved (Lahno, 2001: 172-173). The reasons we give for trusting someone are at best approximations which will never grasp the full content of our emotional attitude and at worst post-hoc rationalisations of our behaviour.

Subsequently, we would also have to rethink the way in which we study instances of trust. In Aristotelian terms, rather than trying to grasp the phenomenon of trust by relying on a combination of *episteme*, i.e. theoretical knowledge of the ‘know why’ and

techne, i.e. the instrumental knowledge of the ‘know how to’, we should redirect ourselves towards *phronesis*, i.e. the approach to knowledge that is action oriented and looks at “practical knowledge and practical ethics” (Flyvbjerg, 2001: 56-57). Trust then appears as a form of emotive coping that involves practical wisdom on the part of the trusting agents rather than an abstractly reasoned and technically implementable decision. It seems therefore central to proceed with our analysis by looking at the praxeological features of different forms of trust and try to establish in what relation they stand towards the acting agent as well as to one another.

On that basis, the following praxeological analysis will constitute the main part of this article and will develop a more coherent and differentiated conceptualisation of trust. As was outlined in the introduction we will specifically look at ‘functional trust’ (or reliability) on the one hand and ‘personal trust’ (trust proper) on the other. Given their current use it is most often assumed that they describe two different instances of the phenomenon of trust (see for instance Pettit, 1995: 203). The following lines, however, will question this assumption and argue that they constitute two completely different and qualitatively distinct phenomena. For reasons outlined below it will be suggested to differentiate them – if only heuristically – by referring to functional trust as reliance and to personal trust simply as trust. This distinction between reliance and trust from a praxeological perspective has already been widely acknowledged and referred to in

publications on trust outside IR (Baier, 1995: 98; Holton, 1994: 64; Lagerspetz, 1998: 48-49; Lahno, 2001: 178-181; Mercer, 2005: 95).² As will be shown, trying to bring both of them together under a broad concept of trust will not aid but rather hinder a clear and sound understanding of the nature and emergence of trust we are trying to achieve. Subsequently we will show how recent accounts of trust in IR only deal with reliance and thereby remain dangerously close to the rationalist conceptions they set out to criticise.

That this clear conceptual distinction between reliance on the one hand and trust on the other is warranted will be shown in three different ways. First, we will look at what agents actually do when they functionally trust as compared to cases of personal trust. Secondly, we will consider the negative ramifications for the respective forms and show how their perception and interpretation by the agents exhibit a second basis for a qualitative distinction. Finally, we will address the central notion of uncertainty and argue that reliance and trust are qualitatively distinct in relating to different kinds of uncertainty.

Praxeological reflections on ‘functional’ and ‘personal’ trust

In order to exemplify the different experiences and actions that human agents live through when they come to rely on others (functional trust) as compared to the way in which they come to trust others (personal trust) it seems most appropriate by starting off with looking at an example which allegedly shows a successful case of trust-building in the international arena. In *Beyond Waltz's Nuclear World: More Trust May be Better* Wheeler (2009a, see also Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 235-237) provides us with a prime example of what he interprets to be a successful case of trust building. Analysing the relations between Argentina and Brazil he observes: "By opening up each side's sensitive nuclear facilities to the scrutiny of the other, these visits were highly significant in promoting *confidence* in each other's peaceful nuclear intentions." (Wheeler, 2009a: 437, my emphasis) And further: "By the early 1990s Alfonsín's and Sarney's successors now *trusted* each other sufficiently to establish a new joint organisation, the Brazilian-Argentine Agency for Accounting and Control of Nuclear Materials (ABACC). The organisation comprises inspectors and officials from both countries and serves to *reassure* the political and military leaders of both states that their counterparts are not covertly developing nuclear weapons." (Wheeler, 2009a: 438, my emphases) And finally: "Through a process of *mutual assurance* and high levels of *transparency*, each came to believe that the other was only pursuing a peaceful nuclear programme, and the *trust* that developed between them in the 1980s was cemented by

their accession to the NPT in the second half of the 1990s.” (Wheeler, 2009a: 436, my emphasis)

