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The Role of Trust in Political Systems. A Philosophical Perspective

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Abstract: The paper analyzes the question of whether trust is an essential condition for the functioning of social and political systems; it approaches the issue from a philosophical perspective. Trust appears in both interpersonal relationships (interpersonal trust) and in societal and political institutions (social and political trust, respectively). In the political literature trust is sometimes characterized as ‘an expectation of continued value’. Although the same literature distinguishes social from political trust, the thesis advanced here is that, logically, all forms of trust must be characterized as an inductive generalization from past experience to future expectations of the continuation of some specifiable utilities (goods, services). As such, trust suffers from Humean reservations about inductive inferences. Trust as an expectation of the continued provision of utilities, on the institutional level, will be characterized as a first-order sort of trust. It can be disappointed without necessarily threatening the continuation of a given institution, especially if there is no alternative service provider. But trust as an expectation of the continued functioning of democratic mechanisms will be characterized as a second-order sort of trust. The paper will argue that the second-order kind of trust is essential for the functioning of democracies.

Keywords: Democracy; Democratic Mechanisms; Dictatorship; Institutional Trust; Interpersonal Trust; First-order and second-order trust; Inductive Inferences; Necessary and Sufficient Conditions.

1 Introduction

Trust is a familiar phenomenon in our personal and social lives. We trust our relatives and friends but increasingly mistrust politicians, institutions and their officials. What is perhaps less immediately obvious but equally important is that trust is needed for the functioning of institutions, like the health system, the currency, the police and parliament. But what is trust and is trust a necessary and sufficient condition for the proper functioning of a political system? Does trust play the same role in both democracies and dictatorships? This paper will seek answers by focussing on democracies. It will approach the question of whether trust is essential from a philosophical rather than a political or sociological angle. In the political sense trust is understood as a ‘bet on the future contingent actions of others.’ (Rothstein 2004: 16) In the sociological sense trust is understood as reliability, which enables the coordination of social activities; it reduces complexity and provides individuals with a sense of security. But it also deprives these individuals of the opportunity to influence decision-making because a situation of trust assumes that truster and trustee share common interests and that these interests will be well served. The gist of the argument to be presented in this article is as follows:

Trust, when warranted, is a sense of reliability that has been inductively justified together with an expectation of beneficial consequences from the object of trust, e.g., another person or a social institution. The expectation of *beneficial* consequences suggests that trust has normative implications; it is first-order trust.

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Although many commentators suppose that society's institutions function properly only if they are trusted, they may survive if there is no alternative to them.

It is a feature of democratic systems that citizens have conflicting views about social objectives, leading to a loss of social/political trust and the need for mechanisms such as a judicial system for effectively and dependably adjudicating differences.

Hence, in a democratic society a second-order trust in institutions is an essential condition for its proper functioning, and so long as the mechanisms in question deliver the expected services then second-order institutional trust is a necessary and sufficient condition of democratic institutions.

From a philosophical perspective the argument will first characterize trust as an inductive inference and then move to the question of whether trust is not only a necessary but also a sufficient condition for the proper functioning of democratic institutions. As it turns out the availability of alternatives to a current service provider is a crucial element. The clarification of the functioning of trust in a democracy will throw light on the role of trust in totalitarian systems. A dictatorship can function without the trust of its citizens in its institutions. The use of force and political violence make trust redundant. But democratic societies do not rule by force and compulsion. So the question arises whether they need trust to function effectively.

