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Trust and Political Agency

John Dunn

Trust is both a human passion and a modality of human action: a more or less consciously chosen policy for handling the freedom of other human agents or agencies.[1] As a passion, a sentiment, it can be evanescent or durable. But as a modality of action it is essentially concerned with coping with uncertainty over time (Luhmann 1979: 30; Luhmann, this volume). A human passion, let us agree with David Hume, is an original existence (Hume [1739] 1911: 11, 127). Human beings can certainly affect their own feelings through time, by more or less ingenious strategic dispositions (Schelling 1984: chapter 9). But they cannot at a particular time simply choose these feelings. In contrast - and on any defensible theory of the causation of human actions - they can and do often and decisively choose their own policies and modalities of action. On a holist view, to be sure, these choices may in the last instance be made for them by structural features of the economic, political, or social setting of their lives (James 1984). But the most intrepid holist view denies merely the analytic or explanatory significance of individual choice. It does not (and, to be coherent, it must not) deny either the phenomenological reality or the causal efficacy of individual decisions as such. (To lengthen a causal chain is not to remove its later links.)

The claim that trust is central to the understanding of political action needs to be stated with some care. Defenders of absolutism throughout the ages, from Bodin, Richelieu, and Louis XIV to Stalin and Mao Tse-tung, have sought to present their own putatively legitimate political authority as founded in fact upon the profound and pervasive trust of its faithful and law-abiding subjects, contested only by the wilfully and inexcusably <<74>> contumacious. But one may doubt in fact whether the passion of trust can ever have been a very prominent characteristic of intricate and massively inegalitarian political relations - perhaps indeed of any political relations of substantial demographic or geographic scope.[2] Certainly it is scarcely a prominent feature, or a natural consequence of either of the leading forms of contemporary state: the huckstering interest brokerage of advanced capitalist democracies or the petulant accents of monopolistic party authority in existing socialist states. Nor, it may be as well to add, would there be any great cognitive appropriateness in the passion itself being at present markedly more widespread in political relations. The absolutist case for the benefits of subject docility continues to have plenty of utilitarian force: lowered expenditures on surveillance and repression, and the smoother concertation of productive energies for projects of which many of the benefits are likely to extend far beyond ruling circles. But for a belief to be consequentially advantageous is very far from its being true.

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[1] <<73>> I am extremely grateful for the challenges levelled at the first version of this paper at the King's College seminar on trust, especially by Frank Kahn and Bernard Williams, for the editorial suggestions of Diego Gambetta, for the stimulus of two papers by Allan Silver and, once again, for the extensive assistance of Quentin Skinner.

[2] <<74>> Honesty and loyalty may have been the watchwords of the European *ancient régime*. But they were the canonical values of an intensively imposed system of social discipline, not the spontaneous overflow of grateful hearts (Clark 1986: especially 86). Contrast is William Paley's *Reasons for Contentment Addressed to the Labouring Part of the British Public* (1793).

Trust as a human passion may rest on close familiarity or massive social distance. Many have trusted their Queen (or Stalin) as implicitly as ever they have trusted their spouse or favourite sibling. The essence of trust as a passion is the confident expectation of benign intentions in another free agent. Compare Hobbes's sharp behaviourist account:

> *Trust is* a Passion proceeding from the *Belief of him* from whom we *expect* or *hope* for Good, so *free* from *Doubt* that upon the same we pursue no other Way to attain the same Good: as *Distrust* or Diffidence is *Doubt* that maketh him endeavour to provide himself by other Means. And that this is the Meaning of the Words Trust and Distrust, is manifest from this, that a Man never provideth himself by a second Way, but when he mistrusteth that the first will not hold,' (Hobbes [1640] 1750: 19)

Since at the moment of experience it is necessarily unchosen, trust as a passion cannot be in any way strategic, though of course like any other psychic state it can in practice prove to have either good or bad consequences (Good, this volume). As a modality of action, however, trust is ineluctably strategic, however blearily its adopter may conceive the circumstances in which he or she comes to adopt it, and however inadvertently they may carry through the adoption itself. When it proves to have been strategically well conceived, trust as a modality of action may well generate its passive concomitant, convert a policy of trust into a <<75>> condition of confidence. But when less happily placed, naturally, it is more apt to generate acute anxiety, or even paranoia. To see trust as a modality of action as central to the understanding of politics is certainly not to commend a strategically inept credulity or a sentimental misconstruction of the intelligence, ability, or benignity of the great. How, then, should we see the claim that an assessment of the presence or absence of trust and of the cognitive justification or folly of trust must be amongst the central elements of any adequate understanding of politics?

I

It may help initially to contrast this claim with a range of other understandings of the character of politics with which it is clearly incompatible. One such understanding is given by a common version of anarchism. We may take this to assert: firstly, that centralized coercive power can never be justified; secondly, that it is never a precondition for organized social life; thirdly, that it never (or at least seldom) on balance has consequences more desirable than those which would follow from its absence; fourthly, that human beings who belong to a single community potentially have both the will and the capacity to cooperate with each other to whatever degree such cooperation will be necessary to serve their several (real?) interests; and fifthly, that individual communities in their turn have both the potential will and the potential capacity to cooperate with each other to the same degree. The serious case in favour of anarchism is, as Michael Taylor has well argued, a case in favour of the efficacy of community (Taylor 1982).

