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‘Back to the rough ground!’ A Grammatical Approach to Trust and International Relations

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Abstract

This paper asks what it is that we are doing when we talk about trust in international politics. It begins by reviewing the recent and growing body of research on trust and International Relations (IR), locating this more nascent collection of literature within a wider, established body of social science work on trust in disciplines such as psychology, political science, business and management studies. It claims that the existing literature is based on particular practices of representation that unquestioningly attempt to find the correct meaning for trust and that this representational account of meaning limits the form of the research, carrying assumptions about meaning that lead to several semantic and methodological problems. The paper challenges this way of understanding through the use of Ludwig Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations* and proposes an alternative, grammatical approach to trust and IR based on ‘meaning as use’. To illustrate this, the paper then conducts a grammatical investigation of the use of trust regarding nuclear arms control with the Soviet Union during the second term of the Reagan presidency. This challenges the familiar narrative of the role of trust at this time by going back to the ‘rough ground’ of President Reagan’s speech on trust and nuclear weapons.

Keywords

Trust, Wittgenstein, nuclear weapons, Reagan

Introduction

There is a rapidly expanding body of literature on trust and trust-building in International Relations (IR) and trust has been used as a theme of several publications, academic conferences and workshops. This growing body of scholarship on trust has promoted the concept as providing a valuable and distinctive contribution to our discipline that could offer a new way in which to

understand and influence international politics.¹ This emerging scholarship in IR has also been preceded and influenced by an increase in research on trust across the social sciences. Throughout this literature, trust is assumed to be both important and, apart from some discussion of the perils of misplaced trust, generally quite a good thing.²

This is complemented by the common public declarations of state leaders and diplomats on the need for trust in politics and the importance of building trust between states and peoples as a means of overcoming conflict. This familiar language on trust and diplomacy promotes the impression that the two are naturally linked. Even President Reagan's maxim of 'trust but verify' is still being used by politicians across the political spectrum in the United States, from former US Ambassador to the United Nations, John Bolton, speaking on Iran, to President Obama's description of Russian President Vladimir Putin's actions on Syria.³

¹ Literature that does this includes Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation, and Trust in World Politics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008); Aaron M. Hoffman, *Building Trust: Overcoming Suspicion in International Conflict* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006); Vincent Charles Keating and Jan Ruzicka, 'Trusting Relationships in International Politics: No Need to Hedge', *Review of International Studies* 40, no. 4 (2014): 753-70; Andrew Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Deborah Welch Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust: US-Soviet Relations during the Cold War* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997); Brian Rathbun, 'Before Hegemony: Generalised Trust and the Creation and Design of International Security Organizations', *International Organization* 65, no. 2 (2011): 243-73; Brian Rathbun, *Trust in International Cooperation: The Creation of International Security Institutions and the Domestic Politics of American Multilateralism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012). Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Beyond Waltz's Nuclear World: More Trust May be Better', *International Relations* 23, no. 3 (2009): 428-45; Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Investigating Diplomatic Transformations', *International Affairs* 89, no. 2 (2013): 477-96.

² For example Diego Gambetta, 'Can We Trust Trust?', in *Trust, Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, ed. Diego Gambetta (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); Deborah Welch Larson, 'Distrust: Prudent If Not Always Wise', in *Distrust*, ed. Russell Hardin (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2004).

³ John Bolton, 'We cannot verify and must not trust Iran's promises on nuclear weapons', *The Guardian*, 15 October 2013; 'Dealing with Putin: "Trust, but Verify,"' *Chicago Tribune*, 12 September 2013.

However, there are certain assumptions about meaning that are necessary to enable the idea of trust as a viable tool of analysis in international politics in the way the current research proposes. This includes the acceptance of a certain level of stability of meaning across time and space, as well as the idea that one can uncover a true or general understanding of a word. The existing research takes this for granted and is thus beginning with assumptions about meaning that become inbuilt in the types of questions it is possible to ask using the word. This paper claims that an implicit but ubiquitous assumption of meaning as representation underpins the existing literature, and that this assumption precedes and limits the range of possibilities for the form of the subsequent research.

The existing literature is based on particular practices of representation that unquestioningly attempt to find the correct meaning for trust. The question posed, either explicitly or implicitly, is ‘what is trust?’ To understand trust is therefore to gain insight into the ‘essence’ of a stable and uniform thing that a) exists in the world and b) is represented by the word ‘trust’. The literature, while displaying superficial differences, is therefore all founded on the same claim to accurately represent trust, which in turn relies on a particular, picture theory of meaning.

This paper proposes an alternative approach to meaning in general, and to trust specifically, using Ludwig Wittgenstein’s assertion that, in general, the meaning of a word is its use in everyday speech.⁴ It argues that taking the word ‘trust’ out of the context in which it is used for its meaning to be analysed on a purely theoretical level results in the creation of a set of challenges and limitations in its study. It will instead advocate an approach to language that regards it as a practice rather than the knowledge of a set of words that correspond to things in reality. In doing so it will show how the Wittgensteinian description of language as ‘part of an activity’ both brings to light and challenges the assumptions within the search for correct meaning throughout the existing research.⁵

The paper provides an illustration of the grammatical approach by conducting an investigation of President Ronald Reagan’s use of trust regarding nuclear arms control with the Soviet Union. The grammatical investigation of Reagan’s public speech and archival administration documents shows how the meaning for ‘trust’ as practised by the Reagan White House in this context was used as a strategic tool to link nuclear arms control to the issue of human rights; ‘trust’ in this instance implicitly contained a particular set of US political goals. By going back to the ‘rough ground’ of Cold War diplomatic speech, the case study illustrates how the Wittgensteinian approach exposes the political nature of the meaning of trust in this context. The case study thereby shows the potential of the grammatical perspective for a practice and context-based approach to

⁴ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1953), 43.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 23.

meaning that has the ability to acknowledge the implicit and complex meanings that are lost to IR when one adapts a representational approach.