2 Trust

Trust can be understood in the first instance as the reliability of a person, procedure or institution to deliver whatever services they provide and are expected of them. Thus Giddens defines trust

as confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principles (technical knowledge). (Giddens 1990: 34)

But this characterization is uninformative as long as no independent sense of 'reliability' is given. Philosophically, notions like trust and reliability can be understood in an inductive sense: they are inductive notions, with all the Humean vagaries which are attached to them. Trust is an inductive generalization from the *past* performance of a person, an institution, a service or procedure to its expected *future* performance. If an institution has delivered justice or economic success in the past it is then expected that it will continue to deliver this performance in the future. Of its past performance citizens have evidence: of its future performance they only have expectations. Trust is built on the evidence of past success, not on the expectation of future performance. Note, too, for future reference, that trust is voluntary and that the loss of trust is not accompanied by sanctions or fear. This expectation is the pragmatic aspect of trust but trust also has a normative dimension. Like all types of inductive reasoning, past evidence is no guarantee of successful performance in the future. But the 'warranty' of success can vary according to circumstances. The inductive reasoning from the observation of sunrise in the past, to the continuation of these events in the future is considerably strengthened by knowledge of the underlying regularities, which make the sun 'rise' each morning in the east. Our trust in the sunrise tomorrow is not based on our past observations. Most people do not deliberately observe the sunrise each morning and record its precise time of occurrence. Our trust is based on our implicit or explicit knowledge of the underlying regularities of the Earth's rotation on its own axis within the solar system. But our trust in institutions, people or procedures cannot be based on underlying natural or social 'laws'. Human behaviour is not governed solely by the invariant regularities of the natural world. These regularities can be technologically exploited but they cannot be changed by human intervention. By contrast, social 'laws' often vary from society to society and, more importantly, they can be modified and even reversed. Logically speaking, social 'laws' are mere trends or patterns of behaviour. Trust in institutions is purely based on past experience with these providers. This past experience may be based on the actual experience of the service they provide. But it is possible to have trust in institutions without having direct experience of their performance. Trust may be based on a reputation of an institution (like a bank) in delivering services, e.g. on third-party experience.

Alternatively, trust in institutions may be based on the underlying mechanisms, rules or regulations, which make them provide a reliable service. Trust in social institutions is much easier to destroy than, say, trust in natural laws because it is subject to the problem of inductive reasoning in the Humean sense. As Hume argued, inductive reasoning is subject to doubt because it can neither be shown to be logically valid nor empirically reliable. (Hume 1973: Part III) That is, any amount of past evidence may be valid, yet the conclusion that future performance will be reliable does not follow from the premises. It therefore possesses a much lower level of inductive ‘certainty’ than do natural events. It is much easier to destroy and much more difficult to rebuild. Once trust is broken the expectation that an institution will continue to deliver its services is shaken.

It is often said that without trust institutions cannot function. Mistrust would then be the expectation that the continuity of the services may be interrupted with nefarious consequences. This characterization of mistrust points to a further important feature of trust: we trust persons and institutions because their services have beneficial consequences for our well-being. This is its normative dimension. Although we hear statements like: ‘I trust him to be late’, what is really being said is ‘I fear that he will be late’ and his lateness will have non-beneficial consequences. Trust is an expectation in the absence of *complete* information, hence a future-directed inference:

We need it because we have to be able to rely on others acting as they say that they will, and because we need others to accept that we will act as we say we will. The sociologist Niklas Luhmann was right that ‘A complete absence of trust would prevent [one] from even getting up in the morning. (O’Neill 2002: 1)

O’Neill also hints at the crucial reason why trust is important: ‘trust is needed precisely because all guarantees are incomplete.’ (O’Neill 2002: 2) Giddens agrees that ‘the prime condition of requirements for trust is not lack of power but lack of full information.’ (Giddens 1990: 33) Trust is thus based on partial information (of past performance).

It is sometimes said that trust in people differs from trust in institutions. Trust in individuals expresses an expectation of reciprocity. The service, which *A* renders *B* is expected to be returned to *A* at some future point, if *A* requires it. But trust in institutions is different, as Giddens affirms:

(t)rust in abstract systems provides the security of day-to-day reliability, but by its very nature cannot supply either the mutuality or intimacy which personal trust relations offer. (Giddens 1990: 114)

O. Patterson (1999) distinguishes four kinds of trust: 1) affective trust is based on face-to-face relations; 2) intermediary trust functions at a distance through intermediaries; 3) collective trust involves direct, yet impersonal contact and 4) delegated trust is trust in institutions and abstract systems, their rules, values and norms.