On this view centralized coercive power, whenever and wherever it is present, can only be a ground for acute rational distrust and resentment; and whatever grounds for interpersonal and intercommunal distrust may emerge and persist at different times and in different places can be sufficiently and best dealt with by interpersonal and intercommunal cooperative responses which do not rely on the concentration and alienation of coercive power. The core conviction of anarchism is the conviction that such coercive capacity must never be permitted to congeal, to settle down into a distinct institutional complex under the control of a distinct set of persons. Anarchism depends upon (or can be expressed as) two key presumptions: firstly, concentrated coercive power cannot be made trustworthy (or less utopianly, it cannot be made *sufficiently* trustworthy for its existence to be endorsed); secondly, dispersed coercive power (what Locke called 'the executive power of the law of nature'; Locke 1967: 11, paragraphs 7-9) just is trustworthy, or at any rate it can readily be made and kept trustworthy (or less utopianly, it can readily be made and kept *sufficiently* trustworthy).

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The anarchist thesis is that there is nothing wrong with the state of nature; or, that there is nothing wrong with it which is not even more dramatically wrong with organized and concentrated coercive power. Of these two beliefs the second, especially since the invention of nuclear weapons, is very substantially more plausible than the first (indeed, in a wide variety of settings at different times - from Buenos Aires to Phnom-Penh - it has been proved very evidently valid). It is helpful to present the deficiencies of anarchism as a theory not by stressing its exceedingly skimpy and implausible conception of the causal determinants of collective social life and its vicissitudes (a charge which can scarcely be denied), but rather by underlining its blatantly capricious views about the incidence of trust in human social relations.

The anarchist judgement that organized coercive power cannot be made entirely trustworthy, while despondent, has much persuasive force and is in fact shared with a number of thinkers who are certainly not anarchists (Locke 1967: 11, paragraphs 159-68, 199-243). What really marks anarchism out as a political theory is the judgement that dispersed coercive power either is in itself, or would be if instantiated, or could readily be caused to become, quite sufficiently trustworthy for the living of acceptable human lives. At its most optimistic anarchism simply consists in the universalization of trust towards all humans who are not themselves bearers of concentrated coercive power. Its sociological realism therefore varies very greatly with historical setting, from the Nuer ('deeply democratic, and easily roused to violence': Evans-Pritchard 1940: 294) to the *classes dangereuses* of a great Third World metropolis like Cairo (or Beirut) or a centre of advanced capitalist civilization like Manhattan. As Locke pointed out (1967: 11, chapter 5), and as most subsequent social and political thinking has amply confirmed, this sociological realism diminishes markedly with a deepening division of labour, enhancement of productive power, and widening of economic inequalities. To restore to anarchism a measure of sociological plausibility, it would be necessary to extricate an anarchic community from the modern world economy and to reconcile its members to decidedly more modest standards of living than those which prevail in, for example, Sweden or Spain or the Soviet Union. It would also be necessary to reconcile the existing holders of territorial sovereignty (and perhaps their neighbours) to this withdrawal. The problems of anarchism so conceived are certainly problems of its potential stability within a world of comparative economic dynamism. But they are also, and at least as acutely, problems of its mere accessibility within that world.[3] As a policy, <<77>> accordingly, anarchism prescribes the universalization of trust in conditions which it gives no good reason for supposing will prove available. As a strategy for conditions which are at all likely to obtain, it has, therefore, very little to recommend it. In anarchism trust as passion swamps trust as potentially well-considered policy.

A second understanding of politics which regards trust as potentially unproblematic, because dependably available under particular circumstances, is Marxism. In contrast with anarchism, Marxism certainly has an explanation of why rational trust is unavailable in principle in many (perhaps, thus far, most) historical circumstances, and of why in contrast it is (or will be) available in others. It does, in that sense, have some explanation of the asymmetry for which anarchism provides no explanation whatever. And it certainly offers a sociologically fuller and more realistic representation of the practical settings within which rational trust cannot hope to be reproduced. (It is decidedly weaker on the settings in which it *can* reasonably hope to be reproduced.)

Like anarchism, unfortunately (and partly because one key element in its political theory simply is a form of anarchism), Marxism's grounds for rejecting the dependable availability of rational trust where it sees this as absent are decisively more cogent than its grounds for affirming this availability where it presumes it to be potentially, readily, or even necessarily present. The core Marxist view is that rational trust is precluded in principle by exploitation. It is unavailable, plainly, in a slave or feudal mode of production, and equally unavailable under capitalism. The theory of surplus value may be of little or no use for economic analysis; but it does offer a vivid idiom for disputing the justice of capitalist property relations. Justice may or may not be

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[3] <<76>> I take this way of expressing the distinction from an essay of Frank Hahn's (in Dunn 1988a). For the crucial political importance of accessibility see Dunn 1984.

precluded in principle by capitalist relations of production (compare Rawls 1972); but it is scarcely routinely encountered in practice under such relations. There is plainly a strong case for claiming, as both Marxists and modern liberals like Rawls and Dworkin do, that rational trust is precluded by a structurally unjust social order. Contrast, however, the flimsiness and aberration of the judgement that rational trust will readily be generated (let alone guaranteed) by the presence of a structurally just social order: a society in which all productive property has been subjected to collective ownership or its modern liberal surrogates.