While this research focuses on the literature on trust and IR based on the recent increase in academic interest in this topic, there are several other words that could also benefit from the grammatical approach proposed here such as sovereignty, fear or power. There have been Wittgensteinian interventions into debates on the meaning of other big concepts in politics. Shane Mulligan has conducted a conceptual history of legitimacy in international affairs through an incorporation of Wittgenstein's discussion of language games.⁶ Jonathan Havercroft uses Wittgenstein's description of changing aspects to argue that political philosophers should discuss liberty as an 'aspectual concept'.⁷ Véronique Pin-Fat has undertaken a grammatical reading of the expression of universality in literature on ethics and IR.⁸ This paper contributes to this literature by showing how the dilemmas of definition and explanation in the current literature on trust are self-imposed by the unreflective adoption of a picture theory of meaning.

The paper proceeds in several parts; first providing a brief overview of the current literature on trust in IR before illustrating how the current scholarship all rests on a particular representational view of meaning that both limits the type of research that can be conducted and imposes specific methods of explanation. It then challenges this dominant approach to meaning through the challenge of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. The paper suggests that an alternative approach to meaning that goes back to the rough ground of context and meaning as use could provide a more critical and self-reflective study of trust in international politics. The paper finally conducts a grammatical investigation of President Ronald Reagan's use of trust regarding nuclear arms control with the Soviet Union. This challenges the familiar claim of the role of trust at this time by going back to the 'rough ground' of Reagan's speech on trust and nuclear weapons during his second term.

The Study of Trust in International Relations

On first glance there is much variation within the literature on trust and IR. This includes work on rational choice, cognitive psychology, sociology and emotions and IR. However, despite this seeming disparity, all the existing literature implicitly endorses a specific, representational account of

⁶ Shane P. Mulligan, 'The Uses of Legitimacy in International Relations', *Millennium – Journal of International Studies* 34, no. 2 (2006): 349–75.

⁷ Jonathan Havercroft, 'On Seeing Liberty As', in *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy*, ed. Cressida Heyes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003).

⁸ Véronique Pin-Fat, *Universality, Ethics and International Relations* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010).

meaning. This representational account presupposes a thing called ‘trust’ that is represented by the use of the word ‘trust’ and can therefore be identified or measured according to the parameters outlined by the researcher. This section will briefly outline the differing accounts of trust before arguing that these ostensibly disparate versions actually rely on the same representational approach to understanding their main concept.

A common portrayal of trust within the IR literature is that of trust as a rational choice. The rational choice school of trust scholarship deals with portraying specific actors that are self-interested, rational agents who make strategic decisions in particular, limited contexts of potential cooperation.⁹ These decisions can be influenced by managing preferences and outcomes external to the actor. Trust in this account is a cognitive notion and is discussed as the calculation that another party is potentially trustworthy (i.e. cooperative) in a given situation.

Several authors have criticised the rational choice accounts for ignoring the dispositional, emotional and interpersonal components of trust and have put forward alternative explanations.¹⁰ Brian Rathbun and Deborah Larson propose conceptions of trust and cooperation based on social and cognitive psychology respectively.¹¹ Jonathan Mercer suggests that trust is an ‘emotional belief’ that can be explained with social identity theory.¹² In their work on the security dilemma, Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler argue for an emotional base to trust and propose that trust is a ‘mix of feeling and rational thinking’.¹³ Jan Ruzicka and Nicholas Wheeler propose an approach, based upon the work of Martin Hollis, which considers trust as binding.¹⁴ Inspired by authors such as Vincent Pouliot,

⁹ This approach is represented by authors such as Russell Hardin, *Trust and Trustworthiness* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2002); Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*; Hoffman, *Building Trust*; and Diego Gambetta, ed., *Trust, Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988).

¹⁰ See Lawrence Becker, ‘Trust as Noncognitive Security about Motives’, *Ethics* 107, no. 1 (1996): 47; Jonathan Mercer, ‘Rationality and Psychology in International Politics’, *International Organization* 59, no. 1 (2005): 95; Rathbun, ‘Before Hegemony’.

¹¹ Rathbun, ‘Before Hegemony’; Larson, *Anatomy of Mistrust*.

¹² Mercer, ‘Rationality and Psychology’, 95.

¹³ Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 232.

¹⁴ Ruzicka and Wheeler, ‘The Puzzle of Trusting Relationships’; see also Martin Hollis, *Trust Within Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Torsten Michel argues for the incorporation of a more non-conscious and inarticulate approach to the idea of trust that has its origins in the idea of the ‘logic of practicality’.¹⁵

The existing literature is thus based on an impression of difference, loosely divided along a rationalist/non-rationalist divide.¹⁶ However, these superficial differences actually obscure a more fundamental agreement on what trust is and how it can be studied. All these multiple ways of conceptualising trust within IR rest on the same basic unexpressed assumption, that the word ‘trust’ represents a concrete and stable meaning (or set of meanings with a baseline set of necessary and sufficient conditions) and can be defined, understood and agreed on an abstract level. That this is possible is taken for granted, but actually rests on a set of assumptions about language as a representation of the world. The tendency throughout the trust literature to adopt an uncritically representational account of meaning leads to certain problematic inclinations in its study. This results in the imposition of certain methodological imperatives on the research that demands particular and often problematic types of explanation.

There are three main imperatives that this paper will outline. The first is the urge to define trust; by conceptualising the word trust as representing a particular meaning, the ensuing question must be “what does trust mean?” If trust is hypostatized as a thing that can be operationalised, this demands a specific type of explanation, which can lead to what John Gunnell describes as ‘internal contradictions and self-generated dilemmas’.¹⁷ This influences the methods of explanation that are both allowed and required for those who study trust. Because of this, scholars have struggled to define trust and so must often resort to the employment of complex and sometimes tortured means of explanation.

¹⁵ Torsten Michel, ‘Time to Get Emotional: Phronetic Reflections on the Concept of Trust in International Relations’, *European Journal of International Relations* 19, no. 4 (2012): 13; see also Torsten Michel, ‘Trust, Rationality and Vulnerability in International Relations’ in *The Vulnerable Subject: Beyond Rationalism in International Relations*, eds. Amanda Russell Beattie and Kate Schick (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013); Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ Jan Ruzicka and Vincent Keating provide a comprehensive review of the IR trust literature that divides it into rationalist, social and psychological approaches, see Jan Ruzicka and Vincent Charles Keating, ‘Going Global: Trust Research and International Relations’, *Journal of Trust Research* (2015): DOI: 10.1080/21515581.2015.1009082

¹⁷ John Gunnell, ‘Desperately Seeking Wittgenstein’, *European Journal of Political Theory* 3, no. 1 (2004): 77–98.