It is worth noting that in these characterizations the future-oriented inductive nature of trust goes unnoticed. It is also assumed, without further consideration, that trust is essential for the proper functioning of institutions.

Trust is sometimes distinguished from other notions. Some commentators see trust as a property of persons, which involves their interests. Trustworthiness attaches to the reliability of institutions. (Hardin 1998; cf. Levi 1998: 80)

N. Luhmann distinguishes trust and confidence. (Luhmann 1988: 97) Confidence expresses an attitude that one’s expectation will not be disappointed. Trust, on the other hand, presupposes a ‘situation of risk’. In complex societies ‘lack of confidence will lead to feelings of alienation’, whilst ‘lack of trust (...) simply withdraws activities’. (Luhmann 1988: 103-4) Luhmann makes two important points: confidence is an inductive attitude and lack of trust affects people’s behaviour. Thus, these two notions are linked.

If trust is lacking (...) this changes the way people decide about important issues. (Luhmann 1988: 103)

Luhmann regards confidence as one of the ‘essential conditions of trust’. However, confidence can be lost when risk increases the expectation of disappointment and trust in reliable institutions is not necessarily

linked to risks. These distinctions may nevertheless be helpful in a sociological analysis, but from a philosophical point of view the central aspect of confidence, trustworthiness and trust in its various forms is the future-oriented expectation of continuity. If trust is an inductive inference then in both interpersonal and institutional trust there is an expectation, created by experience of the past, that both the interpersonal reciprocity and the upholding of the delivery of services linked to rules, values and norms, will continue into the future. It appears that both interpersonal and institutional trust are essential for the proper functioning of human institutions.

3 Trust in Institutions

Can an institution function without the trust of its service-takers? Political scientists tend to draw a distinction between social trust and political trust. (Newton 2001) Social trust is invested in social institutions – for instance voluntary organizations; political trust affects political institutions. But from a philosophical point of view, all forms of trust are inductive generalizations. Let us approach the question whether an institution can function without the trust of its service-users via an analogy: Can public transport function without the trust of its users?

In the latter case the answer is ‘yes’, if there is no alternative. A bus service can become unreliable. It will force people to accept much longer waiting times. If there are no alternatives to this kind of public transport then people will simply have to accept to wait for the next service, however long it may take. In this case people will have lost trust in the reliability of the service but they will still depend on it. The bus service will function (unreliably) in the absence of trust because people have no alternatives.

What happens, however, if people can choose alternative means of transport? This is a more interesting question for the analysis of trust. If alternative means of transport are available – say trains – people will increasingly use them. The bus service will become unprofitable and may cease to function. In this case the loss of trust will have changed the attitude of service users. Not only will people, in Luhmann’s words, change the way they decide on important issues, the loss of trust will also change the very nature of the institution, in this case public transport.

When we apply this analogy to judicial, political and social institutions, we observe that trust also has normative implications. So far it has been stressed that an institution may deliver its services one day and fail to do so another time. As trust is an inductive inference, people will lose the expectation that the service will be delivered in a non-random, reliable fashion. But if there is no alternative, this institution will continue to function, although it lacks the trust of its service-users. How does this situation present itself in a totalitarian system? The ‘faithful’ will ‘trust’ the dictator to guarantee their well-being. It may be based on sheer faith in the abilities of the leader or on fear of sanctions in the case of non-compliance. The opponents of the regime can also trust the dictator and his henchmen to employ every means to silence them.

Trust, however, is not based on fear; it is voluntary. It is reported that some German soldiers ‘trusted’ Hitler to deliver the final victory. But theirs was not trust as an inductive inference since there was little evidence, from 1940 onwards, that the Führer would achieve his goal. It was blind faith, rather than trust. Faith, unlike trust, is often maintained in the face of disappointed expectations. From a logical point of view blind trust does not exist.

