Trust as a Social Reality*

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Abstract

Although trust is an underdeveloped concept in sociology, promising theoretical formulations are available in the recent work of Luhmann and Barber. This sociological version complements the psychological and attitudinal conceptualizations of experimental and survey researchers. Trust is seen to include both emotional and cognitive dimensions and to function as a deep assumption underwriting social order. Contemporary examples such as lying, family exchange, monetary attitudes, and litigation illustrate the centrality of trust as a sociological reality.

In recent years, sociologists have begun to treat trust as a sociological topic (e.g., Conviser; Garfinkel; Haas and Deseran; Henslin; Holzner; Strub and Priest; Weigert,a,b). Indeed, two short and powerful books, Niklas Luhmann's *Trust and Power* (1979) and Bernard Barber's *The Logic and Limits of Trust* (1983), have placed trust at the center of sociological theorizing about contemporary society. Nevertheless, we agree with Luhmann's lament that there is a "regrettably sparse literature which has trust as its main theme within sociology" (8).

There is a large quantity of research on trust by experimental psychologists and political scientists, which, however, appears theoretically unintegrated and incomplete from the standpoint of a sociology of trust. These researchers typically conceptualize trust as a psychological event within the individual rather than as an intersubjective or systemic social reality. They also tend to use methodological approaches that reduce trust to its cognitive content through psychometric scaling techniques or to its behavioral expressions in laboratory settings. Luhmann and Barber, on the other hand, present trust as an irreducible and multidimensional social reality.

The purposes of this paper are three-fold: (1) to propose a sociological conceptualization of trust extracted largely from the works of Luhmann, Barber, Parsons, and Simmel;[1] (2) to bring this sociological concep-

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tualization to bear on the psychological and political science studies of trust in order to go beyond their conceptual and theoretical limits; and (3) briefly to review selected recent treatments which collectively demonstrate the sociological nature of trust and its crucial importance across a variety of social institutions.

I. Trust as a Sociological Concept

From a sociological perspective, trust must be conceived as a property of *collective* units (ongoing dyads, groups, and collectivities), not of isolated individuals. Being a collective attribute, trust is applicable to the relations among people rather than to their psychological states taken individually. Therefore, we may say that trust exists in a social system insofar as *the members of that system act according to and are secure in the expected futures constituted by the presence of each other or their symbolic representations* (cf. Barber,b). It is the mutual "faithfulness" (Simmel,a,379) on which all social relationships ultimately depend. Consequently, trust may be thought of as a functional prerequisite for the possibility of society in that the only alternatives to appropriate trust are "chaos and paralysing fear" (Luhmann,4). It is more basic for the constitution of solidary groups than even a sense of moral obligation. "Trust . . . is the attitudinal ground—in affectively motivated loyalty—for acceptance of solidary relationships" (Parsons,e,142).

Although trust in general is indispensable in social relationships, it always involves an unavoidable element of risk and potential doubt. We would not have to accept this risk if there were some functional alternative to trust. In order to understand why such an alternative to trust is not always available, we must consider the social function of trust more closely. Luhmann argues that the function of trust is "the reduction of complexity."

This complexity is easily seen in the temporal aspects of social life. Society, especially modern industrial society, is organized by complex and tightly integrated temporal structures (see Lewis and Weigert,a). The flow of social interactions is controlled by "socially expected durations" (Merton) which define when activities are to begin and end. The individual has the twin problems of fitting together his or her unique set of social timetables while simultaneously coping with the potentially disruptive effects of unexpected events and others' timetables.

It is not possible to develop plans of action which take into account all possible contingent futures. If all possible future events were accorded equal probability, the future would appear with such enormous complexity as to preclude rational action in the present. What is needed, then, is a strategy to reduce this complexity to manageable proportions. This reduction of complexity is possible if the cognitively expected proba-

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bilities of most of the contingently possible future events are thought of as zero for all practical purposes.

Rational prediction is one such strategy. By collecting and processing information about known causal relationships, we can make predictions that certain futures are highly probable and others are too remote to require serious consideration in present planning. Unfortunately, rational planning alone is not sufficient. Even if we assume a deterministic universe, we simply do not have the necessary time and resources to rationally predict and control the effects of oncoming futures. Trust is a functional alternative to rational prediction for the reduction of complexity. Indeed, trust succeeds where rational prediction alone would fail, because to trust is to live *as if* certain rationally possible futures will not occur. Thus, trust reduces complexity far more quickly, economically, and thoroughly than does prediction. Trust allows social interactions to proceed on a simple and confident basis where, in the absence of trust, the monstrous complexity posed by contingent futures would again return to paralyze action (Simmel,b).