For example, unable to adequately explain the word, authors often attempt to define trust by dividing it into many different types. Uslander divides trust into the categories of ‘moralistic’ and ‘strategic’ trust and further subdivides these two categories into ‘generalized’ and ‘particularized’ trust.¹⁸ Booth and Wheeler divide trust not into separate categories, but along a continuum which travels from functional cooperation at one end to interpersonal bonding at the other.¹⁹ Lewis and Weigert divide trust into nine types based on the amount of emotionality and rationality involved in the bond. This ranges from rational prediction to faith and includes such types as ‘ideological trust’, ‘emotional trust’, ‘probable anticipation’ and ‘mundane, routine trust’.²⁰ Möllering describes Cummings and Bromiley’s ‘Organizational Trust Inventory’ of various bases of trust that ‘started off with 273 items, were gradually reduced to sixty-two items and ultimately twelve items through statistical processing’.²¹

Another widespread device used in the literature is negative definition. This device is used to explain the nature of trust to the reader by being quite certain about what trust is not. Luhmann asserts that trust is not familiarity nor is it confidence and that it is neither fully rational nor fully non-rational.²² Similarly, Lewis and Weigert assert that trust is not faith or prediction or ‘merely expectation’.²³ Mayer et al., contend that trust is not ‘taking a risk’ and is not predictability.²⁴

¹⁸ Eric Uslander, ‘The Moral Foundations of Trust’ (paper prepared for the symposium ‘Trust in the Knowledge Society’, University of Jyväskylä, Finland, 20 September 2002 and presentation at Nuffield College, Oxford University, 14 February 2003). Available at:<http://www.gvpt.umd.edu/uslander/uslanermoralfoundations.pdf>. Last accessed April 4, 2014.

¹⁹ Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 229.

²⁰ J. David Lewis and Andrew Weigert, ‘Trust as Social Reality’, *Social Forces* 63, no. 4 (1985): 973.

²¹ In Guido Möllering, ‘The Nature of Trust: From Georg Simmel to a Theory of Expectation, Interpretation and Suspension’, *Sociology* 35, no. 2 (2001): 413.

²² Niklas Luhmann, ‘Familiarity, Confidence, Trust: Problems and Alternatives’, in Gambetta, *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*, 42–3.

²³ Lewis and Weigert, ‘Trust as Social Reality’, 970.

²⁴ Roger C. Mayer, James H. Davis and F. David Schoorman, ‘An Integrative Model of Organizational Trust’, *Academy of Management Review* 20, no. 3 (1995): 709–34.

Hoffman also argues that trust is not predictability.²⁵ Larson differentiates between trust and expectation while Vincent Keating and Jan Ruzicka claim that trust is not the same as confidence.²⁶

These examples illustrate how the need to base the study of trust on agreement in definition leads into a sometimes unproductive discourse over correct meaning that tends both to simplify and complicate the study of trust in ways that are not helpful, as well as at times reducing debate to the mere production of thesis and antithesis, ‘so we battle back and forth like the tone of an argument between 2 small children. “Es ist doch nicht es-aber es ist doch so”’.²⁷

Apart from the difficulties illustrated above in the execution of a definition of trust, in practice, if one accepts the picture of language as representation and the subsequent necessity for trust to be defined on an abstract level, there are two possible variations of compromise one can accept in order to deal with the ambiguity of meaning: either to define trust very loosely or in very specific terms. Each of those two compromises has its own problems in terms of an actual contribution to understanding international politics. If one creates a very broad, general definition for one’s purpose, one runs the risk of being able to make everything and anything fit into a narrative of trust, thus explaining little. In contrast, if one takes a very specific definition of trust, one is left with the proposition that ‘according to my definition of trust as “x” in specific circumstances “y” this is an occasion of trust’. This circular explanation may be technically accurate, but again, has a problem with how much it can actually contribute to furthering an understanding of politics.

The second imperative of the representational view of meaning and trust is that it does not allow for self-reflection on the type of practice involved in the search for the correct meaning of trust and how this may induce one to think about trust in a way that will naturally shape one’s conception of the term. This is evident in the encouragement within the literature to seek out multi- and interdisciplinary approaches to trust in order to discover an overarching account of trust within the social sciences; trust is promoted as a potentially unifying factor for disparate disciplines.²⁸ However, this

²⁵ Hoffman, *Building Trust*, 21.

²⁶ Larson, ‘Distrust: Prudent If Not Always Wise’, 35. Keating and Ruzicka, ‘Trusting Relationships in International Politics’.

²⁷ The English translation is ‘It is not like this—but it is like that’. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, taken from Susan B. Brill, *Wittgenstein and Critical Theory, Beyond Postmodern Criticism and Toward Descriptive Investigations* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1994), 7–8.

²⁸ See for example, Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 234; Jan Ruzicka and Nicholas J. Wheeler, ‘The Puzzle of Trusting Relationships in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty’, *International Affairs* 86, no. 1 (2010): 72. In other social science work see Gregory A. Bigley and Jone L. Pearce, ‘Straining for Shared Meaning in Organization Science: Problems of Trust and

ignores the possibility that why one uses a concept is not separate from how one uses it. Being a more or less trusting person is a different thing to how a polity may trust in political systems or institutions, or how states cooperate under anarchy; conflating or trying to place these things along a continuum or within a hierarchy of importance creates methodological challenges. Taking that approach carries the assumption that there exists a core baseline of understanding that can be attributed to the various things that are labelled as trust; while there may be different types of trust there still exists a common thread of meaning in all uses. The challenge of meaning as use suggests that this is less useful than is generally suggested, or at least needs to be carefully considered, as the specific approach to meaning implicit in this approach actually generates many of the multiple challenges in its study. There is no actual subject of study for trust; one is studying how people's feelings of trust can relate to international cooperation, management strategies, the mechanisms of complex social institutions, psychological dispositions and countless other things.

