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Political Trust, Commitment and Responsiveness

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Matthew Festenstein

Department of Politics, University of York, Heslington, York YO10 5DD

Matthew.festenstein@york.ac.uk

Abstract:

Political trust has become a central focus of political analysis and public lament. Political theorists and philosophers typically think of interpersonal trust in politics as a fragile but valuable resource for a flourishing or stable democratic polity. This article examines what conception of trust is needed in order to play this role. It unpicks two candidate answers, a moral and a responsiveness conception, the latter of which has been central to recent political theory in this area. It goes on to outline a third, commitment conception and to set out how a focus on commitments and their fulfilment provides a better account of trust for political purposes. Adopting this conception discloses how trust relies on a contestable public normative space and has significant implications for how we should approach three cognate topics, namely, judgments of trust, the place of distrust, and the relationship of interpersonal to institutional trust and distrust.

The importance, fragility and dangers of trust and distrust have become increasingly central topics for political analysis and normative reflection, as well as for anguished political brooding. These themes dominate the extensive literature on how and 'why we hate politics', on the wide-scale erosion of public trust and confidence in government, and on the rise of anxieties about populism and its cultivated dialectic of distrust (of normal politics, parliaments, the system) and trust (of the leader, the movement) (e.g., Hay 2007; Hetherington and Rudolph 2002; Levi and Stoker 2011; Norris 2011; Warren

and Gastil 2015). A particular dimension of this is a concern about the ethics and integrity of politicians (Allen and Birch 2015), although the targets of political trust and distrust are widely dispersed, to include experts and professionals, the personalized leader, political parties, government, the political classes, officials and bureaucrats, and other citizens. Politicians claim to seek to earn our trust, and where this seems to be at risk, to deflect concerns about trust on to other territory: in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq, Tony Blair insisted that divisions over this were not 'over issues of trust or integrity … the real issue … is not a matter not of trust but of judgment' (cited Freeden 2013: 192).

What do we mean by trust such that it matters to us in this way? One answer, which has been predominant in the political theory literature on trust, is that we trust when we think the interests of those whom we trust are aligned in the right way with ours or when we think they are motivated to support our interests. The absence of this alignment in politics, or at least our inability to rely on it, poses the problem of political trust. As Mark Warren puts it in his influential analysis, 'where there is politics […] the conditions of trust are weak: the convergence of interests between truster and trusted cannot be taken for granted' (Warren 1999: 312; cf. Warren 2018: 76; Hardin 2006; Norris 2011: 19-20). I argue that this approach falls short of capturing what we're interested in when we think about interpersonal trust in politics, and that instead we can make better sense of political trust by seeing it as grounded in the attribution of commitments to those whom we trust, together with reliance on them to fulfil these. Understanding trust through this lens allows us to see the fragility of political trust in a different way: not primarily as the product of epistemic uncertainty or conflict of interests but of the political contestability that imbricates the commitments that underpin trust.

I develop this argument in four stages. The following section clarifies the scope and starting point for the problem here: focusing on the kinds of value that political theorists of trust have attributed to interpersonal trust, it asks, if interpersonal trust, as opposed to mere reliance, has a value in politics, what concept of trust is in play? Section 2 examines and unpicks two candidate answers, a moral conception of trust and what is called here a responsiveness conception, the latter of which has been central to recent political theory in this area. I argue that these don't successfully draw the line between trust and reliance and between trust and distrust. In their place, in section 3, I outline an alternative approach that analyses trust through the notion of a practical commitment , and try to show how a focus on commitments and their fulfilment provides a better account of trust for political purposes: if political trust is to have the value ascribed to it, it needs to take the form of a commitment conception.[1] For a commitment account, to trust someone to do something involves attributing a commitment to her to doing it and to rely upon her to meet that commitment. Unlike the responsiveness account, this approach views my trusting as neutral about the trusted's motivations toward me. This attribution rests not only on explicitly undertaken pledges but on the basis of the social and political roles and identities of those to whom commitments are attributed. Judgments about trust and trustworthiness of politicians and officials are not then primarily judgments about whether they are motivated to serve your or my interests but about what commitments we take them to have and

[1] From the wider philosophical literature on trust, this particularly draws elements from Mullin (2006), Gilbert (2006), and Hawley (2014), in ways outlined below, although Mullin's paradigm case is motherhood and Hawley's focus is also largely on intimate relationships.

whether or not we think they are being fulfilled. This has important repercussions for when we think of trust or distrust as a legitimate attitude to take in politics, that is, when we are entitled to trust. Section 4 develops the contrast between responsiveness and commitment views and brings out how adoption of the latter has significant implications for how we should approach three cognate topics, namely, judgments of trust, the place of distrust, and the relationship of interpersonal to institutional trust and distrust. Viewing political trust through the commitment lens doesn't only help us to understand the claim that interpersonal political trust has value. It also makes sense of the way in which trust is public and contestable, and so political.