Even though trust is functionally necessary for the continuance of harmonious social relationships, its actual continuance in any particular social bond is always problematic. Friends and spouses sometimes come to distrust each other; citizens lose trust in the government, the judicial system, the news media, or the monetary currency; patients and clients wonder if doctors and lawyers are trustworthy at all. Such distrust itself may be functional in complex interpersonal and institutional relationships (Barber,b). Political scientists have perhaps best documented that distrust in any set of political incumbents is functional for the continuance of democratic institutions (Hart). Distrust, in other words, also reduces complexity by dictating a course of action based on suspicion, monitoring, and activation of institutional safeguards. Ultimately, however, there is no foolproof safeguard, and suspicion eventually gives way to knowledge or realignment, so that actors must fall back on some kind of trust. Although, as Barber suggests, both trust and distrust may be functional, the dynamics of each would lead to different kinds of systems, the former tending toward solidarity and the latter toward atomism.

We see that the primary function of trust is sociological rather than psychological, since individuals would have no occasion or need to trust apart from social relationships. In addition, we would like to argue that, like its function, the *bases* on which trust rests are primarily social as well. This raises the question of how trust in other persons and institutions is established, maintained, and, when necessary, restored.

An adequate conceptual analysis of trust begins by recognizing its multi-faceted character. It has distinct cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions which are merged into a unitary social experience. We will argue that each of these three dimensions must be comprehended

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sociologically and that variations in the relative importance of the cognitive base of trust in comparison to its emotional base provide the grounds for differentiating two important subtypes of trust. Moreover, this analysis makes it possible to distinguish trust from the various psychological states and processes (faith, prediction, etc.) with which it has sometimes been conflated. Barber (b), for example, overly restricts his conceptualization of trust to expectations, which results in a too functional and rational analysis.

First, trust is based on a cognitive process which discriminates among persons and institutions that are trustworthy, distrusted, and unknown. In this sense, we cognitively choose whom we will trust in which respects and under which circumstances, and we base the choice on what we take to be "good reasons," constituting evidence of trustworthiness. Luhmann states, "Familiarity is the precondition for trust as well as distrust, i.e., for every sort of commitment to a particular attitude towards the future" (19). As Simmel (a) had likewise observed, trust involves a degree of cognitive familiarity with the object of trust that is somewhere between total knowledge and total ignorance. That is, if one were omniscient, actions could be undertaken with complete certainty, leaving no need, or even possibility, for trust to develop. On the other hand, in the case of absolute ignorance, there can be no reason to trust. When faced by the totally unknown, we can gamble but we cannot trust.

No matter how much additional knowledge of an object we may gain, however, such knowledge alone can never cause us to trust. The manifestation of trust on the cognitive level of experience is reached when social actors no longer need or want any further evidence or rational reasons for their confidence in the objects of trust. Although some prior experience with the object of trust is a necessary condition for establishing the cognitive element in trust, such experience only opens the door to trust without actually constituting it. The cognitive element in trust is characterized by a cognitive "leap" beyond the expectations that reason and experience alone would warrant—they simply serve as the platform from which the leap is made. Luhmann describes this cognitive process as "overdrawing" on the informational base. Each individual is typically able to make the leap not only because of his or her particular psychological make-up, but also on the assumption that others in the social world join in the leap. Although there are individual differences relevant to the trust factor, the cognitive content of trust is a *collective* cognitive reality that transcends the realm of individual psychology, and herein lies the theoretical significance of Luhmann's claim that the cognitive base of trust lies in "trust in trust." Each trusts on the assumption that others trust. We will argue that this cognitive attitude is present in all forms of trust, but the experiential and rational "platform" from which the cognitive leap is made varies considerably from one type of trust to another.