The final imperative that results from the unspoken consensus on the representational view of trust in the literature is that trust is commonly bestowed with agency. The temptation to hypostatise one's conception of trust that is embedded in the representational view of meaning brings with it a temptation to afford this conception with the ability to act without reflection on the relationship between representation and acting, what one is doing in representing trust in this way. Uslaner states that trust 'brings us all sorts of good things', 'has consequences' and 'has powerful effects on business and cultural group involvement as well as on charitable contributions and volunteering'.²⁹ Luhmann asserts that 'trust is a solution for specific problems of risk'.³⁰ Booth and Wheeler ask whether it is possible for trust to 'overcome uncertainty and conquer interstate anarchy?'.³¹ Others speak of a 'role' for trust; Ruzicka and Wheeler describe the 'crucial role' played by trust and trustworthiness in upholding the nuclear non-proliferation regime,³² while Roderick Kramer describes the role of trust in 'reducing transaction costs'.³³

Distrust', *Academy of Management Review* 23, no. 3 (1998); Roderick M. Kramer, 'Trust and Distrust in Organizations: Emerging Perspectives, Enduring Questions', *Annual Review of Psychology* 50 (1999): 569–98; Lewis and Weigert, 'Trust as Social Reality'.

²⁹ Uslaner, 'The Moral Foundations of Trust', 1, 20, 18.

³⁰ Niklas Luhmann, 'Familiarity, Confidence, Trust: Problems and Alternatives', in Gambetta, *Trust: Making and Breaking Cooperative Relations*.

³¹ Booth and Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma*, 230.

³² Jan Ruzicka and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Decisions to Trust: Maintaining the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime', *RUSI Journal* 155, no. 2 (2010): 20–5.

³³ Kramer, 'Trust and Distrust in Organizations', 583.

By adopting an unquestioningly representational picture view of meaning, the accounts of trust in IR, while claiming difference, all portray trust as a word that represents a particular thing that exists in the world; so when one says the word ‘trust’ it refers to a corresponding, relatively stable and independent entity that can be transferred and analysed across differing contexts. This type of theorising about trust is, according to Henry Staten, ‘connected with the traditional philosophical picture of mind and meaning, according to which meanings are object-like unities that float about in a homogeneous spiritualized medium called “mind”’, and this picture both limits the possible ways that we may think about trust and international politics, and demands certain methods of explanation.³⁴

‘A picture held us captive’, Wittgenstein and the Meaning of Words

The Wittgensteinian challenge dismantles this representational idea of a ‘true’ meaning (or set of meanings) for a word and argues that the portrayal of language contained therein, while depicting certain elements of a system of communication (i.e. naming), does not describe everything that we call language but is in fact a ‘primitive’ idea of how language works.³⁵ Understanding language is not simply a question of naming and interpretation. This naming only works within an understanding of the wider context of the speech and only if one is already accustomed to the naming process. The mastery of language that must come prior to naming is not a type of knowledge but a practice: ‘[t]o understand a language means to be master of a technique.’³⁶ Wittgenstein describes the words that make up our language, and the activity in which it is practiced as a ‘language game’, ‘I shall also call the whole [of language], consisting of language and the actions into which it is woven, the ‘language-game’.³⁷ The label of ‘game’ highlights the importance of practice in the use and meaning of language.³⁸

³⁴ Henry Staten, ‘Wittgenstein and the Intricate Evasions of “Is”’, *New Literary History* 19, no. 2 (1988): 285.

³⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 199.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 7.

³⁸ Although this is not the only way that Wittgenstein makes use of the idea of the ‘language game’, he uses the terms in many differing ways in the *Philosophical Investigations* to illustrate various points.

Meaning therefore does not rest in the relation between words and the things that they name but is acquired through the practice of following rules that have become connected to the language through repeated use. As Karin Fierke states for example, '[o]ne does not interpret a stop sign, but rather follows the rule that one stops when confronted with this symbol'.³⁹ Understanding a language consists of a practice of rule-following that comes prior to interpretation and 'must consist in the unmediated ability to 'grasp' a sign manifested in actual praxis'.⁴⁰

Rather than meaning as representation, in most cases the meaning of a word is its use in everyday speech.⁴¹ Therefore the meaning of a word cannot be taken out of the context wherein it is expressed to be analysed on a universal and purely theoretical level but is the use of a word in everyday speech. Meaning as use is therefore a warning against the urge to generalise above or delve below the surface level of language. It highlights the dangers of presenting meaning as a preconceived notion to which we then amend our experiences. The idea that a concept such as trust can mean one, or two, or even 50 different things that all have a minimum baseline of attributes in common and a definite boundary around them is thus denied, as meaning does not encompass this sort of universality or require these set limits. There is no set space wherein the meaning of the word rests but instead a 'family resemblance' of intersecting characteristics in the ways the word 'trust' is used.⁴²

If language is acknowledged as an activity, taking a word in isolation and asking what it means takes it out of the activity in which it is bestowed with meaning and thus renders it less meaningful. Therefore I can tell someone that I trust them, can read a hotel bill that says 'we trust you have enjoyed your stay', or exclaim 'trust her to do that', and the meaning of the word 'trust' expressed, though different in each case, is clear to anyone who is enmeshed in the practice of our language game. It is only when one takes the word out of this practice to ask 'what does it mean to say the word "trust"?' that its meaning becomes in any way unclear. Thus the common assumption that language is a representation of reality is a restrictive force, it causes us to think that we are able to outline the nature of a thing, to explain the meaning of a word, because words stand for certain things in 'reality' when indeed we are simply recreating our own version of that meaning.

³⁹ Karin Fierke, *Changing Games, Changing Strategies: Critical Investigations in Security* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 25.

⁴⁰ James Tully, 'Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy: Understanding the Practices of Critical Reflection', in *The Grammar of Politics: Wittgenstein and Political Philosophy* ed. Cressida Heyes (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), 38.

⁴¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 43.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 67.

One thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it.

A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably [emphasis in original].⁴³

It is the acceptance of this 'picture' of language that is problematic in the study of trust. By implicitly accepting that one can find a meaning for the word trust in its representational sense, it becomes tempting to view the notional meaning that one sets around the word as somehow correct or real. Studying a concept such as trust with an uncritically representational approach to meaning can induce hypostatisation of the concept, giving presence to a meaning that has merely been placed around a limitless concept in order to fulfil a certain course of study, and then promoting a view of this construct as a viable object of study in itself.

