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On the Concept of Basic Trust

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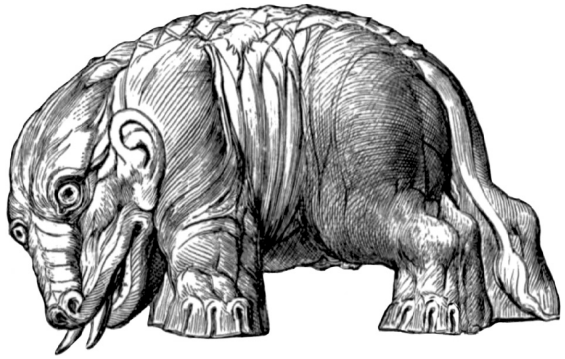
Abstract:

In sociology, psychology and also in philosophy trust is often taken to be basic or fundamental in the sense that only trust allows us to be and engage in the world, to develop a healthy ego-identity or to gain knowledge about other people's opinions. Without basic trust in the world, in others or in other's testimony, that is, we would not, as Luhmann says, get up in the morning, we would lack the self-confidence necessary to interact with others or would be unable to take their statements as trustworthy which seems to be a prerequisite for all learning processes. I question this model of basic trust not necessarily because I find it wrong but because I find it less informative than is often assumed. The fuzzy notion of trust gains in semantic richness and distinctivess, I assume, if we "de-fundamentalize" it and accept it as always surrounded by alternative psychological and emotional attitudes. Trust is thus treated as an achievement never to be taken for granted though easily naturalized. Following some conceptual clarifications I discuss phenomena such as violence and terror in order to clarify in what ways they destroy basic trust. This also opens the possibility to historicize trust and thus treat it less as an anthropological or psychological given.

Keywords: trust, basic trust, violence, terror



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> They [the people] trust that the state will continue to exist and that particular interests can be fulfilled within it alone; but habit blinds us to the basis of our entire existence. It does not occur to someone who walks the streets in safety at night that this might be otherwise, for this habit of safety has become second nature, and we scarcely stop to think that it is solely the effect of particular institutions. (G. W. F. Hegel, Elements of the Philosophy of Right, § 268)

1. Introduction

Trust is a notoriously vague concept that seems to allow reference to an endless range of living and non-living objects. On the basis of everyday language we seem to be able to put trust in other people as much as in God, in institutions, in technologies, in animals or even in the world. This extreme plurality of use makes it difficult to delineate general contours of the concept as trust, say, in a parent appears to be far away from trust in a technology or in tomorrow's sunrise. What do these uses of the concept of trust have in common to justify our talk of trust in each respective case? Some might say "not much" and move on to concentrate on specific cases or relations of trust that seem to be easier to analyze in fruitful ways. Others go for a general analysis in developing a "prototypical" concept of trust (McLeod 2002) or in searching for the conceptual "role" trust plays (or should play) in everyday discourse (Jones 2012) but the more abstract the analysis gets the greater the risk of overgeneralization and inapplicability to specific cases.

In what follows I want to steer a middle course in focusing on a specific concept of trust, namely on what I will call, following Karen Jones (2004), basic trust, a concept that is, however applied across a wide range of social and natural phenomena. Despite this narrow focus my hope is that the analysis of the various uses of the concept of basic trust will generate insights that might be of wider relevance to the use of the concept of trust as such. The intuition to be followed is that many uses of the concept of basic trust are less informative than they appear to be which makes it difficult to assess the concept from a philosophical vantage point. In the end, my aim is not so much to call for conceptual revisions but to spell out some of the implications of what we mean or might possibly

mean by using the concept of basic trust. If I am not mistaken this will help us to understand what we don't mean or, in some cases, shouldn't mean, when we talk of basic trust and it links the analysis of the concept of basic trust to the wider notion of trust. As will become clear, my intuitions about this wider notion are, of course, present in the analysis of basic trust but I will only spell them out as the argument about basic trust unfolds.

Before embarking on this analysis two clarifications are apt. First, in using the concept of basic trust I am interested in a specific approach to trust that does not necessarily have to be couched in the language I use. "Basic trust" is not a conventionalized term and I use it for reasons of terminological convenience and as an interpretive category that is meant to shed light on a widespread understanding of specific trust phenomena. Some authors speak of "fundamental" or "primitive" trust, others work with the concept of "ontological" trust or "trust in the world" and yet a third group just speaks of "trust" when what I take to be basic trust is at stake. I will, of course, have to prove that the difference in terminology does not imply massive differences in semantic content that would delegetimize any attempt to treat them in one theoretical context. Second, and closely linked to this, as the more general concept of trust the concept of basic trust is also applied across a wide range of phenomena. As we will see, it is used in psychological contexts as much as in sociological or in philosophical contexts. Again, it will have to be shown to what extent it makes sense to ignore the differences between, say, trust in someone's communicative assertions and trust in a parent's benevolence, but I think that this can be done.

