Chapter 12

Republican Theory and Political Trust

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The republican way of thinking about citizenship and government has long given prominence to the notion of trust. We are told that government is a trust with which the people invest those in power; this theme is prominent among the “commonwealth-men” (Robbins 1959) who dominated eighteenth-century England and America and was most explicitly formulated by one of their heroes, John Locke ([1690] 1965). And we are told that there is no prospect of decent government unless those in power prove to be of a trustworthy disposition; this theme recurs in the emphasis among all republicans, classical and modern, on the need for civic virtue (Burr 1993).

This chapter outlines and defends a characteristically republican picture of the role of political trust—that is, trust in government—connecting that picture with the traditional republican way of thinking. When I speak of the republican way of thinking, I do so with a degree of idealization. I refer to the distinctive habits of thought found in the long republican tradition that goes back at least to Cicero and that encompasses Machiavelli at the time of the Renaissance, Harrington at the time of the English Revolution, and a wide spectrum of English, American, and French thinkers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—thinkers as various, for example, as Algrenon Sydney and Joseph Priestley, Tom Paine and James Madison, the Baron de Montesquieu and Jean Jacques Rousseau (Oldfield 1990; Pocock 1975, Skinner 1983, 1984).
The so-called "independent judge," the other as personal trust. Suppose that I am planning a weekend trip to the coast with my family and need to know if the trip will be delayed by roadwork. I would expect to receive the required information from the court, but not from the judge personally. I assume that the court will provide accurate information, and I assume that the judge will provide accurate information. However, I do not assume that the judge will provide information about my personal life, such as what time I will return from the trip.

The concept of trust is important in the context of the relationship between the government and the citizen. When we trust the government, we believe that it will act in our best interest. This trust is based on the assumption that the government will provide accurate information and that the information provided will be unbiased.

The concept of personal trust is also important. When we trust someone personally, we believe that they will act in our best interest. This trust is based on the assumption that the person we trust will provide accurate information and that the information provided will be unbiased.

In both cases, the concept of trust is based on the assumption that the information provided will be accurate and unbiased. This is why it is important for the government and citizens to have confidence in each other. When we trust each other, we are more likely to cooperate and work together towards common goals.

In conclusion, the concept of trust is important in the relationship between the government and the citizen. It is also important in the relationship between individuals. When we trust in each other, we are more likely to cooperate and work towards common goals.
sonnel because I know the accountability constraints under which they are employed. I rely on them solely because I judge that they are independently constrained to behave in the required fashion. In personal trust, on the other hand, the reliance that I display is distinctively trusting. I see the center personnel as people who have such a cooperative attitude toward me, whether in my individual right or as a member of the public, that my manifesting reliance will strengthen or reinforce their existing reasons to do what I rely on them to do (see Bauer 1986).

What can it mean to believe that the center personnel’s reasons for acting in the required way are strengthened or reinforced, if I already believe that there is little or no possibility of their letting me down—say, if I think that they are more or less bound, on pain of dismissal, to give me accurate information? I already believe in such a case that their utility for giving the correct information is higher than the utility they attach to not doing so. But I will be trusting in my attitude toward them if I also believe, on the grounds of their being cooperatively disposed, that the utility they attach to giving the right information increases with the recognition that doing so will serve my purposes.

Someone may say that trusting always means taking a risk and that my account allows that I may trust someone—trust him personally, and also impersonally—to do something even when I have independent reasons to be sure that he will do it; thus they may claim that the phenomena I target do not strictly deserve to be called trust (Hardin 1993). But it is certainly possible for me to trust someone of whose behavior I am independently assured. I may trust a friend in the personal way to do something—A, for example—though, for any of a variety of reasons, I cannot imagine his doing anything other than A: the reason may be that the law requires that he do A, that doing A is a matter of virtue or honor, that he is indeed a very good friend, or whatever. But though trusting someone may not always mean taking a risk, in the sense of relying on him to do something that I am not sure he will do, it will always mean taking a risk in another sense. It will always require me to make myself vulnerable to the other person in some measure, to put myself in a position where it is possible for the other person, so far as that person is a free agent, to harm me or mine. While I may run no probabilistic risk in relying on someone to act in a certain way, therefore, I must still recognize that he is a free agent and that my welfare is in his free hands.