There are many difficulties with this ingenuous expectation:

1. Can a structurally just social order even be coherently conceived in principle? Is it possible to furnish a non-contradictory and reasonably full description of such an order? (Modern liberals here can at least not be accused of failing to try.)

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2. Could a structurally just social order be causally viable in principle? Is rational economic planning a real causal possibility? Does not the democratic organization of an economy necessarily demand: one person, one economic plan? Could there be cooperative ownership and control of productive property and reasonable economic efficiency without in due course engendering just those arbitrary and unjust disparities of property rights which are characteristic of capitalist economies? How can such a social order be reconciled with the ineluctable existence of a political division of labour? How, within such a social order, are we to understand the cultural self-formation of society?
3. Is a structurally just social order (could it ever realistically be) causally accessible in practice (Dunn 1984)?

There certainly are very grave doubts as to Marxism's capacity to resolve either the second or the third of these sets of difficulties, a central problem about both being the recalcitrant presence of a highly obtrusive division of political labour: a set of institutional structures for political action, reproducing through time. Marxists at present scarcely have much claim to rational trust over the purely economic effectiveness of a productive system founded upon communal or cooperative property (Nove 1983; but compare Elster and Moene 1988). But even if they did possess such a claim, they would remain drastically inadequate in their conception of politics. The political creation and reproduction of a structurally just social order is presented within Marxism as an occasion for rational and unproblematic trust on the part of all those who are not structurally opposed to its inauguration in the first place. But even if it were in fact historically possible to create and reproduce such an order, the choice of strategies for attaining it, and the assessment of commitment to doing so, would always remain savagely demanding exercises in appraising the rationality of trust.

A third understanding of politics which regards trust as politically unproblematic does so from a dramatically contrasting point of view. It insists that we have no option but to take the concentration of power in human societies as given, and that we must take the less edifying motives and the less impressive levels of cognitive insight of most human beings as equally given (that is what human society and human beings are like: that is the existential reality of human society). Classical natural law or natural right theories it sees as confused, sentimental, and in bad faith. The world and human beings are to be taken the way they are and are going to remain. Coercive power may sometimes be humanly ugly; but it is here to stay and is, moreover, certainly no uglier than the more socially <<79>> extended impotence that it confronts, reproduces and, to a large degree, protects from a still worse fate.

This putatively realist perspective can be expressed in notably unapologetic terms - as it is, for example, by Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic,* to some degree by Machiavelli in *The Prince,* and subsequently by Nietzsche. Thus presented, it is a perspective on power from the viewpoint of the powerholder (or of claques of intellectuals who more or less grovellingly identify themselves with the powerholder). But it is commoner for it to appear in a decidedly more

apologetic vein, explicating not the pleasure of exerting coercive power but the practical services which this can and does furnish to those over whom it is exercised.

An instructive thinker to consider in this respect is Joseph de Maistre, who combined a strong feeling for the absurdity of rationalist politics and for the massive role of the heteronomy of ends within political experience with a powerful utilitarian critique of the actual consequences of rationalist politics in revolutionary France and a gleeful providentialist celebration of the extent to which the victims of revolutionary violence on all sides had it coming to them (Maistre 1964). De Maistre, to be sure, is scarcely a promising starting point for constructing a modern political theory. But the way in which he conceived politics is sufficiently unlike our own to bring out some aspects of the latter with some sharpness. In particular he makes it clear that it is possible to reject the view that the problematic availability of trust is of any great significance for the understanding of politics on grounds other (and intellectually more bracing) than misplaced credulity over the merits of particular political agencies. A necessitarian theodicy which sees political society as something for which human beings are not genuinely causally responsible - and for which they are in principle incapable of making themselves fully causally responsible - is less than enticing for most inhabitants of the modern West. But it is important to note how little it differs in its practical implications from the alienated and egoist individualism characteristic of the most sophisticated contemporary thought (Dunn 1980: chapter 10). There is, therefore, considerable admonitory force to de Maistre's point of view; and there are certainly today still a fair number of human settings to which it directly applies. Who has the least idea how South Africa, or Cambodia, or the Lebanon, or even Afghanistan could be turned into humanly acceptable habitats once again?

II

Over considerable areas of the world, however, it is now reasonable to believe that establishing or sustaining a social frame that facilitates <<80>> human flourishing does depend upon establishing and sustaining structures of government and responsibility which in some measure merit and earn trust (Dunn 1986). Where such institutions already exist and happen to be operating successfully it is reasonable for individuals to feel a stolid indifference towards the exertions which have brought them into being and to see them merely as occasions for current confidence. But where they have yet to be established the need for direct and exigent forms of trust is altogether more importunate. Whether or not such structures will be established depends upon two sorts of factors. It depends obviously, and passively, on the way things already are, on the historical inheritance of the society in question. But it also depends, *pace* de Maistre, on human agency; and this in its turn depends upon human intelligence and practical skill.