In the second section of this paper I will offer a preliminary definition of basic trust and introduce several approaches to the concept in sociology, philosophy and psychology. In the the third section I will begin to discuss the concept and ask first conceptual questions. The fourth section will deal with one specific element of the larger concept of trust, namely the element of optionality, that is, to my mind, pertinent to the concept of basic trust. In the fifth section further refinements of the concept of basic trust follow. The attempt is made to flesh out the concept in refering it to topics such as violence, terror and security. The conclusion wraps up some of the insights the discussion has hopefully produced.

2. Models of Basic Trust

Let me try to specify on a very abstract level what I mean by the concept of basic trust. Further elements of the concept will be mentioned as I introduce and discuss some of the more concrete cases. Models of trust that work with a concept of basic trust treat trust, first, as a default stance or baseline from which deviations such as a destruction of trust or simple distrust occur and they suggest, second, that the only alternatives to this stance of basic trust is what one might call drastic alternatives. The idea is that if basic trust is absent or is being destroyed all we are left with is chaos, radical insecurity, existential fear or other very serious negative psychological attitudes and states. As will become clear throughout the paper, it is this alternative between a baseline state of basic trust and, on the other side, some seriously impeded social, psychological or communicative state that I find less informative than it might appear at fist glance.

This abstract specification of basic trust certainly leaves many questions unanswered. In particular, nothing is said about the possible genesis of basic trust. Calling it a default stance or baseline avoids this question but this avoidance, I suggest, reflects the avoidance of this question in the literature consulted by me. Put differently, many authors working with the concept of basic trust treat it as a simple given that may be destroyed but that seems to have no history. Either it is present or given or it is not present or given.

Here are some examples from sociology. At the beginning of his well-known study on trust Luhmann famously calls trust a "basic fact of social life" (1979, 4). The further context of the quote makes clear that trust may not just be a basic fact of social life but a basic fact of life for Luhmann adds: "[…] a complete absence of trust would prevent him [men] even from getting up in the morning" (ibid.). What distinguishes this kind of basic trust in the world is that it is, in contrast to other forms of trust, not even optional. Without this trust, Luhmann says, "anything and everything would be possible" (ibid.); however, "[s]uch abrupt confrontation with the complexity of the world at its most extreme is beyond human endurance" (ibid.). We see here the elements of basic trust as specified above: On a very general level, trust is treated as a fundamental given that enables human beings to be and act in the world. No genesis of this "fact of social life" is mentioned and the alternative to it seems to be some form of unlivable insanity. This is, to be sure, an option – though not one we can consciously choose, I assume – but if I read Luhmann correctly, it is not only drastic in my sense but no *real*

option. By real option I mean psychologically realistic options that do not carry prohibitively high decision costs such as death, insanity, extreme suffering, deep alienation from one's surroundings etc. Luhmann leaves no doubt that the alternative to basic trust is unlivable for the kinds of beings we are.

In a similar vein, Alfred Schütz and Thomas Luckmann suggest that the world with which one is familiar "will continue further and that consequently the stock of my knowledge obtained from my fellow-men and formed from my own experiences will continue to preserve its fundamental validity" (1973, 7). One might add Anthony Giddens' notion of "ontological security" to the list; ontological security is, according to Giddens, a kind of "confidence that most human beings have in the continuity of their self-identity and in the constancy of the surrounding social and material environments of action" (1990, 118). Reference to "experience" does open this model of basic trust to questions concerning the genesis of the taken-for-granted familiarity with the world but this dose of empiricism does not prevent Schütz and Luckmann from treating trust in the stability of the familiar world mostly as a necessary precondition for being in the world at all. Giddens is explicit on this. The alternative to basic trust in his sense of ontological security is, basically, some form of deep psychic disruption: "A person who is existentially unsure about whether he or she is several selves, or whether others really exist, or whether what is perceived really exists, may be entirely incapable of inhabiting the same social universe as other human beings. Certain categories of individuals regarded by others as mentally ill, particularly schizophrenics, do think and act in this way" (1990, 93).