The Grammatical Approach

The idea that taking a word away from its use removes the word's meaning is one reason that the Wittgensteinian challenge of 'meaning as use' renders unanswerable the question 'what is trust?' that is the inclination embedded in the trust literature. This presents, as Pin-Fat asserts, 'an insurmountable problem for any form of explanation (including explanations in IR) that rests on the "discovery" of a property that is common to all instances of phenomena under investigation'.⁴⁴ The search for this property demanded by the question 'what is trust?' implicit in the existing literature in IR places a notional theoretical boundary around the word that does not exist in the ordinary way the word is used. This results in distance between the language under examination, and our ability to understand it.

The more narrowly we examine actual language, the sharper becomes the conflict between it and our requirement...The conflict becomes intolerable;...We have got on to slippery ice where there is no friction and so in a certain sense the conditions are ideal, but also, just because of that, we are unable to walk. We want to walk: so we need *friction*. Back to the rough ground! [emphasis in original]⁴⁵

It is on the rough ground of context and the everyday that we remain safe from the excesses of theory and the need for general definition. This research thus proposes an alternative, grammatical study of

⁴³ Ibid., 114–15.

⁴⁴ Pin-Fat, *Universality, Ethics and International Relations*, 11.

⁴⁵ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 107.

trust, building on existing literature that has brought the Wittgensteinian challenge to traditional accounts of meaning into the study of IR.⁴⁶

Wittgenstein describes grammar as expressing a word's 'essence'.⁴⁷ If the meaning of a word is in its use, grammar is the range of possible uses for a word and thus tells us what 'kind of object' something is.⁴⁸ Knowing the grammar of an object means knowing how to act. Fierke gives the example of IR as a grammar on which basis 'any practitioner...knows "how to go on" in constructing an argument or acting in the world'.⁴⁹ The grammar of trust then would include all the ways in which the word 'trust' can be used, one can lose trust, gain trust, abuse trust, deserve trust, be trustworthy or entrust for example. It also includes how these uses relate to other concepts and how they are similar or are different. So, for example, losing trust is different to losing one's keys and gaining trust is different to gaining weight.⁵⁰

A grammatical investigation examines the place of and use for trust in context and in relation to other words. It will ask how and why trust is being used; not 'what is trust?' but 'what is meant by trust here?' The point of the grammatical investigation is to stay on the surface of language. It rejects the idea of the possibility of a more true meaning for trust than what we mean when we say the word 'trust'. Rather, the grammatical investigation accepts meaning as use and examines the use of the word in its context. This approach by its nature cannot be prescriptive or general but is fundamentally that of Wittgenstein's advice to 'look and see'.⁵¹

⁴⁶ See for example, Karin M. Fierke, 'Critical Methodology and Constructivism', in *Constructing International Relations: The Next Generation*, eds. Karin M. Fierke and Knud Erik Jørgensen (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2001); Karin M. Fierke, 'Wittgenstein and International Relations Theory' in *International Relations Theory and Philosophy: Interpretive Dialogues*, eds. C. Moore and C. Farrands (London: Routledge, 2010); Martin Hollis and Steve Smith, *Explaining and Understanding International Relations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990); Friedrich V. Kratochwil, *Rules, Norms and Decisions: On the Conditions of Practical and Legal Reasoning in International Relations and Domestic Affairs* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Nicholas Onuf, *World of Our Making: Rules and Rule in Social Theory and International Relations* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989); Pin-Fat, *Universality, Ethics and International Relations*.

⁴⁷ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 371.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 373.

⁴⁹ Fierke, *Changing Games*, 46.

⁵⁰ For a more extensive explanation see Hanna Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 116–21.

⁵¹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 66.

Rather than a prescription for a method, it is perhaps best to think of the grammatical approach as an admission or a reminder of the limitations that inform our descriptions. Pitkin speaks of a kind of self-knowledge ‘that [h]owever much we struggle to define the essence of a concept, or to defend the essence we think we have found, we cannot escape our tacit knowledge of how words are actually used’.⁵² The method of description is not a method in traditional terms but thus an attempt to read with a ‘self-knowledge’ of the implications of our attitude to meaning. It is an admonition against the struggle to overcome the inconsistencies and contradictions of meaning and a reminder that these very inconsistencies and contradictions are the rough ground on which language works. Reforming the commonly asked questions from ‘what does trust mean?’ to the more grammatical, ‘what is meant by trust here?’ can provide a valuable redescription of trust and IR. The following section will provide an example of going ‘back to the rough ground’ by conducting a grammatical study of President Ronald Reagan’s use of trust regarding nuclear arms control and the Soviet Union.

A Grammatical Study: ‘Trust the people’, Ronald Reagan and Nuclear Arms Control

Several authors have used thawing of relations between the United States and the Soviet Union, the personal relationship between Reagan and Secretary General Gorbachev and progress on nuclear arms control during the late 1980s as an example of the role of trust in international politics.⁵³ This study will illustrate how taking a grammatical approach to the meaning of trust in this instance can provide a valuable redescription of the politics of the time that avoids the picture theory of meaning implicit in the existing literature. It will accomplish this through an investigation of Reagan’s use of ‘trust’ in his public speech regarding the Soviet Union and nuclear arms control during his second term in office. On the ‘rough ground’ of Cold War diplomacy, the meaning of trust as practiced by the Reagan administration was a conduit that linked nuclear arms control to the issue of human

⁵² Pitkin, *Wittgenstein and Justice*, ix.

⁵³ Tuomas Forsberg, ‘Power, Interests and Trust: Explaining Gorbachev’s Choices at the End of the Cold War’, *Review of International Studies* 25, no. 4 (1999): 603–21; Andrew Kydd, ‘Trust, Reassurance, and Cooperation’, *International Organization* 54, no. 2 (2000): 325–57; Deborah Welch Larson, ‘Trust and Missed Opportunities in International Relations’, *Political Psychology* 18, no. 3 (1997): 701–34; Nicholas J. Wheeler, ‘To Put Oneself into the Other Fellow’s Place’: John Herz, the Security Dilemma and the Nuclear Age’, *International Relations* 22, no. 4 (2008): 493–509.

rights; to 'trust' in this instance meant to adhere to a particular set of US policy prescriptions implicit in the contextual meaning of the word. This crucial context, which is brought to light through the grammatical approach, is absent from the study of trust and IR when one takes a representational view of meaning.