The example of relying on the personnel at the traffic center enables us to draw the distinction between two different modes of trust, one impersonal, the other personal. In both forms of trust I rely on another to do something. In impersonal trust that reliance is associ-

ated with the belief that the agent is independently motivated, perhaps constrained, to act in the pertinent manner. In personal trust it is associated with the belief that the agent, being of a cooperative disposition, will be motivated by my reliance on his mode of action to prove reliable. The associated belief leads me to think in each case that the trustee has a reason that will help to produce or reinforce the behavior on which I rely; and in each case that belief makes it rational, assuming that the costs and benefits are appropriate, to invest my trust in the trustee.

But not only does our example help to bring out the difference between impersonal and personal trust, it also shows that these modes of trust are not exclusive of one another. I may simultaneously trust someone on an impersonal and on a personal basis. I may trust her to the extent of thinking that she is independently motivated to do that on which I rely. And I may trust her to the extent of thinking that she will also find my relying on her motivating; if she is cooperatively disposed, the perception that I am relying on her will raise the utility that she attaches to proving reliable.

While the distinction between impersonal and personal trust has been drawn with reference to a simple, artifactual example, it should be clear that it applies more generally. In particular, it should be clear that it applies in relationships between the people and those in power. We may trust our politicians or bureaucrats or judges to behave appropriately on the grounds that they are effectively bound to do so by the disciplines of office. Or we may trust them to behave appropriately on the grounds that they are cooperatively responsive to the reliance of individual people, or of the people as a whole, to their decisions. Or of course we may trust them at once on both sorts of grounds.

People Have No Choice but Personally to Trust or Distrust Government

The main difference between the simple example and the general political case is that when I invest trust in the traffic center personnel, whether on an impersonal or on a personal basis, I have a choice that is often lacking in politics. I may choose to invest trust in those personnel, or I may decide to exit from the situation that requires trust; I may decide against going to the coast. If I make myself vulnerable to how the center performs, as I do when trusting the information they provide, then I assume that vulnerability in a voluntary manner. But in the political case I may have no choice of this kind. Wherever I choose to live, I will find myself subject to a government and in a position of vulnerability to government agents. I may trust or distrust
The government, of course, but I have no choice about whether to put my trust in it or not, for everybody has a duty to look after their own interests. There is no conflict between the idea of exercising power in the public interest and the idea of exercising power in the interest of the government. No matter how much we trust the government, we must always consider the consequences of its actions and the effect on our personal interests.

Suppose that I have to make a decision about whether to trust the government or not. I may decide to trust it, but if I decide that it is not trustworthy, I cannot rely on it. I may decide to trust it for the benefit of the community, but I must also consider the impact on my personal interests.

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of government it is impossible to eradicate discretion. And it causes two independent problems of its own. The first is that there is no effective possibility of submitting the legislature to the sort of popular control that would mean that the people did not have to choose between personal trust and personal distrust in the legislators. And the second is that even if the people in its collective capacity could exercise the required control—even if electronic technology made it possible, for example, to have government by plebiscite—that would still leave in place a legislature that was uncontrolled from the point of view of individual agents. The legislature would now be the people in its collective identity, not the body of elected representatives, and from the point of view of individual persons that agent would certainly have discretion and power sufficient to force on them the choice between personal trust and personal distrust. Indeed it requires little reflection to see that from the point of view of individual persons the collectivity may look like an agent that is particularly difficult to control, an agent that is as wanton as the wind.

I think that this discussion shows that issues of desirability apart, neither the libertarian nor the populist image of government represents a serious alternative. However government is organized, and to whatever ultimate end, there is no possibility of constraining government agents to more or less uniquely determined choices. Nor is there any realistic possibility, where such constraints fail, of subjecting government agents to the control of those who are governed. Government agents inevitably enjoy such discretion and power that people have no choice but to trust or distrust them on a personal basis.