In philosophy, Bernard Williams comes close to my notion of basic trust when he mentions that there "are some general forms of trust on which all social interaction depends, in particular the expectation that other people's behaviour will not be unpromptly aggressive" (2002, 88). Here what is relevant is less our trust in the (familiar) world as such but our trust in others. Psychologist Erik Erikson is probably the one who has done most to popularize the idea that as infants we start out with an attitude he also calls, in *Childhood and Society*, "basic trust" (a concept which is rendered as "Urvertrauen" in the German translation of the book): "The infant's first social achievement, then, is his willingness to let the mother out of sight without undue anxiety or rage, because she has become an inner certainty as well as an outer predictability" (1977, 222). The idea is that trust in others, once established, simultaneously creates a sense of trust in oneself through internalising the more or less continuous external presence of early caretakers, a process which is the very basis for accepting

external insecurities and for forming "a rudimentary sense of the ego" (ibid.). It will not come as a surprise that Giddens also refers to Erikson's ideas in his account of ontological security (1990, 94-96).

To take another philosopher, John Austin, well-known for inaugurating speech act theory, suggests yet another model of basic trust. He says that "it is fundamental in talking [...] that we are entitled to trust others, except in so far as there is some concrete reason to distrust them. Believing persons, accepting testimony, is the, or one main, point of talking" (1961, 82). Interestingly, Austin introduces an alternative to trusting others that does not appear to be drastic; we can simply distrust them if we have positive reasons to do so. However, the context of his argument makes clear that this is an option we should not choose too frequently for if we do so, or if we are forced to do so, a very serious price may have to be payed. In other words, without this kind of trust, without, that is, firmly settled dispositions to believe in the truth or at least the truthfulness of what others say, our system of communication would, evidently, break down or be seriously harmed. Williams expresses the same point by postulating a "primitive trust" in others that rests on the assumption that what they assert is "usually right" (2002, 49).

Again, I realize that I have lumped together several accounts of (basic) trust that deal with different objects of trust (from the very unspecific "world" to the slightly more specific "other persons" to the even more specific "other person's assertions"). **[1]** Whether some object in the world (a roof, a floor) disappoints my trust (if we accept that way of talking for the moment) or another person will make a difference with respect to my reactive attitude. The latter disappointment is likely to have a moral dimension which the former often (though not always) lacks. However, at this point in the argument I ignore these obvious differences in order to emphasize a deeper similarity in the models of trust. I will ask whether these models actually make sense or how far they carry us in helping us to understand trust. My interest is not so much to fully discredit these models but to take more seriously a point that most of them, as seen, somehow presuppose, namely the fact that there are alternatives even to basic trust which means that it is less basic or fundamental than often assumed. Basic trust can then be seen as what it is, a fragile achievement that should never simply be taken for granted. Furthermore, if my view is correct the alternative to basic trust may not be an unlivable insanity and not even a Hobbesian state of war of all against all. As Hobbes well knew, the absence of active warfare is compatible with being in a state of war so there is sociality without trust, granted

[1] Here I react to an anonymous reviewer who found the variety of my examples and references confusing and demanded a more systematic approach. I hope I have improved my argument in response to this critique and thank the reviewer for the suggestions.

that an enduring state of fearing aggression by (all) others is not exactly what we identify as a state of trust. The alternative to a general stance of trust is, according to my position, not a state of war or an unlivable pre-social natural state but a social state that will make it more difficult for many involved members to achieve their ends or may even hinder them from achieving them at all. That's not war, it just is a world with a reduced quality of living.

3. The Initial Plausibility of the Model and First Conceptual Questions

Why is the model of basic trust in its various forms so attractive? The reason why it has such a strong appearance of unquestionable evidence is, of course, that assumptions of basic trust seem to be the very flipside of a world, to take up Williams' term, of unprompted aggressiveness. It is the absence of such a nasty Hobbesian world in most of our social surroundings that allows us to talk of basic trust in the first place or to take such trust for granted. The plausibility of the notion of basic trust even becomes stronger if we reflect on historical periods which have seen a total breakdown of this kind of trust. Here is one of the most frequently cited descriptions of such a breakdown, namely Jean Améry's account of the torture he suffered as a victim of the Nazi regime. Améry says that "with the very first blow that descends on him [the tortured individual] he loses something we will perhaps temporarily call 'trust in the world'" (1980, 28). Améry adds that by this he means the "certainty that by reason of written or unwritten contracts the other person will spare me – more precisely stated, that he will respect my physical, and with it also my metaphysical being" (ibid.). Violence, then, attacks the physical and the metaphysical being as much as it attacks or destroys our trust in the world and in others. Being able to be in the world without having to suffer from blows of violence thus allows trust in the world or is actually somehow based on such trust. If something is destroyed through violence (I will come back to Améry's stress on the "first" blow) *something* obviously had to be there to be destroyed and that something is often called trust or trust in the world.