1. Valuing political trust

The focus of this article is conceptual, on the question 'What is it to trust?' not on the institutional guardrails to help ensure that rulers, politicians and officials are constrained to be trustworthy or on how citizens can have assurances of their trustworthiness. Further, it is specifically on interpersonal trust in politics, and particularly citizens' trust in politicians and officials. This is distinct, then, from trust primarily directed at objects (such as trusting in a reliably constructed shelf to take the weight of a vase). It is also distinct from trust in institutions, groups or procedures (trust in the impartiality of a constitutional court or a central bank, for example) (Newton 2007), testimonial trust or trust in expertise (e.g., O'Neill 2007:154-66; Festenstein 2009; Lane 2014; Moore 2017) and from trust/distrust in political regimes, such as the classical distrust of democracies for their passion-driven inconstancy (Schwartzberg 2007). On the face of it, while these other forms of trust are important, interpersonal trust matters in politics because agency matters, together with associated concepts such as responsibility.

For political theorists of trust, a central thread of argument for the importance of trust has been that is instrumental for, or constitutive of, democratically valuable goods. Political trust is considered necessary for a functional democratic politics (e.g., Dunn 1988; Lenard 2012; Levi and Stoker 2000; O'Neill 2002; Rothstein 2011: 145-92; Warren 2018). Stable and flourishing democratic polities are characterized by trust (e.g., Walker 2006, Lenard 2012, Murphy 2010, 2016) where unstable and conflict-ridden societies are marked by its loss. While less powerful a bond than solidarity or community, trust facilitates commerce, politics and social life more generally: it thought to increase social harmony, allow for compromise, promote order and collective goods without recourse to coercion, and expand the scope for individual and social action. And trust is a ubiquitous and often unrecognised background condition of social life – without trust, we could not get up in the mornings, and everyday life is a catalogue of successful exercises in trust (e.g., Luhmann 1979; Hollis 1998; Sztompka 1999).

In one influential version of this argument, articulated clearly by Patti Tamara Lenard, voluntary compliance with democratically established rules is instrumental for democratic efficacy, and trust is an important ingredient in securing widespread voluntary compliance with these rules (Lenard 2012). The idea is that there are norms compliance with which requires that I trust that others will generally comply: if no one else is recycling or respecting traffic regulations then my lack of trust in others' compliance removes a reason I have myself to comply. In order for citizens to believe that the electoral system is functional, and therefore to participate and vote, citizens must trust that their votes are properly counted, for example, and that the losing party will give up power. Citizens on the losing side must accept the legitimacy of the elected party: the 'trust that underpins the willingness to comply voluntarily with the preferences of the electorate equally underpins the willingness to comply with the

subsequent decisions made by the winner' (Lenard 2012: 43; cf. Miller 1995: 97; Richardson 2002: 143-61; Allen 2004: 27-31; Offe 2001). In this way political trust is instrumentally valuable for democratic rule, including being needed in order to sustain mechanisms of democratic accountability. First, for a governing party to give up power when it loses an election requires that it trusts the opposition in various ways, including to give up power in turn if they in turn fall. Political leaders, party members and voters need to be able to trust one another to behave in this way for electoral processes to flourish (Lenard 2012: 42-4; cf. Offe 2001). Second, there is the argument that democratic politics requires trust that participants will adhere to conventions, norms and unwritten rules, and when these are flouted or 'eroded' this damages the quality of democracy. So, for example, when the United States Republican Senate blocked President Obama's move to make a final Supreme Court judicial appointment, this represented a betrayal of the kind of trust in how power can be used that not only hampered Obama but damaged the underlying culture and institutions of US democracy (e.g., Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018).

In addition, some theorists also suggest that there are non-instrumental reasons to value political trust. From the non-instrumental perspective, trust, when reasonable, is an important expression of respect and a commitment to reciprocity in political relationships (Mansbridge 1999; Murphy 2010, Murphy 2016). Its absence is damaging to political relationships for non-instrumental reasons as it forms a constitutive part of those relationships of mutual respect that are said to underpin liberal democracy. In trusting you I extend a form of non-instrumentally valuable moral recognition to you, constitutive of respecting your agency.

Here I want to assume that interpersonal trust is politically valuable in order to explore what trust is, if it is to have this value. So it's not a part of my purpose here to

engage directly with sceptical arguments about the value of political trust to the effect that, even if we need to rely on one another in politics, this can be achieved without trust as a significant ingredient (e.g., Hardin 2002; Cook, Levi and Hardin 2005; Rosanvallon 2008). However, it's worth underlining that from the instrumental or non-instrumental perspective, political trust need only be viewed as *conditionally* valuable (Murphy 2010). In part, this is because it isn't always rational to trust, so there are conditions tied to the reliability of the trusted: when the governing party refuses to step down and implements martial law. Further, trust isn't necessarily functionally valuable for democratic politics: groups with high levels of internal trust can work to erode democratically valuable goods and institutions. With these ideas in place, I want to turn now to the concept that underlies these evaluative claims.

2. Morality and responsiveness

An adequate theory of political trust needs to distinguish trust from a broader conception of reliance or confidence. Within the rich philosophical literature devoted to the conceptual analysis of trust (e.g., Baier 1986; Faulkner and Simpson 2017; Hawley 2014; Helm 2014; Holton 1994; Jones 1996; McLeod 2015; O'Neill 2002; Pettit 1995; Simpson 2012,), trust normally is viewed as bounded by domain so it has a basic tripartite structure, on top of which further elaborations can be made: A trusts B with respect to X (e.g., Baier 1986: 236; Hardin 1993: 505; Hardin 1999: 26; Lenard 2012; Murphy 2010; Weinstock 1999: 293). So there is a question of what ingredient(s) need to be added to A's reliance on B with respect to X in order to allow us to think of this attitude of reliance as trust.