This last is a delicate claim, but it is of fundamental importance. Much of human life, plainly, is shaped by forces which no human beings at all at the time of happening genuinely understand; and even if a few select human beings did happen to comprehend those forces, they could scarcely significantly affect them. There are important cognitive perspectives on human life (for humans themselves, often perspectives of a retrospective kind) which are views from well above or beyond politics. A political perspective upon human life, if it is to be coherent, must necessarily be more modest. It is a view focused upon, and restricted by, human capacities: by the possible consequences of possible intended actions. It is within this (world historically, somewhat mole's-eye) view of human circumstance that the incidence of well-founded or ill-founded trust occupies such a key position. It does so because within this perspective what happens to a human society *does* depend both on the intelligence and practical skill of at least some of its members and on the use they elect to make of their freedom of action. Fundamentally, trust is a device for coping with the freedom of other persons (Luhmann 1979; and this volume). It is because of the phenomenological plausibility of this conception of trust that it plays such a prominent role in shaping collective life.

Most of what is true and worth saying about the role of trust in making possible human flourishing is severely particular. To develop a clearer sense of the bearing of trust on political agency in general it may be more helpful to consider a pair of seventeenth-century generalities.

We may take these, conveniently, from the political theory of Locke (Dunn 1985: chapter 2), though the viewpoint they represent was characteristic of a wide range of European political thinkers of the period of the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century wars of religion (Skinner 1978: 11). The first of them is the claim which Locke shared with many natural law thinkers before and after him: that the fundamental bond of human <<81>> society - what makes it possible for human beings to associate with each other as human beings at all - is *fides*, the duty to observe mutual undertakings and the virtue of consistently discharging this duty. Truth and the keeping of faith, as he put it elsewhere, belong to 'Men, as Men, and not as Members of Society' (Locke 1967: 11, paragraph 14). As human beings actually exhibit it (or fail to do so), it is a socially acquired attribute. But for Locke it both helps to explain what makes benign social existence possible at all and sets a standard for judging how far social existence is indeed benign. Locke himself believed that such mutual dependability could only be rationally and stably coherent when backed by the sanctions of an avenging deity: 'the Hand of the Almighty visibly held up, and prepared to take Vengeance' (Locke 1975: 74, and see also 69; and for the judgement compare Williams, this volume). But he was far from insensitive to the psychic impact of human socialization (Wood 1983: chapters 5-7; Locke 1975: 353-7). His eighteenth-century critics were far more sanguine about the efficacy of socialization (Dunn 1985: chapter 3), anticipating the verdicts of Talcott Parsons and, with a rather different emphasis, Michel Foucault. No modern political thinker has mustered a very impressive treatment of this issue.

Most seventeenth-century natural law thinkers laid particular emphasis upon the promise as a type of social performance on which human cooperation depends and on the role of language in defining the scope and limits of human commitments to one another; and Locke was emphatically amongst them. But his root conception of what makes social existence possible does not really depend on the role of words in expressing such commitments. Rather, it depends (and in ways which perhaps extend with comparative ease to some other species) on the presence or absence of relatively well-founded expectations about the conduct of others - expectations which can serve, until too harshly violated, as premises for partially cooperative conduct of one's own. What the root conception consists in is a picture of the conditional meshing of mutual interaction.

One great political merit of this root conception is that it discourages excessively credulous and optimistic expectations, recognizing that such forms of interaction arise and persist because all human beings need and rely upon a large measure of cooperation from others, but also recognizing that all may at any time discover that such cooperation is in fact unavailable. In some measure it certainly is true, as Locke put it, that men 'live upon trust' (Locke 1976: 122). But the twin of trust is betrayal. However indispensable trust may be as a device for coping with the freedom of others, it is a device with a permanent and built-in possibility of failure (compare Gellner, this volume). The central, if equivocal, role of mutual commitment and understanding in rendering social <<82>> cooperation possible is one important seventeenth-century generality which needs to bulk a great deal larger in late-twentieth-century political theory. In so far as a political life is conceived exclusively in terms of manipulation and ideological befuddlement, the issue of trust need not feature prominently within it. But even in this vision those whose role it is to manipulate and befuddle will in practice face the constant problem of how to concert in carrying out their venture. In so far as politics is conceived at all in terms of agency, the cooperative and strategic interaction of individuals and groups, the issue of the rationality of trust is ineliminable from it.