This example is taken to embody a classic case of trust-building in international politics. But what does trust signify here and what role does trust play in this relationship? The two countries managed to overcome a spiral of hostile relations and settle their looming dispute and the spectre of nuclear proliferation through a mixture of reassurance moves and institutionalisation (the language alone here should alert us to a rationalist and functional form of cooperation). Yet to say that both leaders trust each other enough to establish an organisation to supervise each other’s nuclear policy is odd indeed. It is as if a couple after having suspicions about possible affairs of the respective other decides to grant each other access to their email accounts and mobile phones to check whether any suspicious communications took place that could reveal infidelity. After they ‘reassured’ one another to a certain degree they now decide to enter into a clearly defined contract which establishes what counts as infidelity and what does not and subsequently hire private investigators that neutrally will observe whether they abide by the terms of their agreement. It can be safely assumed that no one would characterise this relationship as one characterised by trust. That does not mean that the arrangements are bad in any way and it might even be the case that the partners (who are still fond of one another) prefer this situation to a messy divorce. Furthermore, the outcome will

indeed reduce uncertainty and increase transparency in the relationship; the action of the two individuals when it comes to marital fidelity will also be highly reliable due to the possible consequences of cheating.

The problem when it comes to characterising this relationship as a trust relationship lies with the fact that through the increased transparency and the ‘institutionalisation’ of these relationships (and this holds for the marriage as well as for the Brazil-Argentine example) trust never comes into play. In fact, the whole arrangement shows that the parties involved do *not* trust each other. If they trusted one another they would not need transparency, contracts or institutions to supervise each other’s actions. As Mercer (2005: 95) pithily observed: “If trust depends on external evidence, transparency, iteration, or incentives, then trust adds nothing to the explanation.” In fact such an arrangement “eliminates the need for trust and the opportunity to trust.” (Mercer, 2005: 95) Although Wheeler takes Mercer’s criticism of the de-psychologising attitudes in rationalist accounts on board (Booth and Wheeler, 2008: 232-234) it remains doubtful whether he succeeds in leaving them behind. Although Wheeler refers to the ‘human factor’ as an important element, of what consequence was the ‘human factor’ in the relations between Argentina and Brazil? The way in which the development of trust is presented here depends on external incentives such as transparency, institutionalisation, routinisation and iteration of behaviour and so on. The human factor is reduced to an

epiphenomenon which, in explanatory terms, is redundant (Mercer, 2005: 95). The relationship developed within a clearly defined and controlled environment in which the decisions were reached by strategic calculation about the abovementioned incentives. And as Mercer observed, “if observers attribute cooperation to the environment rather than the person, then trust cannot – and need not – develop” (Mercer, 2005: 95) because “incentive-based behaviour is not a substitute for trust-based behaviour” (Mercer, 2005: 95). It seems that the attitude towards others in trust-relationships is not characterised by any form of functional supervision or control. In fact, if such a process would have been initiated it would be the very expression of a lack of trust (to be clear, a lack of trust does not necessarily imply mistrust but only the absence of trust). In the case of Argentina and Brazil, the presence of ‘security mechanisms’ and measures of supervision and control indicate a willingness to cooperate but only under increased transparency. The institutional structures surrounding these measures bear witness to the absence and not the presence of trust. Would Argentina and Brazil trust each other, they would not need the institutional measures.

If we are thinking about devising mechanisms to ensure the correct behaviour of the ‘trusted’ we already exhibit a lack of trust as we are prepared to think of a reasonable chance that we might be cheated and start a process of calculated risk-taking. Seeing such instances of calculated risk-taking as trust creates at least two problems. First, it is

unclear how this model is substantially different from the criticised rationalist accounts and secondly we seem to include a phenomenon in the notion of trust which is contrary to the experience we connect to the meaning of the term trust. It seems warranted to draw a clear conceptual line between two different phenomena here if we want to illuminate the nature of trust more substantially.

We should then distinguish between functional trust or ‘reliance’ and personal trust or simply ‘trust’ (for a similar differentiation see Baier, 98-99 and Hollis, 1998: 10-11). The first is closely connected to a decision making process that each individual uses every day to judge whether to take a risk or not (Becker, 1996: 45). The actors involved enter into a functional exchange which is circumscribed by role expectations, role performances and the possibility of role management (Seligman, 1997: 23). If for instance state leaders interact, they do so in the perception of the specific function of the respective other as ‘state leader’. Because the role expectations are related to these functional elements it is comparatively easy to ascribe certain preferences and objectives to the respective other (such as state leaders prefer peace to war, state-survival to state- disintegration, prosperity to poverty and so on). This subsequent decision making process is usually characterised by a mostly instrumental calculation the outcome of which can vary according to different types of risk-taker. In general, however, the mechanism behind it involves some rational decision-making in which

preferences, interests and incentives are set in relation to one another and a decision is reached whether a specific action is 'worth the risk'. The calculation here is done by a rational actor who weighs the different outcomes and their likelihood and decides a course of action on that basis (Lagerspetz, 1998: 48). In short, cases of reliance exhibit all the main features of rational choice decision making and because of that reliance is a wilful decision reached through an instrumentally rational process of reasoning and calculation (for such a conception see for instance Kydd, 2000: 330-340; Macy and Skvoretz, 1998). It is up to me to decide whether I rely on someone in a particular situation or not; the decision is a strategic choice (Becker, 1996: 45).