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The sociological foundation of trust is also constructed on an *emotional* base that is complementary to its cognitive base. This affective component of trust consists in an emotional bond among all those who participate in the relationship. Like the affective bonds of friendship and love, trust creates a social situation in which intense emotional investments may be made, and this is why the betrayal of a personal trust arouses a sense of emotional outrage in the betrayed. The betrayal of trust strikes a deadly blow at the foundation of the relationship itself, not merely at the specific content of the betrayal. This emotional component is present in all types of trust, but it is normally most intense in close interpersonal trust. Its presence in public trust is evident in the surge of emotional indignation we feel when we learn of doctors performing unnecessary surgery on elderly people in order to collect federal Medicare payments or of corrupt politicians and judges who accept illegal "kickbacks" and the like. When recipients of public trust turn that trust to their personal, pecuniary advantage, they inflict serious damage to the heart of civil society. It is this abuse of trust, much more than the simple illegality of individual actions, that provokes our emotional wrath. The emotional content of trust contributes to the cognitive "platform" (mentioned above) from which trust is established and sustained. This contribution derives from the knowledge that the violation of trust threatens to bring severe emotional pain to all who are implicated in the trust relationship, including paradoxically the violators themselves. Thus, we see that the emotional content of trust is just as reciprocal and intersubjective as is its cognitive base.

This brings us to the third sociological base of trust—namely, its behavioral enactment. The practical significance of trust lies in the social action it underwrites. Behaviorally, to trust is to act as if the uncertain future actions of others were indeed certain in circumstances wherein the violation of these expectations results in negative consequences for those involved. In other words, the behavioral content of trust is the undertaking of a risky course of action on the confident expectation that all persons involved in the action will act competently and dutifully (Barber,b). The behavioral content of trust is reciprocally related to its cognitive and emotional aspects. Luhmann points out that behavioral displays of trust-implying actions help to create the cognitive platform of trust. When we see others acting in ways that imply that they trust us, we become more disposed to reciprocate by trusting in them more. Conversely, we come to distrust those whose actions appear to violate our trust or to distrust us. Similarly, trust-implying actions help to establish or reinforce the emotional sentiment of trust, as positive affect circulates among those who express trust behaviorally, just as negative affect arises among those who betray or act distrustfully toward each other.

To summarize, although we can identify three distinctive analytical dimensions of trust—cognitive, emotional, and behavioral—which corre-

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spond to the three basic modes of human social experience, in reality these dimensions of the phenomenon are interpenetrating and mutually supporting aspects of the one, unitary experience and social imperative that we simply call "trust." The roots of trust extend to every modality of human experience but it does not thereby lose its unity.

TYPES OF TRUST

From this general sociological conception of trust, we may differentiate types of trust. Although the cognitive, affective, and behavioral contents of trust are present in every instance of trust to some extent, their qualitative mix across instances of trust differs, and these differences provide the basis for distinguishing types of trust relationships. That is, the *cognitive* platform may be quite limited (strangers passing on the street) or may be extremely extensive (as in nuclear arms reduction negotiations); the *emotional* content may be minimal (most interactions among bureaucrats) or highly intense (relations between lovers); and finally, the *behavioral* content may be restricted to a narrowly circumscribed act or extend to an indefinitely large range of acts among those involved. We will designate those trust relationships in which there is a preponderance of cognitive content as "cognitive trust," and those wherein the emotional element is more dominant we shall term "emotional trust." Generally, the behavioral limits of the trust relationship are relatively specific in cognitive trust and more diffuse or open-ended in emotional trust.

Trusting behavior may be motivated primarily by strong positive affect for the object of trust (emotional trust) or by "good rational reasons" why the object of trust merits trust (cognitive trust), or, more usually, some combination of both. One may hypothesize that the stronger the emotional content relative to the cognitive content, the less likely contrary behavioral evidence will weaken the relationship. "Love and hate make one blind" (Luhmann,81). Taken to extremes, if *all* cognitive content were removed from emotional trust, we would be left with blind faith or fixed hope, the true believer or the pious faithful. On the other hand, if *all* emotional content were removed from cognitive trust, we would be left with nothing more than a coldblooded prediction or rationally calculated risk: the ultimate war game in which the only logic is self interest and kill ratios. Trust in everyday life is a *mix* of feeling and rational thinking (Weigert,a), and so to exclude one or the other from the analysis of trust leads only to misconceptions that conflate trust with faith or prediction. The types of trust may be visually represented by the property space relating rationality and emotionality in Figure 1.