A second seventeenth-century generality with an equally strong claim to a place of honour in modern understandings of politics is the vision of the nature of legitimate political authority as a structure of well-founded trust set out in the political theory of Locke, and particularly in his *Two Treatises of Government*. This theory is expounded as a theory of duties and rights; but it survives in modern ideological practice, particularly in the United States of America, as a theory of rights which have sloughed off their concomitant (and markedly demanding) duties - and lost along with them the theoretical basis which gave the right claims whatever intellectual force they initially possessed (Dunn 1988b). But in Locke's own thinking the right claims are principally

important for establishing one categorical distinction: between the political units within which governmental power is essentially legitimate, and those in which it is essentially illegitimate. Locke's account of this distinction is a bit rough and ready (Dunn 1980: chapter 3), though it is a marvel of intellectual intricacy and elegance in comparison with any realistic twentieth-century reflections on the same issue.

Anarchists, of course, deny that there can ever be legitimate governmental power, while providentialist thinkers like de Maistre, in well-merited revenge, deny that there can ever be illegitimate governmental power. But on less flighty views it is perhaps evident enough that there can be, though all too often is not, at least imperfectly or partially legitimate governmental power. The view that a number of existing governments are blatantly illegitimate arises naturally out of listening to the morning news or reading the front pages of a reasonably honest newspaper (in any country that permits reasonably honest newspapers). The view that a number of existing governments are at least partially legitimate is perhaps harder to defend, at least to an audience of trained social scientists. But there can be little doubt that if most of the past population of the world were to be transported into many countries in the present, they would (once they had recovered from the shock of arrival) be extremely clear that the governments of these countries had gained markedly in legitimacy over their historical predecessors. Modern <<83>> political theory is obsessively interested in the question of what could make a modern government truly legitimate; but it has not succeeded in developing at all a convincing way of handling this question (contrast Hare 1972; 1976). Locke, on the other hand, distinguished sharply between true civil societies in which governmental power derives in more or less determinate ways from the consent of their citizens, and political units which possess at least equivalent concentrations of coercive power but in which there is neither the recognition nor the reality of any dependence of governmental authority upon popular consent. For him, legitimate political authority was itself a product of human will and action, a verdict in one version or another essentially common to all major seventeenth- or eighteenth-century contractarian thinkers (Riley 1982). Within illegitimate governments, in Locke's view, the psychological relation of trust between ruled and ruler was likely for the most part to be absent, though it was also apt to be affirmed by those in authority with particular unctuousness. The more complex and the more economically differentiated the society in question, the more likely it was to be absent (Locke 1967: 11, chapter 5). It was within the former - true civil societies with governments of at least partial legitimacy that the category of trust played a second important role in Locke's understanding of the nature of politics.

What legitimate governmental authority is, Locke insists, is a range of freedom to act on behalf of what the governors take to be the rights and interests of the members of a society. To possess this freedom of action the governors must be in some ways released from the control of those over whom they govern. But in a legitimate political society they are accorded the discretion and the coercive power which they need, solely in order to serve their subjects; they claim it solely for this purpose; and they use it, to the best of their abilities, solely for this purpose (Dunn 1969: especially chapter 11). In legitimate political societies, accordingly, governmental power is in fact conceived both by rulers and ruled as a trust and (with whatever modifications are due for the moral and cognitive limitations of both rulers and subjects) the psychic relation between rulers and ruled can also consequently aspire to be one of trust: confidence, the giving and receiving of clear, veridical, and carefully observed mutual understandings, a relation of trust deservedly received and trust rationally and freely accorded. Seen in this way, politics at its best is an intricate field of cooperative agency, linking a multiplicity of free agents, none of whom can know each other's future actions but all of whom must in some measure rely upon each other's future actions.

The most striking feature of Locke's conception, to a modern eye, is its readiness to conflate two issues which most (though not all: see Silver 1985a; 1985b) modern traditions of political understanding regard as so <<84>> drastically discrepant as to be essentially irrelevant to one another: the psychic and practical relations between individual citizens across the space of private life, and the structural relations between bureaucratic governments and the subjects over whom they rule. Locke (who had some experience of the seventeenth-century version, of bureaucratic government) sees these relations as connected in meaning rather than identical in

practical character. But his political theory as a whole represents a determined resistance to the depersonalization and demoralization of political authority which already in his day constituted the main thrust of modern political thinking (Skinner 1978: 11; 1988). This resistance was strongly linked to his uniquely individualist analysis of the basis of political legitimacy and to the sometimes exceedingly radical political implications he drew from this analysis (Tully 1986).