A case of such calculated risk-taking (i.e. reliance) can be observed in the above example of Brazil and Argentina. In this case we can say that mistrust has been overcome but that is not equivalent to trust having emerged (see Mercer, 2005: 97). Both parties recognised that it is in their best interest if this situation does not escalate to the point where they are forced to develop nuclear weapons out of fear the other side might gain too big a strategic advantage. Since such an arrangement cannot be made in the absence of more transparency and reliability they initiate a sequence of small steps in which the risks are minimal for either side. After a specific threshold of reassurance is reached they move on to institutionalise this relationship in order to transform ad hoc measures into routinised behaviour which allows both sides to acquire higher levels of

confidence and predictability. All in all a classic and successful case of institutionalisation which indeed shows the shortcomings of a structural realist take on international anarchy (Wheeler, 2009a: 441). But it does not show in the slightest that trust is either involved or has been 'built' here. What we indeed have is a decision to rely on one another which is the outcome of a series of strategic exchanges leading to the decision to risk reliance rather than maintain a conflictual and potentially more harmful course of action. This conception of 'trust' is still prominent in recent accounts of trust which are critical of the rationalist conception. (see for instance Wheeler, 2009d: 3-4; Wheeler, 2009c: 11-12; Wheeler, 2007: 6)

The notion of trust, however, seems to be of a different quality. First, it seems the scope of entities we trust is much smaller than in cases of reliance. I can rely on animate as well as inanimate entities whereas I meaningfully trust only human beings (Holton, 1994: 66; Jones, 1996: 14; Mercer, 2005: 95). I can rely on my alarm clock to wake me in the morning or I can rely on my car to get me to work. Trust on the other hand seems to be restricted to other human beings. It would be strange indeed to say that I trust my alarm clock or that I trust my car to do something. The reason for this is that both lack a deliberative capacity that allows them to take part in my act of trusting (Holton, 1994: 65-66). Trust then is much more based on the actual interaction between the human agents involved (Sztompka, 1999: 19). Furthermore, trust does not simply abstract from

a specific person to a rationalised, functional blueprint focussed on decision-making under pre-defined strategic circumstances but takes the actual human being(s) which are involved in the act of trusting as unique. We surely have role expectations of the persons we trust but these are not reducible to functional performance. If we trust a friend with something, we consider the friend as an individual person in multiple ways rather than calculating the risks from a purely functional perspective.

Subsequently, the question why do we trust X with Y can no longer be answered by simply rationalising the thought process and analysing the assumptions that led to the 'decision' of trusting. Rather, the act of trusting exceeds the sum of reasons we can give for such an act. When we are asked why we trust X, surely we can answer 'because we have known him for a long time', 'because he has never let us down before', 'because we judge him competent in the task entrusted to him' and so on. These elements could be called the cognitive components of trust (Lewis and Weigert, 1985: 970-971). But that does not seem to grasp the act of trusting as such since we probably know many people with all these attributes but we do not trust all of them. Equally, we trust people on a daily basis which lack these attributes either because we cannot reach a judgment about them or we actually know they do not possess them. In fact, sometimes we trust people in a way and under circumstances which would be utterly irrational from a strategic risk perspective: the hitchhiker that gets into a car with a complete stranger in