One way of thinking about what is needed here is that it should allow us to make sense of the different reactive attitudes within which trust seems embedded; in particular, the distinction between disappointment at having expectations unmet and betrayal (e.g., Mullin 2005: 316-7; Gilbert 2006; Murphy 2010: 76; Lenard 2012; Hawley 2014).[2] When we trust, we aren't just disappointed or let down in the face of non-performance but betrayed. As Margaret Gilbert puts it, '[i]f I am not in a position to trust you to do something you cannot betray me when you fail to do it. You can surprise me, disappoint me, wound me, but you cannot betray me. Whatever lays me open to betrayal legitimates my trust' (Gilbert 2006: 152; cf. Murphy 2010: 76fn). We rely on others all the time in politics, in the sense of acting in a way that depends on their more or less predictable behaviour. Some German conservatives in Weimar made the mistake, from their point of view, of relying on Hitler, particularly thinking that he would be manageable in power and broadly that his rule would promote their interests. However, we needn't attribute to them misplaced *trust*. The question, then, is what conditions put me in a position to trust you, in this sense.

A tempting proposal for this additional ingredient is the expectation of someone's acting in a way that is morally required or commendable. The betrayal of trust that distinguishes it from merely disappointed expectations that accompany other forms of reliance has a moral character. So those who feel that Blair betrayed them have an expectation that he should adhere to a moral norm of honesty that in fact he's flouted: they trusted, they may say, because they relied on him to act from this moral norm. However, this seems unnecessarily to moralise trust, when being trustworthy

[2] On the importance of reactive attitudes (Strawson 1962) for thinking about trust, in particular for thinking about misplaced trust, see Holton 1994.

and trusting another needn't always be morally good. Even if the capacities required for trusting and being trustworthy may be important for an account of moral capacities, it doesn't follow that someone's trustworthiness is morally obligatory or commendable: you can trust a contract killer you've hired but it doesn't follow that what you trust her to do is morally admirable. A domestic abuser may be able to trust his abused spouse to meet his needs but her trustworthiness is also morally suspect.[3]

This moralised view of trust also glosses over well-rehearsed 'realist' arguments about what moral integrity in politics consists in, how it differs from morality tout court, or at least begs the question as to whether there are relevant differences (e.g., Philp 2007; Jay 2010; Mearsheimer 2011; Sleat 2018). As Peter Johnson notes, there is a tension in demands put upon politicians (Johnson 1993): those who are morally trustworthy in the private sense may be politically ineffective at achieving desirable ends. So we are compelled to trust those with dirty hands, or at least the disposition to get their hands dirty.

There are, then, reasons to resist the identification of trust and trustworthiness and moral integrity. In any case, the dominant proposal for the missing ingredient among political theorists is what I will call here responsiveness: that it's necessary for my trusting you that I think that you are responsive to my interests, in the right way. You can rely on a dependable bus driver, in other words, but can trust your friend to get you to the airport on time, since she is motivated toward you in the right way. For example, trust is viewed by Karen Jones as an optimistic affective attitude about someone, to the effect that her good will and competence covers 'the domain of our interaction with her, together with the expectation that the one trusted will be directly

[3] On moral suspicion and trust, see Baier 1986: 259-60; Warren 1999: 328.

and favourably moved by the thought that we are counting on her' (Jones 1996: 1; cf. Baier 1986: 259). For political theorists who follow this line, such as Colleen Murphy in her work on political reconciliation (2010), what matters is this affective orientation toward the good will of the trusted person. In Russell Hardin's epistemic version of responsiveness, to 'say that I trust you with respect to some matter means that I have reason to expect *you to act in my interest* with respect to that matter because you have good reasons to do so, *reasons that are grounded in my interest*' (1999: 26, emphasis in original). For this 'encapsulated interest' account, I trust when I judge that I can rely on you because you are motivated to look after my interests. Trust is the judgment that your interests encapsulate mine, in the right way. What Hardin stresses is that it is not enough that B furthers A's interests simply because his own *coincide* with hers, for a trust relationship to hold. In such cases, B may be dependable, reliable, predictable, and so on, by A, but not trustworthy. Rather, 'I trust you because I think it is your interest to attend to my interests in the relevant matter. This is not merely to say that you and I have the same interests. Rather it is to say that you have an interest in attending to *my* interests, because, typically, you want our relationship to continue' (Hardin 2002: 4). Although this is a responsiveness conception, it is grounded in a starkly cognitivist form of risk assessment rather than affective apprehension of the good will of the other (Hardin 1993: 516; cf. Hardin 1999: 24).[4]

Responsiveness accounts are attractive since they capture a vital source of our interest in understanding trust and assessing trustworthiness. For, the idea is, we rely on those we trust to provide us with, or to protect or foster, some good. And to act on

[4] Here he differs from Coleman (1990: 99), whose rational actor account is framed as a decision on whether to place a bet.

trust is to place oneself in a relation of vulnerability and dependence: if you trust me to take you to the airport, you run the risk that I won't in fact turn up and you'll miss your flight: 'where one depends on another's good will, one is necessarily vulnerable to the limits of that good will. One leaves others an opportunity to harm when one trusts and also shows one's confidence that they will not take it' (Baier 1986: 235). Following this analysis, the focus on vulnerability, tied to the responsiveness conception, has been assumed or elaborated by a number of social and political theorists of trust (Bernstein 2011; Giddens 1990: 34, Johnson 1993: 18; Lenard 2012: 18-20; Mansbridge 1999: 294; Pettit 1998: 298).