This point of view fits well with the republican way of thinking. The tradition has been associated with a sustained search for mechanisms whereby impersonal trust in government can be boosted—mechanisms like limited tenure, rotation of office, separation of powers, democratic accountability, bicameralism, and the like. But it is a recurrent theme among republicans that government cannot live by law and regulation alone, that inevitably it presupposes the presence of virtue—the presence of trustworthiness—in the society, particularly among those who hold power. If government will work only to the extent that those in power are virtuous and trustworthy, then the people are in a position where they have no choice but to trust or distrust personally the relevant public officials.

This theme was well elaborated during the renascence of republicanism in the northern Italian republics of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, particularly in the work of Machiavelli (1665): “Just as good morals, if they are to be maintained, have need of the laws, so the laws, if they are to be observed, have need of good morals” (241; see also Rubenstein 1991). This republican emphasis on the need for trustworthiness among public officials, clearly gives expression to the idea that the constraints that provide grounds for impersonal trust are never going to bind with sufficient strength or scope to drive out the choice between personal trust and personal distrust. But it also reflects a belief that those in government can never be subjected adequately to the control of the citizenry, however broadly the citizenry are conceived.

This latter feature of republicanism may seem surprising. Republicanism is firmly associated with a belief in the power of democracy, and some commentators have tended, for that reason, to give it a populist gloss (Arendt 1973). But the populist reading of republicanism is downright mistaken, at least as I understand the tradition. The central republican focus is always on creating institutions that will further people’s enjoyment of freedom as nondomination, and while democracy is certainly recognized as an important safeguard against governmental domination it is never presented as the central piece of the republican polity.

The seventeenth-century republican James Harrington (1677) made particularly clear that for all the importance he gave to democratic measures, he did not think that populist democracy was at the center of things: “The spirit of the people is no wise to be trusted with their liberty, but by stated laws or orders; so the trust is not in the spirit of the people, but in the frame of those orders” (237). And similar qualifications about populist democracy are found in contemporary republicans such as John Milton, who actively shunned “the noise and shouting of a rude multitude” (Wordsen 1991, 457) and, a little later, Algernon Sydney (1990), who said of “pure democracy . . . I know of not such thing; and if it be in the world, have nothing to say for it” (189).

The authors of the Federalist Papers thought that representative democracy was important enough to build it into the definition of a republic (Madison, Hamilton, and Jay 1807; see also Paine 1989). But they too insisted that democratic representation was only one of a number of ways of furthering “civil liberty”; like the separation of powers, they placed it in the catalogue of “powerful means by which the excellencies of republican government may be retained and its imperfections lesened or avoided” (Madison, Hamilton, and Jay 1807, 119). Like almost all republican writers, they shrank from any suggestion that government can be subject to such perfect popular control that there is no need for the people to have choice between personal trust and personal distrust in relation to those in power.

The belief that government has to involve giving not fully constrained and not fully controlled discretion to public officials is characteristic of the republican tradition, as I hope these considerations
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Why might trust in particular government officials be central to a political system? If the gods of a particular country were to try to assert their sovereignty, they might find that their citizens would not be inclined to follow their orders. The reputation of particular government officials would be crucial in determining the willingness of the citizens to obey their orders. If people believed that the officials were honest and competent, they would be more likely to follow their instructions. Conversely, if people believed that the officials were corrupt or incompetent, they would be less likely to follow their instructions. This trust in government officials would be essential to the functioning of a political system.

The Republic of Political Trustworthiness

Republicanism theory and political trustworthiness are closely related. Republicans believe that the government should be accountable to the people and that citizens should have a say in the decision-making process. This accountability is essential to political trustworthiness. If the government is not accountable to the people, it is likely to be seen as corrupt and incompetent, which would erode trust in the government.