an unfamiliar environment is just one example (Becker, 1996: 50, Pettit, 1995: 218). Trust, then, exceeds the mere functionality of reliance and presents a richer, emotionally based attitude that is more than the sum and outcome of rational decision-making (Lagerspetz, 1998: 38-39). Rather “[g]enuine trust is an emotion and emotions are, in general, not subject to direct rational control” (Lahno, 2001: 172). The introduction of a ‘human factor’ in recent publications on ‘trust’ in IR, grasps this emotional dimension to a certain extent but these allusions remain sketchy and are never fleshed out in any depth or detail. As was argued above, this is mainly due to the questions that guide research into trust in IR, even under this ‘new’ conceptualisation. Asking what we can learn from past instances, looking for patterns across cases, and trying to discern correlations between contexts, circumstances and instances of trust, all rely upon a rationalist model as they see trust as the outcome of a decision-making process. There might very well be an emotive component when it comes to trust but this emotive component can be manipulated and overcome if the right circumstances are created, i.e. if uncertainty is reduced to a level where vulnerability can be accepted. The tension between the rational and emotive components in recent scholarship remains because it lacks an appropriate acknowledgment of the two completely separate phenomena of reliance and trust which cannot meaningfully be brought together under the same conceptual heading.

The difference between trust and reliance that we have sketched out above allows for a clearer understanding of the different processes here, praxeologically as well as phenomenologically. Trust as we experience it is manifested in our practical coping and acting and not derived from or reducible to an abstract (i.e. context-distant) thought-process. (Baier, 1995: 110; Lahno, 2001: 176) The ‘decision’ to trust has always already been made or in other words our process of reasoning is always already too late. This is not to say that reason is completely out of the equation but it is to say that trusting is performatively enacted rather than deliberatively decided upon. This is where the difference in conceptualising trust as an emotional attitude manifests itself most clearly. “Thus, when trust is referred to as an emotional attitude, the following is meant: Trust is necessarily tied to a particular perception of the world or of some part of the world. It may be characterised by certain patterns in the way the world is represented in thought and the way certain contents of thought are associated with each other. [...] Yet, because trust somehow determines how we think, it cannot be understood as the immediate result of rational consideration” (Lahno, 2001: 177).

Consequentialist reflections on Disappointment and Betrayal

In light of the praxeological differences in the acts of ‘functional trust’ and ‘personal trust’ we have introduced the difference between trust as an emotional attitude (formerly

personal trust) on the one hand and reliance as a rational decision (formerly functional trust) on the other. Nonetheless, so far the distinction could be rejected as non-fundamental in that we either assume trust to be a special case of reliance or reliance being a special case of trust (Holton, 1994: 64; Pettit, 1995: 205).

In order to underline the qualitative difference between these two forms of action one can point to another, potentially even more far-reaching difference that warrants a fundamental, qualitative distinction between reliance and trust which can no longer be seen as merely one of degree. This distinction relates to the differences in the forms of harm we suffer when our trust or reliance is misplaced.

In the literature on trust so far we find the statement that any relationship of trust is characterised by vulnerability, i.e. by a situation in which one partner accepts its openness to be harmed and nevertheless participates in a specific interaction (Lahno, 2001: 171; Pettit, 1995: 204). This, however, is also true in cases of reliance. Although the levels of uncertainty can be decreased through transparency, routinisation of behaviour and institutionalisation there will always remain a certain degree of vulnerability the respective other could exploit (Wheeler, 2007: 1-2). Vulnerability alone, then, will not get us any further in our phronetic description of trust. If we take a look at the different forms of harm that result from misplaced trust as compared to

unwarranted reliance, however, we might gain further insights into the nature of the difference introduced above and also into the nature of trust as such. Again, we can draw on literature outside IR to help us identify the different forms of harm we can experience in cases of trust as opposed to cases of reliance. The basic distinction here is between *disappointment* on the one hand (in cases of reliance) and *betrayal* on the other (in cases of trust) (Baier, 1995: 99; Holton, 1994: 65, Wright, 2010: 616).

Starting with the experience of disappointment we would first link this experience to the notion of reliance as we developed it above. As we have argued, the act of reliance can potentially encompass animate as well as inanimate entities such as persons, cars or alarm clocks. Similarly, disappointment can occur any time any of these entities let us down. Betrayal, however, only gains meaning when it is used in relation to human agents. It would be strange indeed if we would say we felt betrayed by an alarm clock because it failed to wake us up or by a car because it broke down (Wright, 2010: 616). It seems betrayal in its proper sense already includes a judgment about a specific action which was undertaken by an agent with a deliberative capacity (Holton, 1994: 66). Subsequently, betrayal is a violation that exceeds disappointment qualitatively as it involves a deeper emotional as well as existential challenge (Wright, 2010: 617). It is an experience that does not only show a misjudgement or miscalculation on our part but also strikes deeper in a more existential sense. This 'striking deeper' hints at the main