The point of his emphasis upon the personal and moral character of political relations was not to embrace the political routines of a decaying feudal order (Silver 1985b), founded very explicitly upon *fides* as a concrete social relation of an eminently instrumental character (Benveniste 1969: 1, 103-21, especially 118-19). He had, in fact, little more enthusiasm for factious grandees or a Frondeur nobility than Cardinal Richelieu himself (Dunn 1969, especially 236 n.; Church 1972). Nor was it to herald or applaud the emergence of a social and economic order in which all human relations aspire to the condition of overt and definite contracts (Dunn 1969: chapters 15-19; compare Macpherson 1962). Nor, indeed, was it in any way to slight the merits of, or discourage the search for, risk-reducing and trust-economizing institutions over time. The very purpose of political society itself is precisely to stand in - by clear and predictable legal and judicial arrangements, backed by effective powers of enforcement - for the erratic and dangerous conditions generated by the collision of institutionally unrestrained human partiality. The best condition open to human beings, in his eyes, was the enjoyment of an environment in which men were fortunate enough to be able to have well-founded confidence (Locke 1979: 148; Dunn 1980: 243). But the thread which ran through all his political judgements and which set him so tenaciously against the modern penchant for purely institutional solutions was the vision of the most benign of human environments as in the end a habitat created and sustained by free human agency (Locke 1967: 11, 6, line 9). Since any state as its subjects actually encounter it at any time behaves as it does merely because a particular set of human beings chooses one course of action rather than another, the most important single point about a state's claims to authority always remains that they are claims of particular human beings to be obeyed (Dunn 1969: 148 n.1). (It was not a trivial matter to elect Ronald Reagan President of the United States.) In political agency what there is in the end for human beings to reckon with <<85>> is only their judgement of how other human beings can be expected to act. No one can *know* how another human being will act in the future. Trust is a policy apt for conditions where knowledge is unavailable, as in the case of the free acts of another person (in Locke's view) it will always remain. Trust does not have to be any more credulous or sentimental than the judgement of those who decide how to allocate it, though it will in practice, naturally, not be any less so either.

There is, to be sure, an alternative to trust: a consistent and strategically energetic distrust. But even in a small *latrocinium* (Augustine 1884: book IV, chapter iv, in volume 1, 139) this is apt rapidly to paralyse all capacity for cooperative agency. Across the space of national, let alone global, politics this perspective, if held with any pertinacity and clarity of mind, will crush political energy and creativity in a sense of overwhelming futility. For most human beings, to envisage politics as a relentless quest for the maximization of personal advantage is to consign its practice to a sorry blend of immediate impotence and protracted disappointment. Indeed for most human beings most of the time, from the narrow viewpoint of instrumental advantage, there is almost everything to be said for pushpin over politics as a field for the expenditure of their energies. Those who live off politics, of course, can narrow their evaluative sights without condemning themselves to miscalculation or absurdity. But only an ampler array of values and a less parsimonious conception of what is worth doing can rescue politics for most as a relatively sane and coherent preoccupation. Locke in effect foresaw this quite early in his life when he acknowledged the radical contradictions between human terrestrial interests (Locke 1954: 204-14). The busily opportunistic optic of game theory has done much to confirm his assessment. (It has also, of course, identified a bewildering array of impediments to rational cooperation that are quite independent of assumptions about individual motivation or interest.) A purposeful determination to avoid being a sucker, we now know, if generalized to the human race, would subvert human sociality more or less in its entirety (Williams, this volume).

In the extraordinarily complicated division of labour on which modern social life necessarily depends no one could rationally dispute (Luhmann, this volume; Silver 1985b; Elster and Moene 1988) that human beings need, as far as they can, to economize on trust in persons and confide instead in well-designed political, social, and economic institutions. One of the main battle lines in modern political theory has been the dispute as to how far such economy of trust can go. On the one side are ranged thinkers from James Mill (Lively and Rees 1978: chapter 2; Thomas 1979: chapter 3) and Bentham (Hume 1981; Rosen 1983) to Anthony Downs (1957) and the younger Robert Dahl (1956), who insist on the Possibility (or in some cases on the actuality) of institutions which <<86>> produce a predictable 'common good' from the consequences of the rational pursuit of interest by individual role-players. On the other are thinkers from Locke and Macaulay (Lively and Rees 1978: chapter 3) to Mancur Olson (1965) and the older Robert Dahl (1985), who insist on the antinomies of individual egoism or stress the key role of improvisatory leadership in facilitating the production of collective goods.

In this setting Locke's insistence upon the centrality of trust was already in some respects archaic by his own day. Even in the feudal monarchies of medieval Europe the impress of Roman public law had prompted a strong theory of the priority of claims of public utility over those of private right, in determining the content of the *rationes status,* and thus in guiding the ruler in the discharge of his or her responsibilities (Post 1964: 241-309, 316-18). It was a priority which might on occasion fully license a breach of *fides* between ruler and individual subject or an emergency encroachment for public purposes upon private property throughout the realm. (The latter claim, notoriously, was one which Locke in contrast with Richelieu (Church 1972: 34-5, 303-15) was especially anxious to repudiate.) In the trenchant pages of Machiavelli's *The Prince* (Machiavelli 1961: chapter 18) the idea that a ruler would be well advised to (or even that he could possibly afford to) confine himself to telling the truth and keeping faith with his subjects was held up to vivid scorn. More recently, and more pertinently, Cardinal Richelieu and his busy apologists pondered long and hard on the question of how far public utility, the *raison d'état,* could justify the breach of a ruler's solemn undertakings to individual subjects or to foreign or domestic heretics (Church 1972: 190-6, 205, 244-7, 278-81, 424-6, 433, 501-2).