Trust is voluntary and it concerns the well-being of the truster in the ability of the trustee not to negatively affect her/his well-being. The task of governments is to guarantee the well-being of all citizens. This is in fact a common conviction in political philosophy, which goes back to the Greeks. This is the *normative* aspect of trust. From the normative point of view, even proponents of a totalitarian system cannot trust their leaders, since the latter’s arbitrary rules and decisions can turn against them. Due to the arbitrary and random nature of totalitarian systems, the normative aspect of trust suffers or disappears. Fukuyama captures the two aspects in his characterization of trust:

Trust is the expectation that arises within a community of regular, honest, and cooperative behaviour, based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community. (Fukuyama 1995: 26; cf. Levi 1998: 78)

For some institutions this normative element may be of little practical concern for a majority, especially when they only provide selective services for a privileged minority, say fox hunting. But for others, like the health service, the police, social services and public schools, it is not just the pragmatic element, which is important – the inductive expectation of reliability – but also the normative element, i.e. that the institution will not have a negative impact on the well-being of the truster. Therefore, it does not follow from the characterization of trust as an inductive inference that people could trust totalitarian institutions for this neglects the normative element, the aspect of well-being.

We cannot trust institutions that are not committed to the well-being of all their service-users because such institutions cannot satisfy the expectations which are invested in them. The judicial system in Nazi Germany, for instance, was pervaded by Nazi ideology and many people did not trust it. Yet the system functioned, for a limited time, without trust. In a dictatorship fear replaces trust. Institutions within such political systems can function effectively without reliance on the trust of people. Trust is not required because political violence forces people to use the system against their better judgement. But even in a democratic society an institution can function without the trust of citizens, if there is no alternative. An institution like the police force may have a poor reputation amongst the population in a particular country and not command its trust. But there is no alternative to a public police force, hence it can continue to function in the absence of trust. By contrast, the European health system allows people to use alternative health providers in other European countries, and there is evidence that people make use of these alternatives.

What happens, then, in a situation where there are alternatives? On analogy with the bus service, if value is not delivered reliably people will cease to trust the institution and turn to alternatives. But this will change the way service is delivered in such a society. Luhmann stresses that lack of trust may have an effect on the very nature of the institution.

It reduces the ranges of possibilities for rational action. It prevents (...) capital investment under conditions of uncertainty and risk. (...) Through lack of trust a system may lose size; it may even shrink below a critical threshold necessary for its own reproduction at a certain level of development. (Luhmann 1988: 104)

Lack of trust and the availability of alternatives will change the nature of the institution, with differential effects on the political situation in a particular country. Consider the current lack of trust in the institutions of the European Union. We can anticipate both a minimal and a maximal effect. A minimal effect would concern the operations of the EU institutions themselves. The EU institutions would need to change their procedures in order to rebuild the trust of European citizens. In the eyes of some constituents, a treaty change is necessary in order to regain the trust of the people of Europe in the EU. But more drastic effects are envisageable: for instance the break-up of the EU or the demise of its common currency. If this were to happen the very nature of the EU and the Euro-zone would be affected. But the effects may be even more dramatic, as can be gleaned from the current problem with mass immigration, which affects many of the wealthier countries in Europe. If people no longer trust the solutions of their established political representatives, they may turn increasingly towards other political agents who make new promises. The Conservative government in Britain promised in 2010 to reduce immigration to ‘tens of thousands’ but some 330.000 immigrants arrived both from within and outside the EU in 2014 in approximately equal numbers. Brexit has had the effect of drastically reducing immigration from EU countries. Germany recorded one million asylum seekers in 2015. New political forces have gained prominence, like the UK Independence Party, which promised to curb immigration by leaving the EU altogether. If such anti-immigration or anti-EU parties gain enough political influence – even though their promises are untested – they will change the political game. It is already the case that much tougher rules on immigration and social benefits are being considered by several governments in EU countries. The lack of trust and the availability of alternatives – in the form of anti-immigration parties, like UKIP in Britain, Le Front National in France or the Alternative für Deutschland in Germany – will change the political landscape. The lack

of trust undermines the authority of the institutions, that is the willingness of people to comply with their rules. (Cf. Rothstein 2004; Braithwaite 1998)