When President Reagan used trust in his speech it was often alongside words such as 'freedom', 'people', 'liberty', 'democracy' and 'faith'. This was Reagan's grammar of trust, one that was linked to the values of conservative America and often expressed using the phrase 'trust the people'. Reagan used many variants of the phrase 'trust the people' throughout his time in office.⁵⁴ In a typical address in 1984 he claimed that 'the doom-criers will always be with us. And they'll always be wrong about America until they realize progress begins with trusting the people'.⁵⁵ He declared that it was 'time to put trust back in the hands of the people',⁵⁶ and repeatedly claimed that in his administration, '[o]ur whole impulse, in all our policies, in all of our administration comes down to this: Trust the people. And we do'.⁵⁷

Reagan's political strengths of perceived trustworthiness and strong personal values informed his use of trust. He presented himself as a 'citizen politician', who 'ran for office to restore common sense and common decency to a government which had grown too big, too complex and too far removed from the concerns of average Americans'.⁵⁸ This use of trust also occurred in a particular historical context. High inflation, unemployment, petrol shortages and perceived foreign policy embarrassments had all contributed to what President Carter had labelled a 'crisis of confidence' in

⁵⁴ 'Trust the people' was also part of the Republican Party Platform in the 1988 presidential election. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, 'Republican Party Platform of 1988', The American Presidency Project, 16 August 1988. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25846> [hereafter The American Presidency Project.]

⁵⁵ Ronald Reagan, Radio Address to the Nation on the Economic Recovery Program, 21 January 1984, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=39983>

⁵⁶ Ronald Reagan, Remarks at a Spirit of America Rally in Atlanta, Georgia, 26 January 1984, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40294>

⁵⁷ Ronald Reagan, Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Cincinnati, Ohio, 20 August 1984, The American Presidency Project. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=40269>

⁵⁸ Frances Fitzgerald, *Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Touchstone, 2000), 28.

1979.⁵⁹ Reagan claimed that the problems of the 1970s were ‘brought about by government leaders who for too long were afraid to trust the American people’.⁶⁰ It was an opportune time for a politician who could convincingly speak trust, one who represented ‘leadership that trusts in you and the power of your dreams’.⁶¹ Reagan thus contrasted himself with the leaders ‘back in the late seventies’ a time when ‘we’d lost respect overseas, and we no longer trusted our leaders to defend peace and freedom’.⁶²

Reagan’s ‘trust the people’ was also a distinctly American trust. This is evident in many of his speeches in which he made statements such as ‘[t]rust the people—this is the crucial lesson of history and America’s message to the world’,⁶³ and ‘America has a secret weapon; it’s called “trust the people”’.⁶⁴

As the United States began to engage more with the Soviet Union from 1985, Reagan began to increasingly emphasise the importance of trust as ‘trust the people’ in his speech on foreign policy. He linked this trust to the issue of nuclear weapons, describing the problem of the nuclear age as a problem of trust, and explaining nuclear weapons as the symptom of a lack of trust in the international realm rather than the generator of a lack of trust in the international realm. The weapons

⁵⁹ Seymour Martin Lipset and William Schneider, ‘The Decline of Confidence in American Institutions’, *Political Science Quarterly* 98, no. 3 (1983): 379–402; Melanson, *American Foreign Policy since the Vietnam War*, 80; Robert A. Strong, ‘Recapturing Leadership: The Carter Administration and the Crisis of Confidence’, *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 16, no. 4 (1986): 636–50.

⁶⁰ Ronald Reagan, Remarks at the Annual Convention of the National Corn Growers Association in Des Moines, Iowa, 2 August, 1982, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42811>

⁶¹ Ronald Reagan, Radio Address to the Nation on the Presidential Campaign, 27 October, 1984, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=39319>

⁶² Ronald Reagan, Remarks at a White House Luncheon for Elected Republican Women Officials, 12 March 1984, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=39622>

⁶³ Ronald Reagan, Remarks at the National Leadership Forum of the Center for International and Strategic Studies of Georgetown University, 6 April 1984, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=39731>

⁶⁴ Ronald Reagan, Remarks at the National Legislative Conference of the Building and Construction Trades Department, AFL-CIO, 5 April 1982, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=42368>

themselves were not the challenge; it was the underlying lack of trust between states that had created the problem of nuclear weapons. Nuclear weapons were therefore the result of the inability of states to trust each other.

This can be seen in several statements on the damaging nature of mistrust in the international. In an interview in October 1985 before the Geneva Summit, Reagan first used a quote that became a regular feature of his speech:

I have a little thing here that I copied out of an article the other day, and the author of the article uttered a very great truth: “Nations do not distrust each other because they are armed. They arm themselves because they distrust each other.” Well, I hope that in the summit maybe we can find ways that we can prove by deed—not just words, but by deeds—that there is no need for distrust between us.⁶⁵

In another interview in November, Reagan again identified the ‘distrust that causes the problems and causes the situation with regard to nuclear arms negotiations’.⁶⁶ This connection implied that the Soviet Union would need to prove that it was trustworthy before becoming a partner in arms control, thus placing a set of implicit preconditions on any agreement.

When nuclear arms control talks between the United States and the Soviet Union resumed in Geneva in March 1985, the administration viewed initial Soviet proposals as propaganda efforts. Gorbachev was proving to be much more adept than his predecessors at positively influencing international public opinion and, as Ambassador Max Kampelman admitted, ‘[g]one...were the days when the Reagan administration could rely on the Soviets to serve as their own worst enemies in public relations’.⁶⁷ In October, Gorbachev proposed a 50 percent reduction in strategic arms. The White House received this with scepticism, privately characterising it as ‘clearly a propaganda attempt to put the ball in the US court’.⁶⁸ A memorandum from Secretary of State George Shultz to President Reagan on the subject described it as ‘one sided and self-serving’ and ‘obviously designed

⁶⁵ Ronald Reagan, Remarks in an Interview with Representatives of Soviet News Organizations, Together with Written Responses to Questions, 31 October 1985, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38015>

⁶⁶ Ronald Reagan, Interview with Representatives of the Wire Services, 6 November 1985, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=38027>

⁶⁷ Mark Hertsgaard, *On Bended Knee: The Press and the Reagan Presidency* (New York: Schocken Books, 1989), 288.