difference between disappointment and betrayal. The act and experience of betrayal is ontologically far more significant than disappointment. Disappointment is always restricted to a particular case in particular circumstances. Furthermore, occurrences of disappointment follow a rational and conscious process of decision-making after which or on the basis of which we decided to rely on someone or something (Lagerspetz, 1998: 48). If this reliance proves to be misplaced the following negative experience has always already been contemplated as a possible outcome. Surely, we cannot say in what way and to what extent we might be disappointed but the very possibility of a 'let-down' is part of the whole deliberative process we use to decide whether to choose reliance or not. In fact, the possibility to be disappointed is the very reason we have to think about it; if there was no chance for disappointment we would not have to think about our course of action in terms of reliance or non-reliance. Equally, the many ways in which we try to minimise the likelihood of being disappointed brings the possible negative outcome clearly into view. If despite all our efforts we experience a negative outcome in cases of reliance we might suffer under the practical consequences but we will be able to situate this experience within the wider horizon of our actions and make sense of it. We might be angry with ourselves for badly assessing the situation or with the 'other' for not following the way of action as she/he/it 'promised' or was expected to follow. The wider fabric of our life-world, however, will not be questioned; we just put this failure down as a bad experience and vow to learn from it.

In cases of betrayal the situation seems profoundly different. If we experience betrayal the source of this experience is surely located within a specific act undertaken by another human being (Wright, 2010: 617). But its ramifications are much more far reaching than in cases of mere disappointment. Betrayal does not only show shortcomings in our estimation of possible outcomes (something we do not undertake in cases of trust (Lagerspetz, 1998: 48-49)) but it generally shakes the very foundations of our relation to the world or parts thereof (Lahno, 2001: 177). Betrayal in contrast to disappointment cannot simply be taken down as a bad experience but provides a much deeper and serious challenge in our everyday lives (Lewis and Weigert, 1985: 971).

As was argued by Lahno (2001: 173-174) trust does not only relate to a specific situation but always carries with it a specific emotive interpretation of and concomitant expectations within the life-world surrounding us (Jones, 1996: 12). Trust equips us with a horizon of expectation at the bottom of which we harbour expectations the violation of which strikes us not only as compromising our relation to a particular person but jeopardising the very horizon of expectation on which we base our relation to the world (Lahno, 2001: 175-176). This all sounds very metaphysical and removed from any empirical circumstances. Nevertheless, if we only think about the case of a malfunctioning alarm clock and the betrayal by a person we trusted the difference

becomes more tangible (Holton, 1994: 66). In the first case we will not fall into a deep crisis regarding our attitudes towards alarm clocks or technology as a whole, in the second case, however, we might very well start asking ourselves “If I can’t trust him/her who can I trust?” The experience of betrayal puts us in an existential quandary which shakes up much more than our relationship to a specific person – we are brought face to face with the phronetic interpretation of our environment as a whole and are forced to sceptically assess our place and relations within it (Lahno, 2001: 176).

The difference between disappointment and betrayal is then a significant one as in the one case we just have a localised form of harm which we will be able to absorb and make sense of within our horizon of expectation. In the second case, we experience a rupture of that very horizon which brings us face to face with a much larger set of relationships between us and the world. Betrayal cannot simply be put down as a single, localised bad experience. It will push us into an existential crisis which forces us to rethink the very basic expectations which we took as inviolable. The deeper and more serious challenge to the hitherto secured horizon of expectation that relates us to the world around us in its various social, political and cultural elements also accounts for the difficulties to re-establish trust once it has been betrayed. In cases of misplaced reliance we can account for our mistakes in the judgment we had reached and probably become more cautious the next time we enter into a similar transaction with a different

person or a different transaction with the same person. The challenge here is particular to a specific situation and can be accommodated into our existent projection of possibilities within the horizon of our life-world.

In cases of betrayal, however, we not only experience a specific form of harm tied to an individual and a particular situation but a 'secured space' which allows us to cope on a daily basis has been shattered. Betrayal cannot simply be accommodated within the always already taken interpretive stand towards our environment but challenges this very interpretation and the horizon of expectation that follows from it. Restoring trust is not simply a process of re-establishing confidence in an individual but it requires a re-interpretation of our expectations of possibilities and a re-drawing of the 'secure space' that comes with the act of trusting. Even worse, because trust is an emotional attitude this process of reinterpretation cannot be done by a rational assessment of probabilities of actions and a decision whom to trust from now on. The challenge of betrayal exceeds the limits of rational decision-making in the same way as the act of trusting does. Re-establishing trust cannot be engineered; the individual has to cope with this challenge on a deeper trans-rational level of agency. Some recover from acts of betrayal and do trust again (albeit probably differently) others might not recover and their possibility to interact with others might be impaired – the reaction to an act of betrayal will be as individual as will be the scope and act of trusting (Holton, 1994: 70).