It has been argued that lack of trust can change the functioning of institutions. But what sort of change is at issue? In the case of the EU it is the legitimacy of the institution itself or at least some component part of it. Some of the constituent institutions of the EU are perceived as operating undemocratically, as being remote from the people of Europe or as interfering in national concerns (as in the case of human rights issues). But in other cases it is the efficacy of the institution that may be affected: it will no longer run smoothly or its very existence may be under threat. This situation occurred in Britain in 2006, for instance, when former Home Secretary John Reid damned his department's immigration operation as "not fit for purpose" with "inadequate" leadership and management systems. Other failings showed the Home Office could be "dysfunctional" and "wholesale transformation" was "probably" needed. In this sense both trust and distrust play essential parts in the functioning of political institutions. A loss of trust can also affect multicultural companies, like Volkswagen. Its emission scandal (2015) has led to a loss of trust in this company and its diesel engines and will have economic and technical consequences both for Volkswagen and the diesel car industry generally. Companies have to start the arduous journey of regaining the trust of their customers.

4 Trust as an essential condition

Is trust a necessary and/or sufficient condition for democratic institutions to function? The answer to this question hinges on the availability of alternatives. If trust is a *necessary* condition for an institution to operate, then in the absence of trust this institution should cease to function. However, an institution like the Public Health Service or the Police Force can function – perhaps only temporarily or ineffectively – even if people have lost trust in the institution because of the lack of alternatives. In the absence of alternatives trust is not a necessary condition for the functioning of particular democratic institutions. But where there are alternatives this loss of trust in one institution will lead to migration to alternatives. The migration of trust will follow, if the alternative institution functions according to expectations.

If trust is a *sufficient* condition for an institution to function, then in the presence of trust, the institution can be expected to work. This is normal because trust means that people have an expectation in the continued provision of services from this institution. But a sufficient condition means that the effect can be achieved by alternative means. (Rain is only a sufficient condition for the street to get wet because a burst water pipe will have the same effect.) If trust is only a sufficient condition, it is to be expected that in the absence of trust some other mechanism – for instance constitutive rules, norms and values – guarantees the functioning of the institution. It has been argued that 'democratic mechanisms such as voting, freedom of speech and association, and separations of power' can replace 'relations of trust'. (Warren 1999: 2) But what is meant by 'trust' here? Interpersonal trust is not required for democratic mechanisms because there is no expectation of reciprocity.

An important democratic innovation was the recognition that in many relationships trust is misplaced or inappropriate, suppressing real conflicts of interest while sustaining exploitative and paternalistic relations. Democratic mechanisms such as voting, freedoms of speech and association, and separations of power enable people to challenge supposed relations of trust, while limiting the discretion of the trusted, and thus the potential harm, in whatever trust relations remain. (Warren 1999: 1-2)

According to Warren interpersonal trust relations – solidarity – must be replaced by democratic mechanisms, because of the potential of conflict. This may lead to an equation of trust with mechanisms and rules. 'Trust in institutions amounts to knowing that its constitutive rules, values and norms are shared by participants and that they regard them as binding.' (Offe 1999: 71)

But can such democratic mechanisms – norms, rules, values – replace institutional trust? People would not use these democratic mechanisms if they had no trust in their proper functioning. It is well

recorded that people use the perceived lack of trust in, say, the voting system, as a reason for not taking part in the ballot. Trust returns at a higher level and this is important for the role of trust in clashes of interest. Locke appealed to interpersonal trust when he said that

those who join the Social Contract to become members of society must have some trust in one another. (Locke 1988: II, §7)

This appeal to interpersonal trust implies an unrealistic notion of social harmony, which is rarely achieved. Philosophically speaking, trust is an inductive inference to future expectations. The problem is that past differences in expectations and interests may lead to different expectations for the future and the potential for conflict.