The existence of these different types of trust is theoretically comprehensible from a sociological viewpoint. The comparative strength and importance of the cognitive versus the emotional base of trust vary de-

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		EMOTIONALITY		
		High	Low	Virtually Absent
RATIONALITY	High	Ideological Trust	Cognitive Trust	Rational Prediction
	Low	Emotional Trust	Mundane, Routine Trust	Probable Anticipation
	Virtually Absent	Faith	Fate	Uncertainty, Panic

Figure 1. RATIONALITY AND EMOTIONALITY BASES, TYPES OF TRUST, AND BOUNDARY STATES

pending on the type of social relationship, situation, and system under consideration (Bonoma). Specifically, the emotional content of trust relationships is typically quite high in primary group relations, and the cognitive–rational base of trust is more extensive and continuing in the formation of trust relationships in secondary groups. Consequently, with population growth and greater structural differentiation, a greater number of social relationships are based on cognitive trust than on emotional trust. Luhmann refers to this as a macro change from a social order based largely on personal or *interpersonal* trust that characterizes small and relatively undifferentiated societies to a social order based more on *system* trust (i.e., trust in the functioning of bureaucratic sanctions and safeguards, especially the legal system) that characterizes modern, complex societies (and see Barber,b).

The reasons for the change are fairly obvious. In the change from a face-to-face society to one of widespread anonymity in a demographically large and structurally complicated system, a person often interacts with others who are not known well or even at all. Yet, for example, we do not hesitate to buy a new appliance from a stranger if we know that s/he is acting merely as a representative of a corporation which offers a warranty for its product. Similarly, we will buy or sell a house to someone we do not know, because we know that the power of the State will intervene if necessary to enforce the terms of the legal contract. These are examples of system trust which modern society increasingly depends on, inasmuch as most of the interactions occurring in such societies would be too risky, unpredictable, or downright impossible if they had to be based only on

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personal trust. We would have to collect a great deal more information about individuals with whom we interact, and the pace and scope of modern life is such that there is not sufficient time for building up the number of personal trusts required.

Luhmann further argues that personal trust and system trust rest on different bases. Personal trust involves an emotional bond between individuals, and the emotional pain that each would experience in the event of betrayal serves as the protective base of trust even where other types of short-term gains could be realized by breaking the trust. This emotional content is largely absent in system trust. System trust rests on what Luhmann (drawing heavily from Goffman) calls a "presentational" base. That is, system trust is activated by the appearance that "everything seems in proper order." Indeed, our assumption that the other is who s/he appears to be forges the essential link between appearances and selfhood. Such "trust in identity" is essential for communication and is a constitutive bond of society (cf. Giffin and Patton; Goffman; Holzner; Holzner and Robertson).

System trust is indispensable for the effective functioning of the "symbolic media of exchange" such as money and political power. Without public trust and confidence in the reliability, effectiveness, and legitimacy of money, laws, and other cultural symbols, modern social institutions would soon disintegrate (see Parsons,c,d). One sure sign that a social system is under severe strain and possibly on the verge of fundamental structural change is generalized loss of trust in the monetary system, in the legitimacy of political leadership and authority, in educational and religious institutions, and (ultimately and consequently) in interpersonal trust in everyday life. As Durkheim similarly noted, institutional trust underwrites interpersonal trust; therefore, we would expect to lose trust in other persons as trust in our common institutions erodes. This again indicates the deeply sociological nature of trust in both its sources and functions in human group life.

II. A Critique of Empirical Social Science Research on Trust

Perhaps the most important theoretical insight of Luhmann's work on the sociology of trust is his observation that trust cannot be fully understood and studied exclusively on either the psychological level or on the institutional level, because it so thoroughly permeates both. For this reason, an adequate sociological theory of trust must offer a conceptualization of trust that *bridges* the interpersonal and the systemic levels of analysis, rather than dividing them into separate domains with different definitions and empirical methodologies for different social science disciplines. The bulk of social science research on trust has been conducted by political

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scientists studying trust in government and public officials, and by experimental social psychologists studying determinants of trusting behavior in laboratory settings. Although these groups of researchers have sometimes borrowed from each other theoretically and methodologically, no general paradigm of trust has emerged from their work. Indeed, a survey of the massive number of empirical studies conducted by these groups fails to reveal even a common *working definition* of trust. Consequently, the social science research on trust has produced a good deal of conceptual confusion regarding the meaning of trust and its place in social life. Although political scientists and psychologists have conducted major research programs with trust or distrust as the main object of inquiry, they have generally remained incognizant of the theoretical contributions of Simmel, Parsons, or Luhmann, and have not adequately recognized the social nature of trust.