As in the moralised notion of trust, responsiveness captures an important dimension of what we're interested in when we invoke trust but, in general terms, there are some difficulties with the idea that responsiveness offers a satisfactory account of interpersonal trust. I can trust (or distrust) without attributing to you a view of how you're motivated in relation to my interests. For example, I can trust a tennis opponent to play by the rules and norms of fair play without thinking that she's doing so out of any responsiveness to my interests: while she may be indifferent to them or be motivated to humiliate me, I can nevertheless trust her to play the game with me in the right spirit. In the event that you don't behave in a trustworthy fashion, I may feel betrayed but that is still distinct from being vulnerable to you in the sense of experiencing some adverse impact on my interests that the responsiveness conception makes core or of thinking that you are not appropriately motivated in relation to my interests. If I promise to take your friend to the airport, you may trust me to do this, believing in my punctuality and reliability: you have no interest in her catching her flight but still may feel in the appropriate sense betrayed or let down if I fecklessly don't turn up.

Still, should we accept the account of *political* trust in responsive terms, embodied 'by an attitude of optimism with respect to the competence and will of other citizens and officials' (Murphy 2010: 77; Lenard 2012: 18-19)? One important line of scepticism about this was developed by Hardin, for whom the specific barriers to political trust are epistemological and motivational. You can't know the motives of politicians and officials so it would not be sensible to assume that these encapsulate your interests. The cognitive opacity of politicians and officials means that the epistemic demands of trust are impossible to satisfy when it comes to ascertaining whether or not to trust them. To say I trust you is to say that I expect you to act for your reasons in a way that tracks my reasons in some matter. Your interest encapsulates my interest. It is not possible to have cognitive trust in officials and citizens on the whole, because of the size and complexity of modern societies: we do not have the ongoing cooperative relationships or thick personal knowledge of one another that helps to overcome, or at least address, the problems of opacity and conflict of interests (Hardin 1999: 28). Further, we can't view government as *cooperating* with us, since we are generally subject to its immense power. This means I can't trust it 'because my power dependence undermines any hope I might have to get you to reciprocally cooperate with me' (Hardin 2006: 152; cf. Farrell 2004). So there is generally nothing we can do to make governmental agents entirely trustworthy.

From this perspective, since we can't have the kind of knowledge he thinks we need in order to judge that politicians and officials are trustworthy, and so can't trust them, trust can't be a significant element in democratic politics. Both the instrumental and non-instrumental arguments for the value of political trust go awry, then, from this perspective. Social cooperation may be instrumentally important for important social goods but should be understood without trust as an ingredient (Cook, Hardin and Levi

2005). And if there is a norm of generalized mutual respect or reciprocity then this too should not involve trust since we can't have the kind of knowledge we would need to know that everyone whom we should respect encapsulates our interests in the right way. An implication of this is that much of the concern about an alleged crisis of trust in politics is over-blown, since trust, in the encapsulated-interest sense, can't plausibly play much of a role in government, so can't be a major consideration in the working of a modern society. Indeed, by tantalizing us with something that we can't in most conceivable circumstances reasonably expect to have, this kind of talk of a crisis in trust plays a role in generating the cynicism that it often bemoans.

Even within its own terms, Hardin's particular epistemological focus squeezes out some of the other reasons we are interested in determining whether we can or should trust. We are not only uncertain about whether an agent will be motivated toward us in a certain way. What matters in trusting are also the potential costs of A's unreliability, as well as the potential costs of foregoing trust. While it is indeed difficult to know whether or not politicians and officials encapsulate your interests, and we may agree with Hardin that it's unlikely that they do, it still doesn't seem too cognitively stretching to gauge whether politicians are trustworthy based, for example, on the answers to 'cui bono?' about their choices, alignments and funding. Assuming we can come to a determination in these cases so rarely that it is politically irrelevant seems implausible. The perverse side effect of throwing an epistemological blanket over politics in this way is that it blots out quite commonplace grounds for specific critical judgments about politicians' trustworthiness.

Hardin's epistemological and motivational doubts about trust in politics are built on and directed at the responsiveness conception. However, the prior question, in the light of the general challenges to the responsiveness conception of interpersonal, is

whether this is a conception of political trust that underpins the value that trust theorists ascribe to it. Recall the two instances of the general claim that trust is instrumentally valuable for democratic governance – that an electoral system requires voters and the opposition to trust the governing party to give up power, if it loses; and that democratic politics requires trust on the part of participants that others will adhere to established conventions over such matters as appointment of judges.