A feature of modern democratic societies is the existence of conflicting interests, which will have an impact on trust relations, as Warren emphasizes:

In political situations, however, the assumption of solidarity with others often is suspect, and herein lies the ambiguous, even paradoxical, nature of the topic of democracy and trust. What makes a situation political is that some issue or problem or pressing matter for collective action meets with conflicts of interest or identities, and that parties bring their resources to bear upon these conflicts.

The claim is that interpersonal trust relations must be replaced by democratic mechanisms. In other words, when interpersonal trust relations break down and conflict arises then some higher-order mechanism – like the judicial system, fair rules – must be used to adjudicate.

The question remains, however, whether institutional trust can also be replaced by political mechanisms. An analysis of trust must take account of such conflicting interests, and should clearly separate interpersonal and institutional trust.

5 Trust and clashes of interest

People with opposing viewpoints may trust each other on an interpersonal level: it is perfectly possible to trust your friends in a personal capacity even though you disagree politically. But they may not trust each other in a political sense. In terms of our definition of trust this just means that people do not expect the opposing party to deliver the service they hope to receive. People with conservative instincts will tend not to trust voters with leftist sympathies and *vice versa*. People in opposite political camps will have no confidence that their respective solutions to societal problems will solve the problems in a just and equitable way. Schematically a conservative will place trust in the free market to solve the problems society faces, for instance regarding the running of utilities, whilst left-leaning voters may want to increase the role of the state, the government, to handle the problems. These incompatible preferences do not encourage mutual trust. Such lack of social/political trust in the opponent's solution to problems is a first-order lack of trust. It simply means that a change in political leadership will lead to disapproval of *their* solutions amongst their political opponents. But if trust is an essential condition for the proper functioning of democratic institutions, this lack of first-order trust must be overridden by a second-order institutional trust in the mechanisms and institutions. (Cf. Miller 2003: 117) No political party, which hopes to take office, can afford to alienate a part of the population. All government parties vow to work for the whole of the country, i.e. to defend and protect the interests of all communities. The obligations of governments for the well-being of its citizens run through the history of political philosophy. Hence, the political opponents, and their supporters, must place trust in the functioning of the institutions: justice, the economy, the health and police system, the currency and their respective mechanisms. So even if people mistrust each other regarding the particular solutions – should a country build a high-speed rail link between South and North, between West and East? – people must trust that the solution eventually adopted will be arrived at in a fair and equitable way. (For this reason a referendum may be a questionable procedure.) For if people lose faith in this second-order trust, and alternatives are available, the danger is that they will look for

alternative, possibly undemocratic solutions. There are various procedures, in which a government can increase its trustworthiness (Levi 1998: 90-92; cf. Petit 1998: 302-4):

- Non-arbitrary coercion of the non-compliant
- Universalistic policies in recruitment and promotion of its agents
- Establishment of credible courts and other impartial institutions.