The bulk of this research has concentrated on two different conceptualizations of trust. Psychologists working from personality theory have conceptualized trust as a psychological construct or trait that individuals develop in varying degrees, depending on their personal experiences and prior socialization. The focus of research is on individual differences or differences in group averages (e.g., college students) across time. Methodologically, this research is based on psychometric scaling techniques, the most prominent scale being the Rotter Interpersonal Trust Scale (ITS). This scale and its underlying "social learning" theory were developed by J. B. Rotter (a,b,c,d,e; Rotter et al.). Rotter (d) defines trust as the *generalized expectancy* that the statements of others can be relied on or promises will be fulfilled. Much of the research and theorizing about political trust and the relationship between "efficacy" and "political trust" has conceptualized trust along similar lines (Bachman and Jennings; Brown; Campbell; Cole; Hart; Hochreich and Rotter; Watts; Wolfe; Zimmer).

The second major conceptualization of trust is represented by the behavioral psychologists who study behavioral trust in laboratory experiments, particularly the "prisoner's dilemma" (PD) game. They propose a strictly behavioral interpretation of the concept "trust" by equating trust with cooperation with others in the game. To trust is operationalized as a "trusting" (i.e., cooperating) choice of behavior. Research focuses on determining situational variables which increase (decrease) the level of trust (cooperation) or distrust (competition) between persons playing the game. For example, many studies have shown that cooperation in the PD game increases when players are able to communicate their expectations to each other and when players carry through on their threats and promises.[2] Morton Deutsch is the most prominent of the experimentalist group (a,b,c,d,e,f,g,h,i,j).[3]

It may be concluded that, despite research efforts to merge the Rotter-type personality theory of trust with behavioral (especially experimen-

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tal) conceptualizations of trust within the scope of a single research design and theory, these two lines of research and theorizing appear destined to proceed in distinct directions. The fundamental reason for the persistent segregation of these research programs is that trust is a highly complex and multidimensional phenomenon, having distinct cognitive, affective, behavioral, and situational manifestations which may not be co-present at any particular point in time; therefore, it is often far too simplistic to ask whether an individual trusts or distrusts another person or governmental agency. One may trust in some respects and contexts but not others. As a result, when trust is regarded as a psychological state, it is easily confused with other psychological states (hope, faith, behavioral prediction, etc.), and dealt with methodologically in ways which have reductionistic consequences.

In groups for which trust exists as a social reality, interpersonal trust comes naturally and is not reducible to individual psychology. For example, Zand found that groups characterized by strong feelings of common purpose and interest are more able to focus on group problems directly, whereas groups that are more individuated tend to degenerate into interpersonal conflicts when problems arise. Like the Durkheimian collective representation, the sentiment of trust is manifest in the psyches of individual group members, but this must not lead us to the common but erroneous inference that trust is fundamentally an individual and behavioral phenomenon produced by rational machinations of autonomous, calculating individuals.

The latter conception of trust is predominantly that of the experimentalists, and may account for the limited results of their PD game experiments. If, as the sociological conception of trust holds, trust is essentially social and normative rather than individual and calculative, we would not expect it to manifest itself strongly in experiments where strangers are brought together to interact in the absence of prior social relationships among them and according to the norms of the experimental situation. Although they speak of trust, these researchers are not really studying trust at all. What they are investigating are the processes by which individuals come to formulate and act on predictions about the behavior of others. But, as Luhmann notes, trust is not mere prediction: "Trust is not a means that can be chosen for particular ends, much less an end/means structure capable of being optimized" (88). Predictions and behaviors based on psychologically reductionist models are "functional equivalents for trust but not acts of trust in the true sense." Prediction and trust both function to reduce complexity and uncertainty, but, as we have argued earlier, in different ways.

Trust begins where prediction ends. The overrationalized conception of trust, by reducing it to a conscious, cognitive state presumably evidenced by cooperative behavior, totally ignores the *emotional* nature of

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trust. Earlier psychologists and sociologists emphasized the importance of emotional ties in human group life, but with the rise of behaviorism and operationalism, the emotional side of social relations has been neglected in comparison to the behavioral and cognitive dimensions of human experience. Fortunately, with the current resurgence of interest in the social psychology of emotion (Gordon; Kemper), it seems likely that the affective aspect of trust will be given attention equal to its cognitive and behavioral aspects.

There are other conceptual difficulties with the behavioral interpretation of trust. One may trust cognitively without necessarily trusting behaviorally. For instance, a police officer may be ordered by a superior to spy on his police partner whom he trusts but the superior does not. One may also feign trust behaviorally without trusting cognitively. By treating behavioral trust as an unfailing indicator of cognitive trust, the PD game experimentalists have restricted their attention to overt behavior which may not necessarily arise from cognitive or emotional trust. In these cases, behavioral "trust" is not really trust at all. It is a calculated prediction, an experiment, a pretense, or something else. Strictly speaking, behavioral trust should be conceptualized as situationally activated cognitive and/or emotional trust. Trust cannot be adequately understood by a "behavioralized" explanation, though behavior is the constitutive medium for doing trust. Even recent analyses by sociologists, however, tend toward a psychological reductionism of trust (cf. Haas and Deseran).