As in the broader interpersonal case, neither of these examples requires that trust consists in a belief or affective acceptance on our part in the good will of those trusted toward us. To say that the outgoing political party trusts the incoming opposition is not to say that they believe in the good will of their opponents; they may view their political opponents as set on their utter political annihilation. Nevertheless their trust consists in believing that their opponents won't do just anything in pursuit of their goals, and in particular won't set aside constitutional constraints and norms in order to achieve that.[5] Similarly, if we take the 'norm erosion' view of the behaviour of the Senate in 2016, where a proponent of the status quo, or a Democrat, may feel betrayed is not necessarily because she feels that that her assumption that the good will she had thought that the Mitch McConnell or other Republican Senators had toward her interests has turned out not to exist. The impact on her interests seems subordinate; the betrayal consists in their not having adhered to what had been thought to be a set of commonly understood rules of the game.[6] To return to a previous example: the concern

[5] This is one way of distinguishing the agonism some theorists think of as essential to the political from a bare-knuckled antagonism that erodes it (Mouffe 2000).

[6] This isn't to say the rules were/are morally commendable of course, or that betrayal in this sense is always unjustified. One can be morally doubtful of the norms being eroded

about Blair's trustworthiness needn't be that citizens judge that he is acting to damage their interests; it's that he has not been publicly honest. Had he been thought to be dishonest but nevertheless thought to be deeply concerned for the public good and his policies had only had positive effects on citizens' interests, the worry about trust would remain. Now we may ask in each case why political agents play by these rules, and there may be various answers; the suggestion here is that trust and distrust consist in a prior judgement, about whether someone has played by these rules. Although, as we've seen, trust theorists invoke vulnerability as a condition of trust, as part of this responsiveness conception (e.g., Lenard 2012: 18-20, 141-6) this also does not seem necessary for their account. In the recycling case, for example, my neighbour's failure to comply may not adversely affect my interests; nevertheless, it undermines, and should undermine, my trust in her to recycle, and perhaps also to conform to other civic norms.

Perhaps, however, there is a tenable milder version of the responsiveness claim to the effect that responsiveness is sufficient but not necessary for trust: if I judge that the tennis player has a good will toward me then I trust her. If the opposition judges that the governing party is responsive to it, at least to the extent of abiding by election results that go in its favour, then it trusts the governing party. However, we can rely on someone's good will or responsiveness toward us without our trusting them. For example, you can rely on my responsiveness to your interests if I find you very

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while thinking that this analytically captures the breakdown of trust. Further, it isn't the case that betrayal can occur only when we trust – distrust can include expectation of betrayal (Hawley 2014: 13): I discuss distrust, and its connection to a commitment view, in the final section. The point here is only that betrayal of trust makes sense in the context of this kind of argument.

intimidating, but this isn't to say that this responsiveness on my part means you can trust me, and, if I don't in fact support you, you haven't been betrayed. There are reasons, then, to think that responsiveness does not capture trust, and I want next to outline in more detail an alternative view of trust prompted by this line of reasoning.

3. Political trust and commitment

For a commitment account, to trust someone to do something is to think that she has a commitment to doing it and to rely upon her to meet that commitment. Unlike the responsiveness account, this approach views my trusting as neutral about the trusted's motivations toward me: these may or may not be thought of as responsive to my interests. When it comes to political trust, the difference between the responsive and commitment conceptions lies in the emphasis of the first on our having grounds to think that politicians and officials have the right kind of motivations and incentives to be responsive to our interests, and, when they don't, on the vulnerability and damage to our interests that we risk; where the emphasis of the second is on normative success or failure. Of course, this doesn't mean that we have no concern about the impact of politicians' and other officials' behaviour on our interests – far from it; but we trust or distrust depending on whether we think they are sticking to commitments, not on our view of how they are motivated toward us.

'Commitment' is a term with a tangled genealogy in philosophy and the social sciences, and this isn't the place to try to elaborate a detailed theory.[7] In this context, we

[7] The notion of a commitment appears in a wide range of theoretical as well as popular contexts. Most relevant here are the treatments in Gilbert 2006; Fossen 2013 (cf. Festenstein 2016). In Fossen's presentation, commitments play a foundational role,

can start with a paradigm case of commitment as promise, including a publicly made pledge such as appear in political parties' electoral manifestos or an oath of office.[8] When we trust politicians or officials in this kind of case, we think they'll fulfil the commitment they have undertaken, and we may feel betrayed if they don't. As these examples suggest, commitment in the relevant sense here is different from having a firmly fixed psychological intention (Hawley 2014: 10). You can be held to have commitments without anyone's thinking you have ever had a very firm intention to do what you're committed to doing: where you've promised to take me to the airport, it makes sense to ascribe the commitment to you, even if you've no intention of fulfilling it (or if the intention has faded since you made the promise); a politician can be held to a manifesto commitment even if she has only a very insecure and hazy psychological

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drawing on Robert Brandom's imposing account of 'the implicit structure characteristic of discursive practice as such' (Brandom 1994: 374). Norms arise within practices of giving and asking for reasons, and in accepting reasons and making claims participants bind themselves to standards that go beyond their subjective interpretation of their commitments. What it is for us to think of ourselves and others as normative beings is as capable of undertaking commitments, ascribing them to others and accepting responsibility for them. Calling an authority legitimate or illegitimate, for example, is a matter of 'taking a stance' in a linguistic practice, attributing various commitments and entitlements to oneself and other participants: to take a claim to authority to be legitimate is to accept commitments to obey while to reject it is to accept commitments to treat it as a coercive imposition.