From this differentiation between different experiences and perceptions of harm in cases of betrayal and disappointment we can also derive a further difficulty in *judging* cases of trust and cases of reliance. The horizon of expectation which conceptually separates trust from reliance is dependent on the larger social, political and cultural context which structures appropriate behaviour and even within such contexts the outcome will be individually distinct. It presents a form of existential coping that in its manifestation is always particular to the individual human agent. Some people might have a generally more trustful stand towards the world (up to point where it becomes naiveté) whereas others prove to be much more suspicious (up to a point where it becomes paranoia). Certainly, everyone exhibits trust in some way but how far trust expands is particular to the individual. There is therefore no general threshold that could be established as to when and whom people trust with what and when or on whom they merely rely. Trustful people might feel betrayed at a point where more sceptical individuals would be hardly surprised about a let-down by others and simply felt disappointed. General dispositions to the life-world around us are closely tied to the horizon of expectation central to the act of trusting.

Existential Reflections on Uncertainty

The third way in which trust and reliance are qualitatively different is that they constitute responses to very different ‘challenges’ humans have to cope with on a daily basis. These challenges are usually conflated into one term – *uncertainty*. By developing a more differentiated view on uncertainty, however, we can also show how an emotive and phronetic account of trust will lead to central and crucial insights in the nature and emergence of trust in political and social settings.

In IR, where in many quarters uncertainty still revolves around the ‘problem of anarchy’, we can initially see two central characteristics of uncertainty. First, it is presented as mainly a problem of knowledge or the lack thereof (Hardin, 1993: 507-510; Wheeler, 2007: 1). In relations between units in the international system the absence of a central authority means that the behaviour of others seems hard to predict or judge (Wheeler, 2009c: 6; Wheeler, 2009d: 4). Surely, the predominant neo-realist conclusions drawn from this conception of uncertainty have been challenged but none of these challenges ever undertook a thorough conceptualisation of uncertainty beyond its epistemological dimension (although there are many variations within this conception of uncertainty (for a typology see Rathbun, 2007)). In many quarters uncertainty remains as a core *epistemological* challenge in many analyses of international relations.

The second characteristic we can already observe right at the outset is the fact that uncertainty is primarily presented as a ‘problem’ (Wheeler, 2007: 1). This framing is important as it brings us back to the two perspectives mentioned above that approach political and social phenomena from the perspective of *episteme* and *techne*. As a ‘problem’ uncertainty is set up to be overcome or solved. If it cannot be overcome or solved it has to be managed, contained or mitigated as effectively as possible. Framing uncertainty as ‘problematic’ brings the authors who address this ‘problem’ already into a specific mindset that we could call with Peter Euben (1990: 16) ‘manipulative mentality’. They will ask what approaches to uncertainty have been used before, how have others dealt with uncertainty in the past and what can be done to deal with it the best possible way in the future. In other words uncertainty presents a strategic challenge to the contenders in the international system and one way to deal with it, we are told, is the fostering of trust between actors in the international realm (by now we know that these accounts are actually referring to reliance) (Wheeler, 2009d: 3; see also Hardin, 1993: 507).

In current trust scholarship uncertainty is seen as central, as mainly epistemological in nature, and as a problem that has to be dealt with (Kydd, 2007: 14-22; Wheeler, 2009a: 435) Trust emerges and is presented as a viable alternative to conflict and of course we come full circle to our starting point when we see the central question that guides much

of trust scholarship in IR: what can we learn from past instances in order to build trust in the international realm. But it should be clear by now that what these contributions discuss is the nature and emergence of reliance rather than trust. Reliance is the final objective that should foster cooperative behaviour under conditions of (epistemological) uncertainty and as a strategic choice it can be engineered and wilfully enacted as was shown above.

But what about trust then? If uncertainty is central to trust as well, why is trust not a viable response to the problem of epistemological uncertainty in the international system. There are two points to be made here. First, we could simply revert to the arguments above and repeat that trust as an emotive attitude is not established through a process of reasoning and therefore cannot be presented as a strategic choice in the way reliance can.

