

Trust in World Politics Group 12th Feb 2008 Introductory paper by Professor Wheeler

This meeting of the Trust in World Politics Group, based in the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth University, addressed the issue of 'Trust and Reason'. Discussion centred on Martin Hollis, *Trust within Reason* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) chapter 1.

Hollis started from Locke's premise that trust is 'the bond of society' and this led him to posit what he called the 'The paradox of trust'. I take this to be his puzzle that the idea of trust 'works in practice but not in theory'. Here, he argued that whilst social life would be impossible without trust, there remains a mystery about how to explain trust once we leave behind the moorings of the natural law tradition upon which Locke had grounded his notion of trust.

Hollis' interest lies in exploring whether the Enlightenment idea of reason and nature can supply the necessary account of trust, but here he has grave doubts. And his critique of instrumental reason or what he calls 'philosophical egoism' in Chapter One is the starting point for the rest of the book where he seeks to give a different account of reason that might both explain and underpin the practice of trust in the social world. Here, I will note in passing that he is rejecting the claims on the one hand of those like Fukuyama who argued the problem of trust rested in an excess of reason defined as instrumental rationality, and those on the other hand who think that we need more of the latter and not the converse. This conclusion was one Hollis wholeheartedly rejected. The road to securing 'trust as bond' could not be paved with the stones of philosophical egoism.

Before turning to this point in a little more detail through his enticing metaphor of the 'enlightenment trail', I want to highlight that Hollis identified two varieties of trust: the first is what he called the predictive – this is the trust we place in the doctor to not poison us or the pilot to carry us safely to our destination. Aaron Hoffman in his 2005 monograph *Building Trust: Overcoming Suspicion in International Conflict*, defines this as 'A trusts B when A predicts that B will at least do no harm when A's interests depend on B's behaviour' (Hoffman 2006: 20). Hoffman notes that Hardin's work on trust is a very good exemplar of such thinking.

Hollis's second variety of trust, and the one he was most fascinated by, is the notion that we trust others 'to do what is right'. Here, the concept of obligation is crucial since trustors expect trustees to live up to the moral expectations invested in them.

Hollis argued that the predictive account of trust could not capture the 'bond of society' since the latter relies upon people not exploiting trust and the predictive account bases trust on people acting in their self-interest. This was a flimsy foundation for trust as Hollis showed in his parable of the 'enlightenment trail'.

I am assuming we have all read this story, and for Hollis it is thinking about whether it is possible to avoid the sub-optimal outcome that Adam and Eve fall into on their walk in the country which guides the rest of the book. The crux of the problem for Hollis is philosophical egoism: as he puts it, 'Adam is moved solely by what Adam wants and Eve solely by what Eve wants'. But if this is the preference structuring of all individuals, how can trust be possible which depends upon us keeping our promises and honouring our obligations even if we are confronted with the opportunity of doing better in terms of maximising our utilities by breaking them?

Actors must be confident that others will prove worthy of the trust invested in them, that they will do what is right (Hollis 1998: 10). To cheat a little and anticipate his later argument in the book, he argued that when 'promises and agreements' are represented in 'consequential terms', in the manner of philosophical egoism, they 'lose their power to bind' (Hollis 1998: 70). The proposition here is that 'philosophical egoists' can never give up the chance to exploit others if their utility will be benefited by such action; trust requires actors to be prepared to eschew the satisfaction of their own utilities – something that is contrary to the nature of philosophical egoism (1998: 59–60).

We will have to leave for another day Hollis's attempted solution to all this, but I want to finish by highlighting the significance of this for IR theorising on trust. In my view, Hollis provides a powerful critique of theories like Andrew Kydd's which explain trust in rational choice terms.

Kydd defined trust in his 2005 book *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations* as the 'belief that the other side prefers mutual cooperation to exploiting one's own cooperation, while mistrust is a belief that the other side prefers exploiting one's cooperation to returning it' (Kydd 2005: 6). But Kydd's argument and others like it are vulnerable to Hollis's critique because basing trust on philosophical or rational egoism is contrary to the very idea of trusting (see Booth and Wheeler 2008). I will give Hollis the last word here: On page 160 of *Trust within Reason*, he wrote, 'even if one had an egoistic reason to play fair with a stranger, it would be only when one had no better reason not to. That would make trust a merely practical question' (1998)."

Professor Nicholas Wheeler is the Director of the DDMI

Links and References

Ken Booth & Nicholas J Wheeler, *The Security Dilemma: Fear, Cooperation and Trust in World Politics*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). You can read a sample chapter or purchase a copy of the book here: <http://www.palgrave.com/products/title.aspx?PID=246644>

Professor Wheeler's latest publication is: "'We Don't Speak to Evil": US-Iranian Mistrust', *Planet - The Welsh Internationalist*, #186, December 2007-January 2008, 6-14. The Planet website is available here: <http://www.planetmagazine.org.uk>

Aaron M. Hoffman, *Building Trust: Overcoming Suspicion in International Conflict*, (State University of New York Press, 2005)

Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, (Princeton University Press, 2005)

For more details of the Trust in World Politics Group, see:

http://www.aber.ac.uk/interpol/en/research/DDMI/trust_group.html

For more on the work of the DDMI in the area of 'Trust-building in Nuclear Worlds' see:

http://www.aber.ac.uk/interpol/en/research/DDMI/research_trust-building.html