As I said, this picture of various kinds of basic trust as being at the base of our ability to be in the world and to communicate and interact non-violently with others appears to be extremely plausible. However, my first, somewhat conceptual, point of discussion is that this plausibility rests on unstated

assumptions which should better be spelled out in order to circumvent possible misunderstandings. Thus, I think this plausibilty rests on the fact that the very possibility of violence introduces an element of optionality into the picture that I take to be important as I do not feel comfortable with the idea of a kind of trust that is without alternative. Seen in this light, there is always an alternative to trust, namely distrust as reaction to destroyed trust or something we might call non-trust which simply refers to the absence of trust without necessarily being the result of lost trust. Violence, systematic dishonesty, cold psychological and physical neglect or other forms of non-cooperation introduce this option into the default stance of trust that otherwise appears to regulate our interactions with others and the world. Calling these forms of non-cooperation an option may not sound convincing at all which is probably the reason why some of the authors mentioned above treat their respective concept of trust as if it was more or less non-optional or without meaningful alternative. It is true, the default stance of trust seems to be without (livable) alternative and somehow unchosen given certain basic aims we have as humans. Thus, to come back to Luhmann, there is no alternative to trust in the world if we want to get up in the morning. And, of course, most of us do want to get up in the morning. Put differently, though there is an (perhaps sometimes rather abstract) alternative to getting up in the morning, namely not getting up for fear that the floor might crack or for fear that the outside world bears too many possibilities for violence or catastrophe, there is no alternative to getting up if we are interested in taking up a normal non-violent and fearless stance towards others and the world. I suppose that most of us share this interest, so what is stated by the conditional (*if* we are interested in …) is obvious and non-salient. If we presuppose a general interest in being able to actively be and engage in the world there is no alternative to trust short of neurotic isolation or misanthropic seclusion. Under normal circustances, one might say, the option of leading such miserable lives is not a real option which amounts to saying that we do not choose to lead fundamentally trustful lives, we just live them in responding to various basic interests and needs we share with most other human beings.

It is understandable, then, that some of the accounts of basic trust introduced above tend to ontologize trust and treat it as a presupposition of what existentialist philosophers might call our being in the world. But as I also said, my comments so far are conceptual in character which means that I prefer to stress the fact that there are always alternatives to trust. If we don't recognize them or take their absence for granted it may be because we have successfully established conditions which

allow us to ignore them. As a concept basic trust then refers to an *achievement* (remember Erikson's term) and not to an apriori stance to be treated as psychological or ontological default position. I realize that this must appear like a minor point that merely seems to spell out implicit assumptions but I hope it will become clear in what follows that it is not. Put differently, *all* accounts of trust gain in strength if it can be shown that the notion of trust envisaged by them somehow rests on having *chosen* the trust option and thereby actively sidelined other possible courses of action. As Onora O'Neill says, "where people have options we can tell whether they really mistrust [or, for that matter, trust, M.H.] by seeing whether they put their money where they put their mouths" (2002, 13). In basic trust my trust relies on not being afraid of violence, untruthfulness or physical catastrophes so these are the options we stave off as trusting individuals. The possibility of being mugged or being *constantly* lied to or of, say, experiencing earthquakes may not be very high but it all may happen, so basic trust rests on being able to dim out these possibilities. Put differently, even if probabilities of certain risks are low, fundamental trust means that we can safely ignore these risks *though we could choose not to ignore them*. Not doing so is part of trusting fundamentally. In violence or catastrophe what opens up as a possibility, what actualizes or emerges is that which can be safely ignored before the negative event takes place or strikes us. It is that possibility that is staved off.

4. Real Options – Refining the Concept

If I am right, basic trust rests on our ability to save ourselfes from seriously considering certain risks. I said that this is the *option* trust allows us to ignore but which we could potentially not ignore. As will become clearer later on, terror (say in the form of random terrorist attacks) is the attempt to make forgetting about or ignoring potential risks impossible. One might say that it reminds us of the hard-won privilege of forgetfulness and ignorance and forces us to remember, thereby destroying the privilege. I also indicated that most authors do not treat basic trust as I just did. In fact, most authors introduce it as inevitable and without meaningful alternative.

Let me add another philosophical example to further clarify my point. Lars Hertzberg situates his account of trust within the context of a discussion of communicative trust. Hertzberg writes that "believing what others say is a refinement of other, more basic forms of trust" (1988, 309). Put differently, before we can assess whether what others say is true or not we must trust them to be

the kind of persons that make true or truthful statements. Before we can judge the competence of a teacher, for example, we have to trust her as we acquire the competence necessary to judge the intellectual honesty of a person only in the very process of teaching that in itself rests on some form of primitive trust in the teacher. In processes of teaching, then, trust is simply presupposed, it is not treated as an experience-based attitude.