There is an important parallel in these construals[4] between the clash of feudal defenders of private right and personal faith with modernizing monarchs and intellectuals pressing the claims of state interest, and more recent encounters between utilitarians and exponents of the primacy of justice. True, the crucial thought experiments considered have changed a trifle over the centuries. Utilitarians today clash with rights theorists over the issue of whether it is ever legitimate to torture an individual to save the city (Gewirth 1984*),* a question over which it might be hard to muster a single medieval critic of the utilitarian viewpoint (compare, later, McManners 1985: 375-9, 550-3). Medieval conceptions of a truly hard case centre more on the regulation of sexuality than on the infliction of pain. Could it be legitimate, for example (a lesser evil), to commit adultery with the wife of an intending tyrant in order to save the city from destruction (Post 1964: 305 n.)? Would the Pope's *plenitudo potestatis* entitle him to dispense from her vows of chastity a fetching young nun, if marrying her to a tyrannical Saracen emperor would deter <<87>> the latter from destroying the Christian faith and all the faithful along with it (Post 1964: 266-7)? (Philosophical examples have gained little in unreality over the last seven centuries.) Even in the early Middle Ages, however, it is plain that contemporaries had a clear sense of the claims of utility in the discharge of public office. When Pope Zachariah deposed the last of the Merovingians from the crown of France and absolved his subjects from their oaths of loyalty, he did so quite explicitly because the latter was *inutilis* for the exercise of his *potestas* (Post 1964: 376).

In the context of this clash, however, Locke's espousal of trust assumes a rather less archaic character. For him the political primacy of *fides* is certainly not a matter of the priority of private rights over public utility. What divided him on this score from Richelieu and other exponents of the claims of state authority (Skinner 1988) was not any lack of sensitivity to the *rationes status*

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[4] <<86>> I am indebted to Quentin Skinner for underlining the importance of this point to me.

(Dunn 1969: chapter 11 and 12). Rather, it was a more disabused and less alienated conception of the state itself. For him the state was only an organizational system through which some human beings are enabled to act on behalf of (or against) others. Above all, it was an eminently fallible human contrivance, not a divine provision. Men and women need in their rulers a power of agency which they can themselves only very marginally control. The subjects of every state are committed permanently by their political subjection to acts the character of which they cannot know and the consequences of which may embellish or devastate their lives. In so far as these actions are genuinely undertaken on behalf of the public good and in so far as their consequences in fact subserve this, human beings can ask no more of politics, even if the means deployed are sometimes ones which under other circumstances would have been open to moral censure.

In political life after a certain stage of economic development the only policies which are open to human beings carry massive risks. In particular they expose men and women to appalling harm through the treachery or fecklessness of those in a position to exert concentrated coercive power. Trust in the relation between ruled and ruler is not a supine psychic compulsion on the part of the former. Rather, it is an eminently realistic assessment of the irreversibility of a political division of labour and a sharp reminder, from the former to the latter, of the sole conditions that can make that division humanly benign.

There is no doubt that Locke's conception of political legitimacy is a remarkably optimistic picture. But its optimism is conditional and in no sense absurd. For, unlike the anarchist view or the Marxist vision of the socialist or communist community, it is a picture of a continuing and inordinately demanding collective human project. It is not a picture of a state of affairs that is effortlessly and routinely available at any stage of history, still less of one which depends on something other than myriads <<88>> of intended and free actions. It is a goal at which to aim, not a destination at which it is reasonable to expect ever fully to arrive, let alone to remain forever. Locke did not expect well-founded trust to be actualized at all frequently even in an essentially legitimate political society. But he thought that in political communities which were fortunate enough to be essentially legitimate the problems of political agency for all socially and politically active groups were always problems of how best to construct, reproduce, or repair structures of well-founded mutual trust. Even in political units which were far from being legitimate he supposed that all socially and politically active groups whose aims were not intrinsically malign had reason to do their best to establish structures of well-founded trust - at least at reasonable risk to themselves and in so far as they stood any reasonable chance of success.

III

How do these two Lockean conceptions bear upon the understanding of modern democratic politics? There are two distinct and not readily compatible conceptions of a democratic political order current in the modern world. One of these, harking back to the institutional forms if not the social or economic realities of the ancient *polis*, denies the need for and the legitimacy of any clear division of political labour. This view is fully current as ideology in contemporary political conflict (to say nothing of contemporary Western higher education). But in a world of economies of immense intricacy, all of which are founded upon an elaborate social and economic division of labour and none of which, plainly, could maintain their productive efficiency on the basis of any less elaborate organization, it is a view in very evident bad faith - where it is not simply hopelessly confused (it is not infrequently both). As a view it neither has had nor could ever have any very firm and lasting purchase on the real political history of societies, being based upon the systematic rejection of the attempt to consider, let alone control, political causality. But none of this implies that it is a view devoid of political consequences: on the contrary.

It certainly is not true, as Moses Finley made exceedingly clear (1983), that the participatory democracy of the ancient *polis* dispensed with an elaborate division of political labour. All modern states likewise display and depend upon such division. Indeed what a modern state

actually is, in large measure is a strongly institutionalized division of political labour, though not one which in any sense occludes the exercise of coercive force. The interesting question in modern political theory is not whether there is going to be a political division of labour (there is). It is <<89>> the question of what forms that division is going to take and what are going to be the consequences of its taking those and not other forms. More acutely still it is the question of what, if anything, could make such a political division of labour at least partially legitimate.