But there is obviously more to this. If trust and uncertainty are closely linked this answer alone seems unsatisfactory. To find out more about the relation between trust and uncertainty it might now be important to conceptualise uncertainty more thoroughly rather than trying to fit trust in a preconceived scheme in which uncertainty is always already presented as an epistemological problem. If we see trust as an emotional attitude and also conceptualise the harm that we suffer from betrayal as transcending the

particular instance of being harmed, a new dimension opens up that seems to link trust with a specific condition of human agency. Rather than conceptualising human agency along the familiar lines of a monadic individual that encounters the world and acts upon it through the powers of instrumental and technological rationality (Taylor, 2006: 204), an emotive account of trust opens the door for a new conceptualisation of agency that is not reduced to and centred on a self-transparent consciousness which exhibits a reflective attitude and a purely wilful interaction with the world. Rather, human agency seems always already immersed in a context and cannot leave this context to gain a ‘theoretical’ view. This situatedness has been conceptualised within (for instance Checkel, 1998: 330-2; Fierke 2005: 7-14) but more forcefully outside IR in many different ways. One very pertinent conception can be found in Martin Heidegger’s ontology. (Heidegger 1996, see also Dreyfus, 1991: 3) Heidegger describes the existential state of human being as ‘thrownness’ (Heidegger, 1996: 127), meaning that we are ‘thrown’ into a world which is always already there, in which we always already make a stand and which in its totality eludes the individual living within it (Inwood, 1997: 22; see also Gadamer, 1979: 245). Human existence is then characterised not as a mere co-existence of already formed rational monads but as a realm of possibilities the realisation of which is contextually and socially enacted. The realisation of individuality in such a conception is not characterised as an abstract encounter with the world but the practical coping *within* a world the boundaries of which are constantly in flux and the

fragility of human design is all-pervasive (Warnke, 1987: 38). Uncertainty in such a conception is not simply a lack of knowledge that can be tackled but uncertainty assumes an ontological quality as an existential characteristic of human being as such.

A phronetic approach to trust is able to reveal the nature of this uncertainty as being fundamental to the actions and lives human beings live. It is nothing to be theoretically understood and problematised. It cannot be understood that way as this form of understanding always comes too late. Existentially, we have always already ‘understood’ this ontological uncertainty as we always already are coping with it and within it. Trust understood as an emotive attitude provides a way of coping with this kind of uncertainty in that we can and do relate to our life-world by drawing a horizon of expectation of which trust is one central element (for a similar view see Szotmpka, 1999: 20-21). In other words trust is the answer to a completely different challenge than is reliance. Although trust and reliance appear to be closely linked and for some even seem synonymous, a thicker and phronetic inquiry as presented above can reveal the fundamental, one might even say, existential difference between the two. Subsequently, it should also become apparent that for the ‘problem’ of epistemological uncertainty which lies at the centre of recent scholarship trust does not appear as a suitable or even appropriate ‘solution’ for the reasons outlined above.

Conclusion

Over the course of this article we have aimed at achieving a more substantial and conceptually clearer understanding of the nature of trust in (political) relationships. Crucially, the article set out to conceptually break down two qualitatively distinct phenomena which still are treated under the same label – trust. The article has argued that in order to achieve a substantial and coherent conceptualisation and pave the way for a thorough analysis of trust this distinction needs to be recognised and taken into account. For this purpose, the article introduced the (heuristic) difference between mere reliance as rationally calculated strategic choice and trust as an emotive attitude that transcends rational decision-making. We have shown this difference on praxeological, phenomenological and consequential aspects that illuminate the concept of trust beyond the scope of contemporary literature on trust in IR.

Three consequences follow from such a conception. First, in terms of recent IR scholarship and the questions that guide it we would argue that the phenomenon that is actually studied in these instances is strategic reliance and not trust. This is not just the result of a misnomer or a mistake but is already preconceived in the very questions this kind of scholarship asks at the outset. If we are interested in what can be learned from past instances of ‘trust’ so that we can build ‘trust’ in the international arena, then we

are already implicitly conceptualising trust as a possible choice actors can make, as dependent on reassurance moves, transparency, reliability, institutionalisation and the iteration and routinisation of behaviour. As we have shown through examples above these elements of current endeavours in trust-building are not exhibiting trust but rather the absence of trust. Or, to put it positively, they are concerned with strategic reliance and the management of epistemological uncertainty. It is true that conflict is not inevitable and that possibility is indeed the essence of human existence. Reliance and strategic decision-making can open ways to peacefully engage in politics, domestically as well as internationally. In this capacity it is worthwhile asking questions as to what conditions seem to favour successful reliance and cooperative behaviour.