As one might imagine by now, the only problem I have with this account of trust is that it treats trust as if there was no alternative to it. But again, there is a conditional involved here that ought to be spelled out: There is no alternative to trust *if* you desire to acquire the competency to judge the communicative reliability of persons. Once more my qualms about this are merely conceptual. As I said having options makes it easier to assess whether someone really puts trust in the world or in other persons. If trust, as Annette Baier claims, involves "accepted vulnerability" (1994a) the element of acceptance appears to be strengthened, to my mind, if *accepting* vulnerability implies having an option not to accept it, if, in other words, acceptance is freely given. In that sense I would say that trustfully believing what teachers say is never an absolute *must*. You can decide not to believe what teachers say if they lack any authority in your eyes or you can just pretend to listen to them or you can try not to attend school.

But, Hertzberg might reply, are these *real* options? By real options he could mean options that make sense in a given context and are not far-fetched or unrealistic. Some of the possible moves just mentioned still seem to rest on acquired competencies that may have had to rest on some form of basic or primitive trust, such as the ability to judge the authority of a person. In the end, then, the child simply must trust the teacher, otherwise he will never acquire the competencies necessary to ever be able to judge the truthfulness or plausibility of taught material. Consequently, Hertzberg and others do not consider alternatives to (basic) trust as there are no alternatives given certain interests we have. So, yes, they fall prey to what I might label by now the 'there is no alternative to trust' mode but they do so for understandable reasons.

Obviously, I need to carry my criticism a littler further in slowly moving beyond mere conceptual comments and in delineating what options I have in mind if not the options I myself just characterized as not being real options. As I said, if our notion of trust is to be informative, it better allow reference to options. One problem we get if one does not do so is that talk of trust loses semantic content in that it cannot be meaningfully distinguished from other attitudes we may adopt in, say,

pedagogic contexts such as gullibility or naivety or blind admiration. If this is valid, our tendency to talk of trust in these contexts requires us to redescribe them so as to be able to give trust a fuller meaning. And this, I think, can be done. Pupils, for example, usually grow up in an environment of plural knowledge production. They have parents who teach them various lessons and they have friends, the media or other sources which supply them with knowledge about the world. And this is probably true very early on, so there is no pedagogic state of nature in which the pupil knows nothing and gets all his knowledge solely from the teacher. The pupil, then, can more or less decide which knowledge source to put most trust in, he can also weigh which source appears to be the most trustworthy. If this is true, a certain space opens up which may be filled with the notion of 'alternatives to trust', a space needed to allow trust to acquire a more definite meaning. In other words, the seeming naivety of the pupil should not be taken for a natural reaction though it appears to be just that. Believing most of what teachers say is not a natural reaction but a capacity that rests on the habitualized conviction that teachers are competent sources of knowledge transmission. In systems of compulsory education pupils have, of course, few possibilities to avoid attending school. But the attitude with which the taught lessons are met is not *determined* by the school situation.

Of course, so far I have said no more than that it may make sense to speak of trust in the "basic" contexts mentioned, only that I have attempted to 'defundamentalize' our talk of trust here if by fundamental we mean 'taken for granted' or 'presupposed on a pre-reflective level'. Trust always is an achievement and can never be taken for granted. If it appears 'natural' it really is *second* natural, the result of successful processes of adopting civilized or cooperative manners. Even the handshake that to many appears to be a natural or "primitive" (Baier 1994b) gesture of trust has its specific history and cannot be taken for granted (Allert 2010), a point I cannot dwell on here (but see Hartmann 2011, 387-395).

5. Security, Violence, and Terror

Now I do realize that my point still appears somewhat technical. Let me move on to another reason for being sceptical of much talk of basic trust. This will, I hope, carry more weight. Allow me to return to Bernard Williams. After having delineated the "general forms of trust" that support all social interaction Williams adds an important modification. He admits that trusting that people will

not react with unprompted violence to whatever I desire of them does not amount to full trust or trustworthiness. In fact, he says, "one is not likely to be reassured by someone who says 'I promise not to murder you'" (2002, 89). In a certain sense, *the absence of violence does not itself constitute trust but rather allows substantial forms of trust to be possible in the first place*. To be sure, Williams does claim that relying on people's non-violence does amount to "standard" trust in them, but I think it still is possible to accept that there appear to be levels of basic trust in others with the lowest level being close to a Hobbesian *modus vivendi* with not much trust involved. It can be an achievement to rely on other people not to kill you, but is it trust? Williams himself seems to have some doubts. My point is just that some of the talk of basic trust misdescribes the basis! It is of the nature of trust to build on what Williams calls "more settled" backgrounds since what trust actually involves are attitudes and expectations that cannot thrive if violence is still an option that needs to be explicitly (or even implicitly) disclaimed. If that is correct, settled attitudes of trust need a basis that itself cannot rely on these very settled attitudes. Does this basis then rest on a thinner notion of trust? I am not sure. But I think that these reflections allow us once more to redescribe basic trust and make it less basic. Maybe reliance on the *force* of right is more basic than trust for it is only the reliance on possible uses of force that allows us to establish what one might call, following Karen Jones (2004), a sense of "basal security" that is then taken as explanation for differing levels of trust.