There is no extant model of the most minimal plausibility which suggests that such legitimacy could be sustained other than momentarily and in extreme crisis without at least freedom of political speech and association and the right to organize and choose political representatives on the basis of the opinions which citizens actually hold. There are not many places in the world today where these conditions are plainly satisfied. We know, too, rather close to home, how painful it may be to satisfy them in, for example, Armagh or Belfast or Haringey or Brighton. But even within a political order which *was* legitimate by these criteria, the issue of how to conceive an acceptable division of political labour or an acceptable structure of representation remains an extremely demanding one (see, for example, Przeworski 1985). The favoured political agency for modern representation has been the political party, a vaguely conceived and in practice a notably unreassuring mode of human agency. Faced with the choice between a state with a variety of competing political parties and a state evasively related to a single monopolist political party which determines its own membership, it is not hard to see the merits of the former model. But in the less auspicious periods of modern capitalist democratic experience (themselves related to the less promising periods of modern capitalism's economic experience) it is discouraging how far their sole convincing ideological merit has become their not instantiating the latter model. A state founded upon political parties may well be a necessary condition for modern political legitimacy of any real durability. But it is distressingly far from being a sufficient condition.

What might serve to flesh it out a little, and render it more of an aid in practical political thinking, would be a more strenuous attempt to think through the character of a modern political party in terms of the project of constructing, reproducing, or repairing structures of well-founded mutual trust. Any such attempt would have fully to acknowledge the reality of the distinction between leaders and led; and it would have to give a much clearer account of the attributes that leaders need to display if trust in them is to stand any chance of proving well founded. It would need to construe the party as agency of representation more as a medium of social identification and less as a structure for the manipulative pursuit of interests (Pizzorno 1981; 1983; but compare Przeworski 1985). But by the same token it would also need to distinguish more sharply than is customary in modern political ideologies between trust in the good intentions of more or less professional politicians and trust in their <<90>> practical capacities. Trust in either might often be an agreeable start. But if it is necessary to choose between the two, it is wiser in most circumstances (the more so, the more democratic or legitimate the polity in question) to opt for trust in practical capacity. Politics is not on the whole good for the character; and it is unlikely that there really are sound reasons for viewing the intentions of most of those who have devoted decades to it with unreserved trust. But this provides no reason for welcoming the chance of being ruled by the well intentioned but hopelessly ineffectual. Modern political theory, both liberal and socialist (because it is so vacuously and evasively moralistic), gives inadequate weight to the human importance of practical skill in politics. Here, especially, we can see how misguided it would be to hope to replace trust as policy (the properly sceptical choice of human political expedients) with trust as passion (in its characteristic modern form, an unreflective confidence in the efficacy and decency of existing institutions: state, party, government, union, or firm).

With this caveat in mind we may take as a final plain illustration of the soundness of Locke's insight into what politics is really about - and as a quite novel problem of practical trust - the question of human coexistence after the point at which human beings have learnt how to exterminate themselves.

Anyone who is minimally informed is aware that the invention and deployment of nuclear weapons has created a condition of considerable danger (Bracken 1983). There is dispute - and probably rationally unresolvable dispute - about the scale of the disaster that is now possible and about the intensity of the risk that any particular assessment of this scale will in fact be actualized over any particular span of time. There are also a miscellany of proposals as to what different political actors would be well advised to do about these risks: few, if any, of them intellectually at all compelling. One point which is clear, however, is how centrally the nature of the problem of what to do is captured by conceiving it in terms of the construction, reproduction, and repair of structures of well-founded mutual trust. There are two simple reasons why this is so, perhaps individually necessary and certainly jointly sufficient to ensure that it is so. The first is that the knowledge of how to make these instruments of destruction is ineliminable in principle except by their large-scale use. This knowledge and the possibilities which it embodies are with us for as long as anything we could sensibly think of as our way of life, or civilization itself, is going to continue. The problem is not how to rid ourselves of this knowledge. We cannot unlearn it. The problem is to stop it getting rid of us. The second reason is that the level of threat, and its erratic but rapid intensification, are themselves a product of obtrusive structures of well-founded mutual mistrust.

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These structures are not going to vanish into thin air in the face of moral disapprobation, more particularly of moral disapprobation on the part of those who are essentially bystanders. Building the structures of mutual trust that would be required to diminish the urgency of the risk cannot be done by burying one's head in the sand, still less by encouraging others to do so. It can only be done by focusing more clearly on the scale of the risk itself and establishing a clear mutual understanding of the priority of the need to reduce it over the need to diminish other - often in their own terms equally realistic and indisputably grave - anxieties.

Once such structures were built they might in due course relapse into occasions for confidence. But until they have been built the project of erecting them will remain as perilous and as urgent an exercise in the pragmatics of trust and betrayal as any staged in the mountains of the High Atlas (Gellner, this volume).

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