III. The Sociology of Trust: Illustrative Treatments

In this final section, we discuss analyses of the necessity of trust in a variety of institutional domains (cf. Barber,b). These treatments highlight both the social reality of trust and its fruitfulness as an interpretive tool. The most general and wide-ranging discussion is presented by Sissela Bok in her analysis of lying as a moral choice in both public and private life. She explores arguments for lying in crucial institutional domains of public life such as medicine, government, international relations, social and behavioral science, law, and the professions generally. Pointed applications are also made to private life and typical interactional situations. After exploring traditional philosophical and religious arguments against lying as well as standard pragmatic arguments for lying in specific situations, she formulates what we regard as a sociological interpretation of the moral consequences of lying across all situations.

Bok's argument assumes that a type of general trust is essential to all social orders. Every lie, however, threatens to some degree this general trust. Regardless of specific individual or institutional justifications for the particular act of lying, its impact on general trust must also be taken into

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account. Bok writes that ". . . trust in some degree of veracity functions as a *foundation* of relations among human beings; when this trust shatters or wears away, institutions collapse" (33). For example, the moral effect of a president's lying to the American people is not judged only by the deception in the matter at hand, but more profoundly, by the threat to the general trust underlying the political order. In a word, Bok's central moral argument is sociological: every lie threatens general trust which is essential to society; therefore, lying threatens society, and the morality of the lie must be judged in that general social context.

A second book presents a general and useful, if somewhat underdeveloped, treatment of trust in the context of contemporary American society. Faced with the contemporary increase in the frequency and scope of seeking legal redress in the courts for perceived harm, Jethro Lieberman argues that ours has become a highly "litigious" society. His underlying model for interpreting the salience of litigation builds on characterization of the change from traditional to modern society as a shift from status to contract as the dominant idea governing social relationships. Lieberman sees contemporary society as characterized by a further shift from contract to fiduciary relationships in which persons are increasingly dependent for their own welfare on the presumed, but not specifically contracted, competent and dutiful actions of others. Fiduciary relationships are safeguarded, not by explicit substantive rules that would be too narrow and inflexible in the face of contemporary complex knowledge and techniques, but by ethically vague and almost hortatory standards governing relationships, especially those between relatively expert, autonomous parties and relatively unknowing, dependent parties. If the dependent party discerns an injustice in the case of an unsatisfactory outcome, the vagueness of standards of performance and accountability demands clarification. And the likely recourse by the offended party is to seek such clarification as well as redress in the courts.

Lieberman pursues his thesis through issues of product liability, medical malpractice, an emerging environmental ethic, court mandated affirmative action, and the "erosion of immunity" as even previously immune governmental units are sued. Prototypical of fiduciary relationships are those based on standards aimed at a general or common good between client and professional, or citizen and official. Narrow rules dictating professional or official action would contradict the nature of such relationships and be totally inadequate for the good which is sought. Fiduciary relationships demand that the dependent party trust in the competence and integrity of the professional or official in accordance with the highest ethical standards.

Trust is the essential assumption that makes it possible to enact fiduciary relationships in pursuit of shared goals. Such goals cannot be empirically assured in every case, however. Patients die; clients lose their

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claims; citizens are denied satisfaction; and some cars are lemons. In the absence of adequate trust, perceived failure in competence or integrity is likely defined by the dependent party as incompetence or fraud, an injustice for which redress is increasingly likely to be sought in the courts. The significant increase in court suits involving such issues as medical malpractice is a response to two major changes in contemporary society: first, the spread of fiduciary relationships; second, for whatever reason, the weakening or absence of trust necessary to enable such relationships to function satisfactorily. Moreover, as trust weakens publicly, the motivation for other dependent parties to seek redress in the courts increases, further weakening trust within the class of sued parties, such as doctors, lawyers, educators, or elected officials. A spiral of distrust emerges, leading to a "rush to the courtrooms" and representing "what seems to account for much litigation elsewhere: a fundamental distrust for those in authority. The courts cannot solve this problem,. . . . Trust can be promised and trust can be earned, but it cannot be ordered" (Lieberman,134).