Nevertheless people can lose trust in a government even if they voted for it and are in agreement with its political principles. Due to its inductive nature trust is a fickle thing. Rosanvallon (2006: 238-43) has highlighted some ‘mechanisms of distrust’, which characterize indirect democracies. Note that these ‘mechanisms of distrust’ can be shown to reflect the distinction between first-order and second-order trust relations. **A.** Civil society imposes constraints on political life in the form of ‘acts of denunciation and revelations of fact on the one hand and airing of evaluations, information, and counter-expertise, on the other.’ The freedom of the press in a democratic society is one vehicle for the exercise of this mechanism. In Britain, for instance, the press exposed the so-called ‘expenses scandal’ by revealing that some parliamentarians were making unjustified claims for expenses, which in certain cases had little bearing on their political functions. Many voters lost their first-order trust in parliamentarians. But given the extent of the scandal there was a real danger that people’s second-order trust in institutions would be at risk. It forced the political authorities to impose sanctions on the offenders, as it does with other forms of corrupt or inappropriate behaviour (tax evasion; sex scandals). **B.** Another mechanism is the ‘erection of independent institutions, ones shielded from the direct authority of executive powers.’ While such a mechanism of distrust is directed at the authority of the ‘executive powers’ it also increases the second-order trust in the functioning of the system. In Britain, examples of such independent institutions are the Institute of Fiscal Studies, established in 1969 as an independent research institute, or the role of ombudsmen. Another example is that the newly elected Labour government granted the Bank of England operational independence over monetary policy on May 6, 1997. **C.** ‘The multiplication of the powers of sanction and rejection is the third form of structuring mistrust of indirect democracy.’ To take the example of Britain, again, ordinary citizens increasingly organize themselves to oppose the construction of the afore-mentioned high-speed railway line between the South and North of England; equally vociferous and determined are groups who oppose the practice of fracking in many parts of the country, in some cases already with tangible results. Scotland, for instance, has imposed a moratorium on the controversial practice and Lancashire council has postponed a decision on allowing a proposed shale gas project to proceed. But again the ‘flip side’ of this ‘mechanism of distrust’ is that it has the potential to increase the second-order trust in institutions.

Luhmann hints at these developments when he points out that modern societies face ‘two interdependent structural changes’:

firstly, the increasing diversification and particularization of familiarities and unfamiliarities; and secondly, the increasing replacement of danger by risk, that is by the possibility of future damages which we will have to consider a consequence of our own action or omission. (Luhmann 1988: 105)

Clashes of interest lead to the branching of first-order trust along divergent inductive inferences. But the contingencies and complexities of the modern world lead in most cases to the maintenance of second-order trust in abstract systems. The shared values, norms and constitutive rules will continue to function, and not disappoint the expectations. (Cf. Lenard 2007) Where interpersonal trust is absent, institutional trust must remain. The latter cannot be equated with knowledge of ‘constitutive rules, norms and values’ because such knowledge must be accompanied by the expectation of their continued function of these very rules in the future. (Cf. Fukuyama 1998: 25; Levi 1998: 89)

6 Conclusion

From the philosophical point of view, institutional trust is essential for democracy as an inductive inference that institutions will continue to function in the future for the well-being of its citizens. But whether trust is a necessary or sufficient condition for the functioning of democratic institutions depends on the availability or non-availability of alternatives. It also depends on whether trust is a first-order or second-order function. Clashes of interest may lead to the loss of first-order trust, without necessarily threatening second-order trust. If alternatives are absent institutions can function for a while without the investment of trust on the part of their service-users. But note that service-users lose trust in the continuation of a particular service, hence they lose first-order trust. Trust can only partially be replaced by mechanisms and rules. Trust is required for their legitimacy. For citizens must retain a second-order trust in the functioning of these democratic mechanisms. In a dictatorship neither first-order nor second-order trust is needed. It makes such totalitarian systems relatively unstable. But in a democratic society a second-order trust in institutions is a necessary condition for its proper functioning, for by its very nature a democratic system offers alternatives. If citizens lost the second-order trust in the democratic mechanisms, they would lose trust in the very nature of the system. For trust to be maintained the institution must not just subscribe to principles, proclaim norms and values; it must also deliver its services in a reliable manner. It must function properly and this may require additional mechanisms in the form of rules and regulations. If the democratic mechanisms – in the form of rules and regulations – function properly, that is, they are upheld, supported by value systems, and the expected service is delivered, then second-order trust is both a sufficient and necessary conditions of democratic institutions.

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