But if we still maintain that ‘proper’ trust plays a central role in political and social relations – and this is the second consequence – we would have to ask questions that reflect the praxeological and consequential characteristics of trust. In order to do this we would have to turn to the role and nature of emotions in international politics. Emotions have so far been widely ignored (some notable exceptions are Crawford, 2002; Fierke and Fattah, 2009; Mercer, 2010). Research into trust would open a new avenue to engage in an interdisciplinary study of emotions, political actions and human agency which would certainly enrich the still overly rational approach to international politics.

Finally, and probably most broadly, an emotional conception of trust alerts us to alternative ways to study and conceptualise political life and human agency. Conceptualising uncertainty as an ontological state pertaining to human being engenders a much richer and more nuanced appreciation of the complexities of political and social organisation and a much stronger criticism against rationalist reductionism. A theoretical attitude that aims at providing a conception of structured and ordered encounters with the challenges in the international arena – foremost among them conflict and war – can only provide an impoverished picture of the variety of human motives and drives of which trust is one. Equating trust with reliance and conceptualising both along problem-solving lines might in the long run lead to more harm rather than less. Acknowledging the limitations and fragility of human designs in response to suffering, injustice and violence will provide a more holistic and probably more humble perspective. Trust as an emotional attitude is indeed central to our efforts to find our way and place within the always already understood and constantly shifting area of politics and social order. To conclude that the human capacity to trust and the centrality of this possibility to a harmonious and peaceful life implies an even greater capability to (re)create trust at will and through human design is hereby not only pretentious but dangerous. It exemplifies the all too common attitude in which challenges in our lives, political and otherwise, are framed as ‘problems’ that have to be overcome and a general promise that human existence is able to invent or present

remedies for even the most insurmountable problems. Trust cannot be shaped and reproduced; it cannot be understood through scientific method and *episteme* and *techne* – in this respect trust as emotive attitude will in ‘theoretical’ terms remain as elusive as it will remain clearly visible in the necessarily active and phronetic coping of everyday life (Hollis, 1998: 1). Practically, though, it assumes a central place in our everyday experiences both in its positive as well as negative aspects.

When understood as an emotional attitude, trust alerts us to a deeper and more substantial conceptualisation of human agency in which emotive elements prove elusive instrumentally rational decision-making (Lahno, 2001: 172). Trust clears a horizon for expectation and serves a much more fundamental purpose than merely ‘avoiding conflict’ or dealing with epistemological uncertainties. It shields human beings from the constant challenge they face when confronted with the complexities and (ontological) uncertainties that defines what it is to be human. Here we will find a more substantial and complex elaboration of the ‘human factor’ that has already been identified as central to instances of trust without, however, receiving the appropriate attention and elaboration. Scrutinising the human factor and its relation to and role in trust relationships in the way suggested above will not diminish but heighten the importance of engaging with instances in trust in (international) politics since without trust human being would constantly face its limitless limitedness against which to struggle becomes

only bearable as a 'we' and not as an 'I'; in that very sense trust is the ground for political and social order and never its outcome. The more open and contested the interactions between political actors become within or between polities the more they will require trust as their foundation.

As sensitive to contextual circumstances as many of the recent conceptions of trust might be, the spectre of a manipulative mentality with its false promise of engineered social and political structures and intra- or intersocietal behaviour still looms in the background. This article could only provide the first steps towards a thicker conception of trust in IR. One thing, however, should be clear by now: In order to study the complexities of trust we would first of all have to ask the right questions. Understood as strategic choice instances of trust will simply be reduced to and equated with occurrences of reliance and thereby tell us nothing about the complexities involved in trust relationships. The concomitant quest for formulae that help us build 'trust' is equally bound to fail as it takes the very precondition for its success to be the outcome of its efforts. In this respect we should remember the last words of Gertrude Stein who on her deathbed asked "What is the answer?" and when her companion did not reply she laughed and said "In that case, what is the question?"

Notes

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¹ Rare exceptions would include Kydd (2000; 2007) and Mercer (1995).

² One can also find it in accounts that do not explicitly refer to reliance (see for instance Becker, 1996:44; Lewis and Weigert, 1985: 972; Rathbun, 2009: 346).

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