[8] See too Eric Beerbohm's discussion of 'assurances' in electioneering (Beerbohm 2016).

intention to fulfil it. In each case, the point is, I'm entitled to trust the other since I'm rightly attributing to them a commitment that they in fact have.

Yet to account for interpersonal trust, a commitment account needs a fairly broad conception of commitment, which goes beyond explicit promises, pledges and oaths to encompass a range of more or less tacit, explicit, discretionary and non-discretionary commitments and norms. Individual (or collective) will or consent doesn't in itself ground commitments without social or public roles and common understandings of those roles, and relevant social institutions: I can swear an oath of office but, unless I've been duly elected, I'm not really undertaking the commitments that attach to it; and the content of the oath is itself a public document.[9] We attribute commitments on the basis of social roles and identities of those to whom the commitments are attributed (as sister or citizen, for example), and our attribution of a commitment may in turn be deeply shaped by our own identities, beliefs and feelings.

Since social roles and identities are often contestable, particularly in political contexts, this opens up the space for contestation over the commitments we may think someone has, what counts as a commitment, and what counts as fulfilment. Commitments themselves may be implicit or unexpressed until a problem arises: as Simpson puts it, the concept of trust functions as an alarm bell, drawing attention to a problem in habitual reliance (Simpson 2011). This helps us understand why perceived breakdowns or violations of trust often provide the moments when disagreement over the commitments entangled with social roles as well as the attribution of the roles

[9] There is a further conditionality, which there isn't scope to explore here, in relation to the mode of *uptake* when explicit promises are made: are you committed to a pledge to me that I haven't accepted? For a negative answer, see Beerbohm 2016.

themselves is ventilated. We can argue over whether you have fulfilled the commitments expected of you in a particular case ('We trusted you to represent our interests in the negotiations, but you did *what*?'). We argue over whether we have the attribution of commitments right ('She calls herself – or, we've thought of her as – a friend, etc., but is that what she is?'). But we also argue over the commitments attached to roles more generally ('Is *that* what a friend/boss/citizen of the republic/neighbour/babysitter/pastor/soldier does?'). Further, of course, the norms, structures and roles underpinning commitments and so shaping attitudes of trust are open to public debate.

This approach allows us to understand why other people – not just the trusted and truster – can contribute to questions about whether someone is trustworthy or has been betrayed (cf. Mullin 2005: 325). For these are contestable public questions about the commitments we attribute to others. While this doesn't eliminate problems of empirical complexity and epistemic uncertainty in working out just what is going on politically (how could it?), it does suggest that the attribution of commitment isn't just a factual matter about which we need a determination, as it is when Hardin seeks to establish whether or not you encapsulate my interests. Rather, the commitments that it's appropriate to attribute to you are subject to political debate, since they rest on a contestable array of social norms, conventions and practices.

For this account, you betray me when you don't act on the commitment that I've correctly attributed to you, but not just in any case where you disappoint me, including when you fail to act on a commitment that I've wrongly attributed to you. This isn't to say you can't disappoint me in those circumstances, but I'm mistaken if I say that you have betrayed my trust, since I wasn't entitled to trust you in the first place. To return to the case of the unreliable prime minister: what entitles us to trust him, and so to feel

betrayed if we think he has broken this trust, is not that we think he is motivated not to protect a particular interest of ours (say, in official honesty), even if that is true. Rather, we trust him because we rightly attribute a commitment to him to be honest, no matter how his motivations stand to our interests, and are betrayed when this is a commitment he fails to fulfil. And this in turn entitles a sense of betrayal or broken trust. It's worth underlining that for this conception, just as trustworthiness doesn't in itself imply moral integrity, betrayal doesn't imply moral odium. If I pledge support for you at the Hobbesian point of your sword and then break that pledge, you have been betrayed, on this account (Baumgold 2013).

As we've seen, one way in which we mistakenly moralise trust is by assuming that it is always morally commendable or relies on a moral virtue of integrity or trustworthiness. From a commitment perspective, there is a distinct kind of moralism in identifying feeling disappointed or being let down as betrayal or the breaking of trust (Gilbert 2006; Hawley 2014). It's quite common to feel disappointed in our political opponents, for instance, when they sink even further below our already depressed expectations, without a suggestion that we ever trusted them not to stoop this low, at least not as more than a rhetorical flourish. We can also feel betrayed when we aren't really entitled to, where we wrongly (or in bad faith) attribute a commitment that isn't there. This doesn't only include cases where you feel betrayed, for example, by your favourite celebrity failing to respond to your communications, marrying someone else, or expressing an abhorrent political opinion, but in fact aren't entitled to have trusted them in these ways to begin with.