A third institutionally focused analysis of trust concerns the economic domain and money in particular. S. Herbert Frankel, an economist, argues that contemporary "monetarist" theorists fail to give sufficient weight to the reality of money as a core social institution which depends on adequate trust for its proper functioning. Monetary theory simply treats money as though it were another inert "commodity" object which would obey the laws of classical economics. Frankel draws heavily from Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money* to refute this assumption and to add sociological realism to the partial abstractions of Keynesian monetarism. For Frankel and Simmel, money functions best when people strongly trust in it, and it cannot function at all without trust. People tend to trust money most when it circulates reasonably freely and "naturally" without any taint of deliberate manipulation for special interests. Excessive and apparently arbitrary political manipulation of money supply, interest rates, debt financing, etc., undermines general public trust in money. The consequences of the total loss of general trust are potentially far more socially damaging than could be compensated by any short-term political or economic gains these monetary manipulations may produce. As Frankel states the issue:

> The trust in money—i.e., in who does the defining—therefore implies trust in the maintenance of the monetary order. This is not a question merely of how particular individual rights, debts, or obligations are dealt with. What is at issue here is a much more basic question: How can a trustworthy society, with stability of character be maintained and continue to be relied upon? (39).

In a word, manipulating the monetary system is an attempt to transform a core social institution into just another commodity object like corn or wheat. Such an objectivist reduction of money is false and mis-

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leading. Economic collapse occurs in contemporary industrial and commercial societies not when nature fails to send rain or locusts ravage crops, but when society fails to support trust and sends citizens running on the banks. The sociological realism of Frankel's argument is emphasized in his concluding pages. He rejects "the nominalist conception of public monetary obligations according to which they can be abrogated at the dictates of convenience and expediency." Such actions "lead to the destruction of trust in the monetary order" (97). Indeed, he sees the free monetary order as "a condition of civility, a code of civil monetary behaviour, an ideal—the pursuit of trust" (100).

The books by Lieberman and Frankel show that trust is vitally important to the political and economic institutions. We now consider a third institutionally focused study which establishes the sociological significance of trust within the family. In his analysis of family structures in nineteenth century Lancashire, Michael Anderson takes a major step toward the development of a middle-range theory of trust by using trust as a mediating variable between the macro-variables of poverty and rapid social change and a set of proximate variables concerned with family relationships. He defines trust as a normative commitment to a relationship in contrast to contractual or calculative commitments, such as "what's in it for me?" He identifies four parameters that we can use to theorize about the level of trust: (1) the greater the homogeneity of the group, the higher is the level of trust; (2) the greater the connectedness of a social network, the greater is the level of trust; (3) the greater the size and complexity of a community, the lower the level of trust; and (4) the greater the social change, the lower the trust. With these assumptions, Anderson is able to hypothesize that trust declines in contexts of rapid change, increased heterogeneity, decrease in interaction frequency, and an increase of outsiders. Indeed, he notes a parallel with writings in medical literature on informed consent.

Anderson then considers what happens to family relationships in a context of declining trust. He finds that as trust declines, so also does: willingness to enter long-run relationships; the length of the time-span within which reciprocity in exchange is expected; the size of kinship networks; and the amount of aid given across the networks. Furthermore, he finds that as trust declines: calculative attitudes toward relationships increase; the probability of terminating the relationship increases; and the probability of bureaucratic solutions increases. Indeed, if trust declines below the barest acceptable level, generalized exchange networks eventually collapse completely. In that case, the kinship group ceases to function and individuals are threatened with an atomistic existence.

In these treatments of trust by Bok, Lieberman, Frankel, and Anderson, we are not to suppose that trust is gullibility. As we discussed at the beginning of this paper, trust always functions within limits posed by

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specific situational conditions. In an analysis of the dynamics of democracy, Vivien Hart addresses the age-old paradox that democracy assumes that humans can govern themselves and yet depends on the proper dash of suspicion about those in power if it is to function successfully. The perception of "a discrepancy between the ideals and realities of the political process" is seen by Hart as functional political distrust (xi). An informed democratic citizenry, then, retains both adequate distrust of individual politicians, and an abiding trust in the political system itself. The Watergate phenomenon may be the hallmark historical exemplar of this distinction for the United States. This kind of distrust is analyzed by Hart as a cognitive and normative reality within attitudes of the citizenry. As such, we conceptualize it as a derivative of the more emergent and underlying assumption of trust as a social reality. The deep sociological question becomes: How much citizen distrust would it take to produce a "run on the state house" and a revolutionary change of the system itself? Just as there is a breaking point in distrust in the monetary system, at which point investors and debt holders run on the banks or aggrieved clients run to the courts for redress, so too, a weakening of trust may lead to even more profound changes in the political system.[4]

