

Trust, Distrust and Commitment

Katherine Hawley (2014)

1 Central Claims and Assumptions

1. CLAIM: Literature on trust is *lopsided* (p.1)
 Understanding distrust is equally important as understanding trust if one wants to understand the wider implications and the gravity of trust.
 → Distrust is treated either as an afterthought or as the mere absence of trust. A good account of trust is unified, i.e. can account for trust, distrust and the absence of trust equally well. "We need to understand both trust and distrust if we are to understand the different ways in which trust can go wrong, the reasons why both trust and distrust are sometimes unwanted, the nature and limitations of trustworthiness, and the difference between unpredictability and untrustworthiness." (p.1)
2. ASSUMPTION: Trust is primarily a three-place relation involving two people and a task (p.1)
3. ASSUMPTION: Trust involves expectations about both willingness and competence. (p.1)
4. CLAIM: Trust is distinct from mere Reliance (p.1)
 → "This [...] is importance because trust, not mere reliance, is a significant category for normative assessment." (p.2)
5. CLAIM: Distrust is distinct from Nonreliance and the Absence of Trust a. (p.3)
6. ASSUMPTION: "[T]o rely on someone to X is to act on the supposition that she will X: this can fall short of believing that she will X, though it is incompatible with outright belief that she will not X" (p.4) → Hawley borrows this definition from Holton (1994)
7. CLAIM: Motives-Based Account of Trust Fail to Explain Distrust (p.4f.) → Jones and Hardin: "neither expectation of ill will nor expectation of attempts to frustrate my interests is necessary for distrust. After all, someone who lies and cheats to achieve her goals should be distrusted, even if she does not bother to bear either goodwill or ill will to others, and does not care about other people's interests." (p. 6)
8. CLAIM: Other Accounts of Trust are Incomplete. (p.6)

2 Trust and Distrust

2.1 Preliminary Definitions

[T]o trust someone is to rely upon that person to fulfil a commitment, whilst distrust involves an expectation of unfulfilled commitment. (p.1)

- "Distrusting someone with respect to X involves not relying upon her to X, rather than relying upon her not to X: distrust does not require confident prediction of misbehaviour. (p.4)
- "[N]onreliance involves not acting on a particular positive supposition, rather than acting on the corresponding negative supposition." (p.4)

Hawley aims to account for the following with her definition: "[W]hat are the features of other people to which either trust or distrust is an appropriate response? I answer this question with reference to commitment, but other answers are available." (p.9)

2.2 The Commitment Account

To trust someone to do something is to believe that she has a commitment to doing it, and to rely upon her to meet that commitment. To distrust someone to do something is to believe that she has a commitment to doing it, and yet not rely upon her to meet that commitment. (p.10)

- COMMITMENT:

- "In the relevant sense, one can be committed to doing something one has no intention of doing: if I've promised to come to your birthday party, but I now decide I can't be bothered, I still have a commitment in the relevant sense, even though I have no intention of fulfilling it. Promising is one clear way of acquiring the relevant sort of commitment, though explicit promising is not the only route to commitment." (p.10)
- "[C]ommitments can be implicit or explicit, weighty or trivial, conferred by roles and external circumstances, default or acquired, welcome or unwelcome. In particular I will take it that mutual expectation and convention give rise to commitment unless we take steps to disown these. And in section 8 I will argue that assertion involves commitment, so that trusting someone's word falls within the scope of the account." (p.11)
→ Hawley does not offer a thorough account of what a commitment is exactly
- Commitments do not have to be between trustor and trustee, they can also be between trustee and a third person. (p.11)

- TRUSTWORTHINESS: Commitment account enables understanding of general trustworthiness (which motives-based views, i.e. Jones's and Hardin's views) struggle with: "On the commitment account, trustworthiness requires us to ensure that our commitments do not outstrip our actions. This requires judiciousness in acquiring commitments as well as doggedness in fulfilling commitments already acquired, independent of others' expectations." (p.15)
- GENERAL TRUST: (as opposed to three-place trust) "reliance on someone to fulfil whatever commitments she may have, and general distrust as lack of such reliance." (p.15f.)
- MOTIVATION: According to the commitment account, you can trust someone to do something without expecting her to be motivated by her commitment. (p.16)
- OBLIGATION OR COMMITMENT?: That said, I think there are cases in which we have obligations but no commitments, and where neither trust nor distrust is appropriate. If I am right, this tells in favour of the commitment account. (p.18)

Reference

Hawley, Katherine (2024): "Trust, Distrust and Commitment", *Noûs* Vol. 48, Nr. 1, S. 1-20.