Let me explicate my position here. What Jones has in mind in utilizing the notion of basal security is a frequently observed phenomenon, namely the discrepancy between consciously articulated risk-assessments and actual (emotional) behaviour. We sometimes trust where we judge a risk to be high and we sometimes refrain from trusting where we judge a risk to be low (thus we know that airtravel is rather safe but still find it difficult to control our fears). According to Jones we can only understand these discrepancies if we adopt the notion of basal security: "These examples of dissonance between intellective judgment regarding the degree of risk presented in a situation and our willingness to actually trust in the face of such-and-such a degree of risk [...] support the postulation of an underlying, affectively laden state that is explanatory of our willingness or otherwise to enter into particular [...] trusting relations" (Jones 2004, 8). The decisive point for me is Jones' idea that our sense of basal security *explains* the level of trust we adopt towards others or the world and is not to be equated with trust. Low basal security may lead us to (emotionally) exaggerate risks we judge to be rather low while high basal security may lead us to ignore risks we judge to be rather high. In

other words, basal security with all its emotional accompaniments decisively influences our willingness or unwillingness to trust others which thus cannot be treated as non-manipulable or apriori baseline for our engagements with the world. **[2]**

Once more, then, my point is that basic trust has fundaments of its own that should not be equated with what basic trust stands for. What this distinction, once granted, allows us to do is not only to defundamentalize trust in explanatory terms but also to supply the concept of trust with a less general meaning and thereby help to sharpen its often blurry semantic edges and turn it into a category better able to capture its own behavioral and action-relevant implications. So, yes, getting up in the morning may rest on a very basic kind of trust – though not the kind of "trust" implicated in statements such as 'I promise not to murder you' which seem to grant too much threatening discretion to single agents. What is necessary seems to be a more settled kind of trust that does not even reflect on the possibility to encounter murder on the way to the supermarket. This kind of trust is basic but it is not to be taken for granted as such, it is, as I repeatedly said, a naturalized achievement that forms part of a practice of trust that helps to rationalize our many single acts of trust in sparing us from the necessity to check for ourselves the general security level of our own society or community. That we factually cannot do so does not mean that we just *have* to trust for that does not appear to be true. Trusting because one never has the time or lacks the intellectual capacities to check for oneself whether single acts of trust might be reasonable or not is not the same thing as trusting because one is aware of being part of an intact and healthy collective practice of trust which really rationalizes one's abstention from testing given trustworthiness levels. Such practices are perhaps rarer than we often think which also means that trust of the basic kind is rarer than we often think. At the same time, the worth of such practices becomes evident if we lack them or experience their active destruction through particular others.

What is so threatening about this kind of destruction is, however, not only that it brings to light an evil (the drastic alternative mentioned above) that could be safely ignored before given the healthy trust practice but that it brings to light an evil that was not even ignored before as it appeared to be, in a certain sense, unimaginable. To begin with, I want to distinguish a phenomenon I call trust-specific vulnerabilities from non-trust-specific vulnerabilities. My impression is that many accounts of basic trust do not make this distinction and thereby miss important differences between trust-related risks and risks that are not related to trust but are of a more general kind. Let me try to clarify

[2] Jones later (2004, 11) seems to equate basal security with what she then labels "first-order trust" so that the category introduced to explain levels of trust becomes itself a specific level of trust. The notion of first-order trust seems to refer to habitualized trust reactions that can become the object of "metatrust", that is, trust in our (first-order) trust. The decisive question here would be: Can I trust myself to place trust wisely? While I find the distinction between first-order trust and metatrust helpful I am not sure whether the (seeming) equation of basal security and first-order trust is equally helpful. Take a statement such as "[l]ow basal security can lead the agent to have higher than average estimates of the objective risk provided by a situation" (Jones 2004, 9). Could we simply replace "low basal security" by "low first-order trust"? Again, I am not sure. After all, low first-order trust would seem to justify a certain level of distrust in my normal trust-based risk assessments. On the other hand, the notion of low basal security does not seem to imply such a critical psychological stance towards my own attitudes. It just explains them (and may, as Jones realizes, itself be further analyzed for its causal sources). For (perhaps merely methodological) reasons explained in the main text I find it helpful to distinguish basal security from trust.