At our present state of knowledge about the dynamics of trust, we have no answers to these deep questions. We do have, however, a theoretical suggestion and a promising empirical lead. The theoretical suggestion comes from Parsons in a discussion of trust within the professional complex and specifically between professional and client. Parsons (e) argues that trust is more basic to the constitution of a solidary group than even a sense of moral obligation or derivative factors such as economic inducement or administrative power (and see Lorber). In the professional–client relationship, trust is more basic because of the "competence gap" that exists between the two parties. Since the layperson cannot validate the competence or integrity of the professional, s/he can only trust to some degree in the professional. Parsons (e) touches on four conditions that generate trust: (1) all participants must believe that action is aimed at common values like health or education; (2) these common values must be "translatable into common goals," such as curing this patient; (3) each participant's expectations must generally fit into his or her general set of solidary involvement, since everyone is more than a mere patient or doctor; (4) participants' trust must be reasonable in light of relevant empirical information, for example, an infamous incompetent doctor forfeits the trust that would typically be assumed in the situation. To generate trust, then, these four conditions must be realized by an adequate symbolic representation of the competence and integrity of the professional. In normal situations, these four conditions act to reenforce each other and to generate a trust that then acquires sufficient autonomy and controls the behavior of both the client and the professional. Such autonomous trust then

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becomes an unexamined assumption to all such situations to which participants are socialized and which governs their moral expectations, so that professionals are typically "trustworthy" and clients typically trust them.

The emergence of the movement to obtain voluntary informed consent from patients before doctors carry out risky procedures has focused on the issue of trust. Barber argues that there are two sets of values vying for control in the doctor–patient relationship, the dominance and collegial models. Both focus on the need for trust, but those enacting a dominance relationship argue that a patient should simply have total trust in the doctor because of "the doctor's self-ascribed competence" (a,60). Relying on the work of Freidson, Barber suggests that trust may be based on a model of persuasion through shared information rather than "authoritarian fiat." To the extent that patients prefer the collegial model whereas doctors prefer the dominance model, the first condition that Parsons identified, common values, is weakened. So too, trust is likely to be weakened, and we would enter the litigious spiral traced by Lieberman.

Summary Remarks

In conclusion, we find that these relatively recent and generally unrelated treatments of trust as a social reality point to the need for a formalized and integrated sociological theory of trust. They corroborate Luhmann's and Barber's insistence on the necessity of a kind and degree of trust adequate to the tasks, complexity, and scope of the system's functioning. Furthermore, unlike the reductionistic conceptualizations and investigations of trust produced by behavioral psychologists and others, these studies give recognition and substance to the contention that trust is a quintessentially social reality that penetrates not only individual psyches but also the whole institutional fabric of society. Indeed, we would assert that the "trust which undergirds our everyday lives is a pure social construction which answers to our need for security by seeming to be a fact when it is always a projected assumption" (Weigert,a,82). The theoretical synthesis of these and future sociological investigations of trust presages deeper insight into the foundations of social order and the workings of contemporary society.

Notes

1. Luhmann's theory of trust is greatly indebted to the earlier work of Simmel and Parsons. Although we lack the space to review here their sociological analyses of trust, it may be noted that Luhmann has brilliantly combined the micro- and macro-levels of perspectives on trust represented by Simmel and Parsons, respectively (see Lewis and Weigert,b).

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2. For a few examples of the massive number of PD and similar game experiments, see Boyle; Evans; Kanouse and Wiest; Kelley and Strahelski,a,b; Loomis; Oskamp; Rapoport and Orwant; Tedeschi et al.; Tubbs; Wallace and Rothaus.
3. Worchel has stated that, with few exceptions (Deutsch,e; Wrightsman), attempts to bring together these two operationalizations of trust by predicting behavior (e.g., PD game actions as in Schlenker et al.) on the basis of Rotter ITS or other personality measures have been largely unsuccessful.
4. For example, although the dominant paradigm of international relations gives priority to the self-interests of each party as the main motivating force, international negotiators must also make assessments of whom they can trust, as Kissinger and Carter comment in their memoirs. We thank Michael Francis for this observation which supports Luhmann's dictum that system trust ultimately depends on personal trust.

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