⁶⁸ Bureau of Intelligence and Research Analysis, 2 October 1985, Jack F. Matlock Jr. Files Box 20, USSR Arms Control 1, The Ronald Reagan Library, Simi Valley, California (hereafter Reagan Library).

for public appeal'.⁶⁹ In January 1986, Gorbachev proposed the abolition of all nuclear weapons by the year 2000.⁷⁰ At an NSPG meeting in February 1986, officials debated how to respond to this. Special Advisor to the President and Secretary of State on Arms Control Paul Nitze explained the move as driven by a 'psychological need to recapture the "high ground"', a view which was reiterated by Chief of Staff Howard Baker who also acknowledged that 'the chess game for world opinion was a central element of the present policy debate'.⁷¹

The administration responded to these initiatives by placing the proposals within a wider political context. The official public diplomacy strategy advised keeping proposals 'in perspective of broader US/Soviet agenda'.⁷² One way the administration managed this was by creating a connection between nuclear arms control and human rights within the language of 'trust the people' in order to undermine the legitimacy of any proposals the Soviet Union might make.

When Reagan spoke of the Soviet Union and human rights, it was therefore within the grammar of 'trust the people'. He frequently repeated variations of the phrase 'a country that distrusts its own people cannot be trusted'. Human rights were a matter of trusting the people and the Soviet Union, by not trusting its people, was inherently untrustworthy. If one accepted this connection, the responsibility would always be on the Soviet Union to prove its trustworthiness, or continue to be responsible for the problem of trust in the international and therefore the problem of nuclear weapons. This created a link between any action that the US might take (or fail to take) on nuclear arms control to the human rights practices of the Soviet Union as though there was a causal relationship between these two things, which became a valuable way of answering any accusations of US intransigence in nuclear arms control negotiations.

President Reagan made this connection on several occasions during the run up to and aftermath of the Reykjavik Summit in 1986. In a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September, Reagan described human rights as 'the indispensable element for peace,

⁶⁹ George Shultz to the President, 3 October 1985, Executive Secretariat NSC-System Files, 8590507-8591016, File 8591041, Reagan Library.

⁷⁰ At the same time the Soviet Union also extended its moratorium on nuclear testing. See Philip J. Farley, 'Strategic Arms Control 1967-87,' in *U.S.-Soviet Security Cooperation, Achievements, Failures, Lessons*, eds. Alexander L. George, Philip J. Farley, Alexander Dallin. New York/Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988, 242.

⁷¹ National Security Planning Group Meeting Notes, 3 February 1986, Executive Secretariat NSG NSPG Box 3, NSPG 127 020686 (Arms Control Gorbachev) 2 of 2, Reagan Library.

⁷² Public Handling of Soviet Arms Control Proposals, 22 February 1986, Jack F. Matlock Jr. Files Box 67, Arms Control Gorbachev (4 of 5) Reagan Library.

freedom, and prosperity' and recounted his conversation with Gorbachev during their meeting in Geneva the previous year.

Mr. Gorbachev was blunt, and so was I. We came to realize again the truth of the statement: Nations do not mistrust each other because they are armed; they are armed because they mistrust each other. And I did not hesitate to tell Mr. Gorbachev our view of the source of that mistrust: the Soviet Union's record of seeking to impose its ideology and rule on others.⁷³

The White House talking points for post-Reykjavik briefings emphasised the message that:

[r]espect for human rights is as important to peace as arms reductions because peace requires trust...A country that breaks faith with its own people cannot be trusted to keep faith with foreign powers.⁷⁴

The following month, when addressing the nation on the Reykjavik Summit, Reagan stated that 'an improvement of the human condition within the Soviet Union is indispensable for an improvement in bilateral relations with the United States. For a government that will break faith with its own people cannot be trusted to keep faith with foreign powers'.⁷⁵ He repeated this point on several occasions during this period and other members of the administration reinforced it in their statements.⁷⁶

In 1987 Gorbachev made several significant concessions on arms control.⁷⁷ In May, National Security Advisor Frank Carlucci expressed his worry that the US was 'losing the public diplomacy

⁷³ Ronald Reagan, Address to the 41st Session of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, 22 September 1986, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36458>.

⁷⁴ White House Issue Brief, 16 October 1986, Alton Keel Files Box 1, Reykjavik Briefings (2 of 3), Reagan Library.

⁷⁵ Ronald Reagan, Address to the Nation on the Meetings with Soviet General Secretary Gorbachev in Iceland, 13 October 1986, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=36587>. Reagan made a similar point in public statements on 4 October and 31 December.

⁷⁶ On 3 October Press Secretary Larry Speakes reiterated this point, and on 6 November Shultz repeated the words of Reagan, 'A government that breaks faith with its own people cannot be trusted to keep faith with foreign powers', for details see Raymond L. Garthoff, *The Great Transition, American-Soviet Relations and the End of the Cold War* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1994), 293.

⁷⁷ Gorbachev agreed to delink the talks on Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces (INF) from the negotiations on strategic weapons in February and suggested the INF double zero proposal in July.

ground to the Soviets'.⁷⁸ Reagan continued to make the connection between trust and human rights in several variants throughout the year, mainly in speeches focused on a European audience. In a statement at the Venice Economic Summit Conference on East-West relations in June 1987 he called for 'significant and lasting progress in human rights, which is essential to building trust between our societies'.⁷⁹ The same month, in his famous Brandenburg Gate speech in West Berlin, he declared, we must remember a crucial fact: East and West do not mistrust each other because we are armed; we are armed because we mistrust each other. And our differences are not about weapons but about liberty.⁸⁰

In an address broadcast to the people of Western Europe in November, Reagan declared that the United States would:

closely watch the condition of human rights within the Soviet Union. It is difficult to imagine that a government that continues to repress freedom in its own country, breaking faith with its own people, can be trusted to keep agreements with others.⁸¹

After the Washington Summit in December, Reagan continued to talk about trust and human rights, telling reporters he had explained to Gorbachev 'how difficult it is for the people of the Western democracies to have trust in a government that doesn't trust its own people and denies their human rights'.⁸²

The great benefit of this use of trust as 'trust the people' was that it transcended any specific concessions that the Soviet Union might make, for as Reagan declared in 1988 'trust between East and West will flourish not only when prisoners are released but when the instruments of repression

⁷⁸ Frank Carlucci to Howard Baker, 15 May 1987, Howard H. Baker Files Box 4, Nuclear Weapons, 19 March 1987, Reagan Library.