this by refering to Susan Brison's narrative of being the victim of a brutal rape in a rural French town (Brison 2002; Jones 2004, 11). Brison is a philosopher from Dartmouth College and is unusual in having written a feminist philosopher's account of rape victimhood. On the face of it, her account fits the model of basic trust and it does not come as a surprise that she mentions Améry's reflections on torture as cause of a loss of trust in the world. After the rape Brison no longer felt at home in the world, she lost all sense of security and describes reactions such as "hypervigilance, heightened startle response, sleep disorders, and the more psychological, yet still involuntary, responses of depression, inability to concentrate, lack of interest in activities that used to give life meaning, and a sense of a foreshortened future" (2002, 40). What struck her most, however, were some of the reactions of the people surrounding her – colleagues, friends, even relatives. Most of them did not know how to react to the rape and instead of talking to Brison chose not to mention the incident at all as if nothing ever happened. Furthermore, those who did respond tried to diminish the sheer unpredictability and meaninglessness of the event by pretending it could not happen again to one and the same person or assuming it might help one to learn to be more careful in certain places or at certain times of the day in the future (but, as Brison mentions (2002, 9), it happened "in broad daylight").

As one may expect Brison was deeply disconcerted about these reactions and ponders on the reasons for this "emotional illiteracy". One conclusion she draws is that we never learn, neither early in life nor late, how to react to a rape (2002, 12) which leads to a feeling of deep confusion on the part of the victim and to silence on the part of the people confronted with knowledge of the rape. If this is true the possibility of a rape is not a possibility we could possibly stave of in basic trust. We never even think about this possibility which is the reason why we don't know how to deal with such acts of spontaneous violence in the first place (Brison explains why we don't think about such risks). In the same vein getting up in the morning cannot sensibly rest on our trust in the stability of the floor unless we live in regions where floors have been known to collapse (say under the impact of earthquakes). Put differently, there are acts of violence (or certain catastrophes) which do not break up a kind of trust that rested or relied on ignoring *just these risks*. There are forms or acts of violence that bring something new into the world (remember Améry's stress on the "first" blow), something that could not be considered a real possibility before and therefore did not appear in need of civilizing mechanisms. Call this the viscious creativity of evil or at least of some forms of evil. It exists but we usually don't treat it as a real option in the aformentioned sense. Therefore, seemingly unusual acts

of violence cannot help us in detecting the risks we stave off in fundamental trust. As Arne Vetlesen writes: "The idea that the exceptional provides us with a privileged access to what is fundamental, yet ordinarily concealed, is suggestive but methodically unsound" (2005, 37). Who would want to say that the possibility of gasing people to death was a real option that could be ignored by fundamentally putting trust in others? Trust in the world, I contend, could not mean that *this* danger was not real. In other words, the world after the Holocaust was and is a different world than the world before the Holocaust and that means that the contours of our trust in the world change over time, an important fact that much of the more atemporal and ahistorical talk about basic trust hides from view. In other words, before the Holocaust being civilized may have meant not to kill people, now it may include not to gas people as the dreadful option of gasing people had turned into a real and practiced possibility through the acts of the Nazis. This still sounds somewhat perverse though and maybe no culture is civilized if gasing people is among the options to be kept at bay. But once more, my point is: No jew trusted not to be gased as this option, I take it, was more or less unimaginable. Such a trust could not have been part of his trust in the world and may likely be no part of any truly civilized society.

From this it follows that there are dangers or risks that hit us because we trust and dangers or risks that hit us because of other aspects of our behaviour or our being in the world. Put differently, getting up in the morning may rest on basic trust if it can be seen to safely ignore real dangers, dangers made possible by our trusting attitude. But there are many dangers we confront not because we trust but because we are vulnerable simply as human beings. Furthermore, the notion of trust-relative risk implies the existence of real alternatives to the trusting attitude, alternatives we safely ignore. Thus, the mere fact of doing something or not doing something should not, in itself, be seen as expressing trust or distrust. It all depends on the options available. Onora O'Neill seems to be saying just this: "Those who *seriously* mistrust producers and suppliers of consumer goods *can* and *do* refuse to rely on them. Those who *really* mistrust the tap water drink bottled water, or boil it, or use water purification tablets; where water supplies are *seriously* questionable, people do so" (O'Neill 2002, 12f., italics by O'Neill). Of, course, the options must be there and we must be somehow aware of them or must, if aware of them, be able to buy bottled water etc. Not buying bottled water thus does not necessarily imply trusting tap water as having a bank account does not necessarily imply trusting the bank. **[3]** Not having a bank account may just be no realistic option in the society I live

[3] Again, lumping bank accounts, tap water, getting up in the morning and, later, terror together may be considered to stretch the concept of trust too far. However, my point is to exemplify, first, what I mean by the notion of "real" options in trust-relevant contexts and, second, to discuss some of the envirnomental factors shaping these options or allowing them to be real options in the first place. A longer study certainly would have to take into account or at least be sensible to the differences of these possible objects of trust.