Political trust, in the interpersonal sense that is the focus here, then, consists in relying on political actors and officials to act on the commitments that we attribute to them by virtue of these roles or the actions, such as campaign pledges, that flow from

them. With these ideas in place, let's return to the value attached to this form of trust. To recall the kind of use made of trust: the claim now is that, when I win an election, my trusting a defeated incumbent doesn't consist in the belief that the defeated candidate will step down out of good will or responsiveness to my interests. Rather, my trust consists in reliance on the defeated incumbent's adhering to her commitment to the norms and rules governing the election. I may be a member of the losing party or my interests may be adversely affected by the change of government but it nevertheless makes sense to say I trust the defeated party leadership to step down. In other words, political trust is reliance on others to act according to the commitments we attribute to them, not to act with good will toward us or with reference to our interests.

A proponent of responsiveness may worry that a false dichotomy is being set up. In some cases, we can think of people having certain sorts of commitment only when these are accompanied by appropriate motivations, feelings and dispositions: for example, I can trust you as a friend only if I think that you're motivated toward me in the right way. In this kind of case, to attribute a commitment is to attribute responsiveness. However, even if we think trust involves ascribing certain motivations, feelings and dispositions to the trusted, the relevant motivations, feelings and dispositions needn't always involve good will directed at the truster, in any sense: they may consist, for instance, only in respect for the sanctity of the rules or an unthinking conformism. In itself the entanglement of motivations (toward my interests) and commitment doesn't mean that there isn't a significant distinction to be drawn between these two conceptions.

We may still think that responsiveness isn't really distinguished from a commitment account since the former relies on, or at least typically can rely on, people's commitments to explain why others are likely to be responsive to you and why you

believe they are; and still maintain the view that trust itself consists in your reliance on them to be motivated in the right way toward your interests. Now it makes sense that there can be cases where good will can help explain the fulfilment of commitments, and that you can view the fulfilment of commitments as bearing on your interests. The suggestion here, though, is that what constitutes trust is your holding that they will fulfil their commitments: if you believe that a politician will fulfil her campaign pledge, then you trust her.

Contra writers such as Hardin, Lenard, and Warren – from their very different perspectives on the democratic politics of trust – the responsive alignment of interests between trusted and truster is neither necessary nor sufficient for warranted trust, and that the conflict of interests that characterise political relationships in itself doesn't create a tension between trust and the political. To ask if we trust you isn't to ask whether or not we think we share interests with you or are motivated to tend for our interests but to ask whether or not you'll fulfil the commitments that we judge you have. The tension between politics and trust arises not from a clash of interests or from epistemic uncertainty about the motivations of political actors, although these can form part of our explanation of why we think someone is trustworthy or not. These are reasons, of course, why we might not rely on others: why we may not be sure what they'll do, how they are oriented toward us, including whether or not they'll fulfil commitments we judge they have. But the specific and prior concern when we trust is with the attribution and content of commitments as well as with the judgment about whether someone is adhering to them.

4. Judgment, distrust, institutions

So far, I've tried to justify thinking about interpersonal trust in politics through the lens of commitment rather than responsiveness. I want to use this final section to highlight three implications of thinking about political trust in this way to draw out the contrast between the two conceptions a little further, and in doing so to explore some further questions for this approach, in relation to political judgment, distrust, and institutions.

Judgments about whether or not to trust in any particular case don't at their core involve an attempt to gauge whether an individual is benignly motivated toward me, or morally praiseworthy, (Hardin's 'street level epistemology') but engage public and normative debates about the content and fulfilment of public roles – how to interpret a president's speech and actions, or the commitments attached to the office. As we've seen, the commitments that we think attach to roles, and the roles themselves, are contestable. Further, even when we share a common view of the commitments that flow from an office, we can still diverge in our judgment of the criteria for appraising whether or not those commitments have been fulfilled or a particular officeholder meets those criteria. From this perspective, political trust is political not because it applies to certain kinds of officeholders but because of the evaluatively contestable character of these judgments about commitments, criteria and application. To recall what Warren says about the political and conditions of trust, conflicts of interests may explain these divergent judgments about commitments but the divergence itself constitutes a space of political contestation.[10]

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[10] This isn't to say that political judgment in this space is indeterminate: the conflict over determinate sovereign judgment in relation to these issues is of course fertile territory for modern political theorising (e.g., Tully 2002; Baumgold 2013; Fossen 2013; Zerilli 2016).

This leads us to consider distrust. Distrust in democratic theory is a large and, as a number of authors have argued, distinct topic, along with 'in-between' states such as mistrust (e.g., Allard-Tremblay 2015; Hardin 2002; Hawley 2014; Krishnamurthy 2015; Lenard 2012: 54-74; Rosanvallon 2008; Ullman-Margalit 2004); however, the contrast between responsiveness and commitment conceptions can be highlighted here too. Distrust doesn't consist merely in the absence of trust or of reliance: rather, it is 'best interpreted as an attitude that reflects suspicion or cynicism about the actions of others' (Lenard 2012: 56). From a responsiveness perspective, this suspicion amounts to more than the thought that you won't rely on the distrusted since you think she lacks a good will toward you: this is the kind of non-reliance that parallels reliance on an inanimate object. Rather, we distrust when we think that we can't rely on someone since as ill-disposed toward our interests. For example, Hardin argues that, in spite of the epistemic opacity of politicians and officials, we have general theoretical reasons to assume that they will act against our interests and so to distrust them: the 'incentives of government agents were [to use their power] to arrange benefits for themselves through impositions on others. Such incentives are a recipe for distrust in the sense that those on the wrong end of the interventions could see that their own interests were sacrificed for others merely because someone had the power to intervene' (Hardin 2006: 136). In other words, in spite of the epistemic opacity that pulls the rug from under reasonable trust, for Hardin, there are good reasons for distrust grounded in this reading of political motivations.