⁷⁹ Ronald Reagan, Venice Economic Summit Conference Statement on East-West Relations, 9 June 1987, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=34376>

⁸⁰ Ronald Reagan, Remarks on East-West Relations at the Brandenburg Gate in West Berlin, 12 June 1987, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=34390>

⁸¹ Ronald Reagan, Address to the People of Western Europe on Soviet-United States Relations, 4 November 1987, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33635>

⁸² Ronald Reagan, Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with News Editors and Broadcasters, 11 December 1987, The American Presidency Project. Available at: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33807>

are dismantled and repressive laws and practices are abolished'.⁸³ Until that time, '[h]ow can we help but doubt a government that mistrusts its own people and holds them against their will?'⁸⁴ By connecting human rights and the problems of nuclear weapons within the grammar of 'trust the people', the White House could, as Shultz stated in an Oval Office meeting, 'hold them hostage on human rights'.⁸⁵ This connection served as a useful justification for a broad range of policy preferences until the end of the Reagan presidency.⁸⁶ In April, Vice President George Bush recorded a memorandum of conversation he had conducted with important Republican donor, Dwayne Andreas. Andreas had recently had a private conversation with Gorbachev during which Gorbachev had complained that it was difficult to have 'a meaningful conversation now with anybody in the administration' adding, '[w]e don't get any real conversation anymore. It all starts out and ends on human rights'.⁸⁷

The grammatical approach to trust taken here not only shows how the search for the 'correct' meaning of trust in the existing literature obscures the potential for seeing meaning in use, but also forces us to question what has become familiar in much discourse on the era; the idea that trust played a role at this time and that this 'trust' can be taken apart and understood out of context. The study shows that, while the Reagan/Gorbachev era has often been framed in terms of trust, this connection can also be understood as a result of a set of decisions by the Reagan administration to link nuclear arms control with a particular meaning for trust. By doing so it provides a redescription

⁸³ Ronald Reagan, Remarks at a White House Briefing for Human Rights Supporters, 3 December 1987, The American Presidency Project. Available at:

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33765>

⁸⁴ Ronald Reagan, Remarks to the World Affairs Council of Western Massachusetts in Springfield, 21 April 1988, The American Presidency Project. Available at:

<http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=35716>

⁸⁵ Hand written notes by Colin Powell from meeting, 20 January 1988, RR, HHB, GPS, CP, Colin Powell Files Box 3, Shultz, George (Sec State [1 of 3]), Reagan Library.

⁸⁶ For example, Wayne Howell has claimed that Reagan used the issue of SDI to push for greater liberalisation and democratisation of the Soviet Union by concentrating on human rights and framing them as a matter of trust during the Reykjavik summit. B. Wayne Howell, 'Reagan and Reykjavik: Arms Control, SDI and the Argument from Human Rights,' *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 11, no. 3 (2008): 392.

⁸⁷ Memorandum of Conversation, 27 April 1988, Howard H. Baker Files Box 3, Moscow (US-Soviet Meetings), Reagan Library.

of the era that allows us to view the political nature of the use of trust, something that cannot be addressed by the representational approach.

Conclusion

This paper has claimed that the existing literature on trust is based on a problematic assumption that one must find the ‘meaning’ for trust and thereby understand and operationalise its role in international politics. The paper suggests that, alternatively, it is in grammar, the place of the word ‘trust’ in the form of life that is our language, where one can find meanings for trust. This approach challenges the very idea of the effectiveness of attempting to gain consensus on what trust means. The challenge, as Pin-Fat claims, ‘opens space for us to ask, though not yet answer, how it is that rules appear ‘natural’ as a representation of ‘how things are’; how ‘reality’ is constituted and its effects’.⁸⁸ In this way, according to Fierke, it is ‘implicitly critical, insofar as it demonstrates the power of language, its social underpinning and its ability to constrain and bewitch’.⁸⁹

By conducting an investigation of President Reagan’s use of trust regarding nuclear arms control with the Soviet Union, the paper also demonstrates how going back to the rough ground of context allows for a more complex and political description of trust and IR. Its contribution is in recognising how the terms we use to talk about the world will necessarily frame what we can and cannot ask. Therefore asking how these terms, such as the idea of a ‘role of trust’ in both the study of IR and the practice of diplomacy, come about and are used can offer an alternative account to unquestioningly accepting the validity of these terms as tools of understanding and thus accepting their boundaries.

Though this paper is focused on trust, the challenge applies beyond the study of trust to many other words used as tools of explanation in IR and makes the wider point that before we begin by asking ‘what does a word mean?’ we should first reflect on the assumptions about meaning that go into the form of these questions. We should question whether current debates over ‘what is the meaning of’ trust and other words fall prey to the universalist temptation of ignoring the ‘rough ground’ of context, practice and the everyday.

This is important in two ways. First because as this paper has discussed, the approach to trust in the existing literature places a distance between the ‘study of trust’ in IR and other ways in which the word ‘trust’ is used. Second, because talking about politics in terms of trust necessarily privileges certain concepts and actions that are related to a specific grammar of trust and undermines those that

⁸⁸ Pin-Fat, *Universality, Ethics and International Relations*, 18.

⁸⁹ Fierke, ‘Wittgenstein and IR Theory’, in Moore and Farrands, *International Relations Theory and Philosophy*, 92.

are not. When trust becomes embedded in the form of our questions, it places a boundary around the world of potential answers. There are limitations in what one can see if one is framing international politics in terms of trust, so that trust becomes, as Wittgenstein describes ‘like a pair of glasses on our nose through which we see whatever we look at’, and we are left with the problem that it ‘never occurs to us to take them off’.⁹⁰ There may be no need to demand the dismantling of the pictures of trust as ‘playing a role’ within IR, but there is a need to acknowledge that these *are* particular pictures of the world, and thus an attempt to understand the implications and limitations of the frame.

Author biography

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⁹⁰ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 103.