in, so simply having a bank account is a state fully compatible with high degrees of distrust in banks. In fact, being merely able to express my misgivings without being able to act on them may exacerbate my distrust in adding a feeling of helplessnes to the already powerful intellectual criticisms I have (and the great reliance of much trust research on opinion polls may indirectly aggravate the uncoupling of measurable trust attitudes from practical contexts of action). Be this as it may, my point is if there are real options, it is much easier for us to attribute real or sincere or true or, to use O'Neill's expression, *serious* trust to others. Notions of basic trust, as they typically ignore the possibility of real options, are, to my mind, uninformative as notions of trust. They do not allow us to distinguish the dangers incurred by seriously trustful behaviour from dangers incurred by simply being the vulnerable beings we are and therefore risk to empty the rich (general) concept of trust from some of the more interesting and important semantic aspects it actually has. I will come back to this in the conclusion.

As indicated above, terror in the form of random terrorist attack denaturalizes our feeling of security and forces us to see it as the brittle achievement it actually is. It reminds us, I also said, of the hard-won privilege of forgetfulness and ignorance and brutally destroys this privilege. But it does more. Part of what it means to really trust is, as Jones made clear (2004, 11), to trust our own judgment as to where to put our trust and where to refrain from doing so. Under normal circumstances we are able to test our trust with regard to its reasonability or unreasonability. We see us as the very source of the act of trust and put the blame on ourselves if we place trust naively. 'Why did I trust, I could have known better…!' Or 'Why didn't I trust? She proved to be totally trustworthy?' In contrast to a seemingly steady default state of basic trust, single acts of trust thus help us to learn about our ability to place trust and to produce correct judgments concerning the trustworthiness of others, an ability Jones calls "metatrust" (ibid.). While I do not want to dwell on this notion, what is interesting about it is that it highlights that what acts of violence or terror really destroy is not so much a given stance of basic trust (as often suggested) but an ability exercized in everyday life, namely the ability to judge other people's trustworthiness. Some of us are better in this than others, all of us have to practice it on a continuous basis to improve it. This dynamic aspect of our judgmental ability to put trust in others is easily ignored by relying on a notion of basic trust that seems to be just present or not. As Jones has shown, terror aims at this "metatrust" in ourselves. As it can hit me anywhere and anytime I lose my ability to place or withhold trust on the basis of my familiarity with my own

judgmental competence. To be in the wrong place at the wrong time is not blameworthy in any meaningful sense. Terror thus creates in its own perverse way a climate of insecurity that partly consists in being no longer able to trust my own judgmental abilities concerning my competence to place or withhold trust. This is, apart from all its other gruesome consequences, its humiliating aspect. It not just kills those it kills, it incapacitates the survivors by sending them the message: 'You will never be able to correctly appreciate the risk levels of what we do or plan to do' (see Hartmann 2013). In other words, in a world in which terror is an all too real option getting up in the morning may imply a kind of trust we never hope for, namely a trust that has to ignore the possibility of unforseeable death. As I said, this may not be trust at all. It may be pure despair. Basic trust, as specified in this paper, certainly is the better option. If I am not mistaken, however, it is not to be taken for granted as it continuously changes what we may call its expectational structure. What today appears safe and sound might no longer appear so at some later point in time.

6. Conclusion

As should be clear, my analysis of the concept of basic trust relied on my ideas concerning a broader concept of trust, ideas I cannot really spell out in full detail in this paper (see Hartmann 2011). Some of these ideas, however, have been explicated in the paper. Thus, I have introduced the notion of trust as a real option that I find lacking in the concepts of basic trust. I realize that talk of real options does raise some questions of its own, questions that could only be answered if a full account of the concept of trust were supplied. Such an account would have to emphasize that trust is not just a mental or affective attitude but is a *practical* attitude that does change our ways of acting if present. Such a full account would also have to describe the complex judgmental structure underlying trustful attitudes and the role collective factors play in influencing individual trust-levels. Moreover, it would pay attention to what I called trust-specific vulnerablities and distinguish them from non-trust-specific vulnerabilities which would further help to bring into view distinctive and non-substitutable aspects of the attitude of trust. Lastly, it would treat trust as a dynamic practical attitude never taken for granted but always an individual and social achievement with distinguishable security levels. Trust comes in degrees and it is open to a multitude of factors influencing its exact strength. Violence and terror were just two (drastic) examples of such factors, other (less salient) factors could be

mentioned. If one is fortunate enough to live in a stable culture of trust and trustworthiness, I grant that trustful attitudes can even become basic in the sense of being second natural to all (or most of) those involved in that culture. But as I have tried to show, and as Hegel's quote from the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* reminds us, such trust is still an "effect" and not a cultural basis ever to be taken as simply given.

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