For the commitment conception, to distrust someone to do something is to believe that she has a commitment to doing it and yet think that she won't meet that commitment (Hawley 2014: 10). Political distrust, then, flows from the judgment that politicians and officials have motives or incentives not to fulfil these commitments: if we

distrust the defeated parliamentary group, it is because we think they have a commitment to step down but aren't in fact likely to do so. Systemic distrust arises when we think that there is a deep misalignment between the incentives driving politicians' and officials' behaviour and the commitments attached to the roles that we have empowered them to fulfil, as in Hardin's recipe. Here liberal and republican theory insists on institutionalized distrust in the forms of checks and balances, the separation of powers, bicameralism, dispersal of power, and mechanisms of accountability and transparency (e.g., Pettit 1998; Dunn 1999; Rosanvallon 2008; Waldron 2016: 167-94: Bruno 2017). It is easy to see how distrust – and, as Pettit points out, the expression of distrust – can be a civic virtue, a way in which we can discipline rulers, 'essential not only to democratic progress but also … to a healthy suspicion of power upon which the vitality of democracy depends' (Warren 1999: 310). For some theorists, contemporary democracy demands an ethos of distrust, which seems to comport more comfortably with fears of heteronomy or subjection to arbitrary power than does trusting (Allard-Tremblay 2015; Krishnamurthy 2015). Nevertheless, what I've suggested here is that distrust rests on a condition for the possibility of trust, namely, the recognition of a commitment in relation to which you may be betrayed or let down. Indeed, if we accept this commitment view, it suggests a reason why democratic politics is inherently susceptible to crises of interpersonal trust, in this sense. Although we may wish it were not the case (Fisher, Van Heerde, and Tucker 2010: 183), competitive overpromising is a feature, rather than a bug, of democratic politics. Perhaps as a result of the focus on deliberative and agonistic dimensions of political argument, this hasn't received the attention that it merits from contemporary democratic theory (but see Beerbohm 2016).

However, distrust isn't exhausted by the identification of the likely failure on an individual's part to fulfil commitments. If we distrust some police officers, for example, this may be because we don't think of them as fulfilling the commitments that go with their role – if they take bribes or routinely stop and search members of minority ethnic groups, for example. But we may distrust them precisely when we think they are in fact complying with what we think of as the commitments and norms that attaching to their roles. We distrust them in this case not because we don't think they will fulfil relevant commitments but because we think of the commitments as defective: we have a critique of the institutions and practices, as including forms of corruption or institutional racism, for example (Wight 2003; Yuval-Davis 2007). For this reason, it makes sense to say that you can act from commitments *qua* police officer, for example, that are themselves the basis of my distrust of you. The first kind of distrust is interpersonal: police corruption is a failure of those officers with respect to the standards or commitments that we think that the police should adhere to. Distrust in this case too then means that the distrusted are thought of as not doing something we should be able to rely on them to do. The second kind of distrust is institutional, directed at the role (or how the role is instantiated in a particular place and time), which moves us out of the space of distrust in an interpersonal sense. This takes us beyond the scope of this article. However, the approach developed here suggests that institutional distrust, as opposed to other forms of non-reliance, hostility or opposition to institutions, requires at least a framework of

normative (but not necessarily moral) expectations in relation to which we judge that the institutions and roles have failed.[11]

5. Conclusion

As citizens, we have an interest in assessing the ethical integrity of politicians and officials as well as an interest in gauging whether or not they are responsive to us and how their actions will impact on us. Legitimate as these interests are, I've argued that they shouldn't be conflated with our interest in political trust and distrust; this is a distinct concern with whether or not they are acting out of commitments. While our paradigm cases of commitment take the voluntaristic form of pledges and promises, to view trust through the frame of commitment attribution in this way highlights the importance of the social practices that underpin the commitment-endowing function of pledges, as well as the commitments attached to social and political roles, norms and institutions, and the political judgment that may underlie and contest the attribution of commitments. Failure to see this underpinning for judgments of trust leaves us exposed to an often moralising identification of disappointment with betrayal.

Embracing it, by contrast, allows us to see that interpersonal political trust relies on a contestable, normative but non-moral public space. Moving from a responsiveness to a commitment conception of political trust means that the question of whether we should trust in politics isn't addressed by our making an epistemic determination of the good will of others but by establishing where they are situated in this evaluatively

[11] Meena Krishnamurthy (2015) makes the case for the democratic value of distrust (that she takes from Martin Luther King) as the belief that another will act unjustly (see King 1964).

contestable public space of commitments and judgments about their fulfilment. This suggests that political trust appears fragile not primarily because it is empirically difficult to assess the motivations of others, however true that may be, but because it is inherently a site of political struggle.

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