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The Republican Reliance on the Trust

Responsiveness of Those in Power

The chapter thus far has shown that according to republicans, people need to have grounds for personally trusting those in power and that they must be able to move from knowing that people in power are trustworthy to having grounds for trusting them. Such grounds are often provided by the fact that they are repositories of a mechanism for expressing the interests of the people. The republican belief in a mechanism of trust is based on the Rousseauian belief in the people's natural tendency to trust those in whom their interests are represented. It is a common republican belief that where there is a mechanism of trust, there is also a mechanism for expressing the interests of the people. This is why the republican reliance on trust is so strong. The key idea in this chapter is that if there is a mechanism of trust, then citizens will have grounds for trusting government agents over and above the grounds that they currently possess. If there is a mechanism of trust, then even those who are not possessed of such virtue will desire to be trusted, because they will desire to enjoy the good opinion of others. This is one of the reasons that the republicans are so keen on the idea of government agents being trusted, as they are considered to be virtuous and good. However, if there is no mechanism of trust, then government agents will not be trusted, because they will not desire to enjoy the good opinion of others. In this case, the citizens will have no grounds for trusting government agents, as the mechanism of trust is absent. The citizens will have grounds for trusting government agents only if there is a mechanism of trust, which is why republicans are so keen on the idea of government agents being trusted.
a good opinion for themselves and that by not complying they run the risk of losing that good opinion.

These extra reasons that people have for trusting those in power are not reasons of trustworthiness—they do not come of a belief in the trustworthiness of the officials—but reasons of trust-responsiveness. They come of the belief that even if the agents are not moved by the fact of others relying on them, in the manner of truly virtuous and trustworthy individuals, they will at least be moved by the fact that those others will think well of them for proving reliable and will think badly of them for proving unreliable. They come of the belief that even if the agents are not trustworthy, in the sense of possessing the cooperative disposition associated with virtue, they are at least trust-responsive; they possess the cooperative disposition associated with caring about the good opinion of the trustees. The lesson of the republican observation about the love of glory is that those who have grounds of trustworthiness for personally trusting those in government may also have grounds of such personal trust.

One final comment. Although trustworthiness is a morally challenging trait and trust-responsiveness is an aspect of human frailty, the two mechanisms are synergetic; they pull in the same direction. To be trust-responsive, to be disposed of being thought trustworthy and therefore admirable, is to have reason to present yourself as trustworthy—in effect, to prove yourself trustworthy. In particular it is to have reason to present yourself as trustworthy rather than trust-responsive; since in most cases you will win no honor if you are recognized as an honor-hunter. “The general axiom in this domain,” as Jon Elster (1983) has said, “is that nothing is so unimpressive as behavior designed to impress” (66). But that means that trust-responsiveness reinforces trustworthiness in a particularly intimate way: it gives a person reason to let impulses of trustworthiness have their way and indeed to try to drum up such impulses. We can think of trust-responsiveness as a force that boosts the motor of trustworthiness, not as an alternative, potentially rival motor.

Republican Vigilance

But the republican story about trust is not so straightforward a narrative as the discussion so far may suggest. For there is another theme that we also find in the republican literature, and on the face of it this theme runs directly counter to the message so far conveyed. The price of liberty is eternal vigilance, according to the traditional republican doctrine, and that suggests that the best way to keep others on track—is in particular the best way to keep government agents on track—is never to take your eye off them, never to relax in the manner associated with personal trust. On the contrary, so the lesson goes, the best way to ensure that they prove reliable in the manner of virtuous officials is to subject them to sustained checks and sustained challenges, to insist that they operate under the challenge of always having to prove themselves to an unimpressed and untrusting audience. How otherwise to “keep the bastards honest”? (see Ely 1981).

The doctrine I am describing took a particularly sharp form during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries in the commonwealth tradition. One of the principal messages of the commonwealthman was that people had to keep a continual watch on those in power—power being inherently corrupting—and that they should challenge rulers to explain and justify their behavior on every possible front. “As he never saw much Power possessed without some Abuse, he takes upon him to watch those that have it; and to acquit or expose them according as they apply it to the good of their country, or their own crooked Purposes” (quoted in Robbins 1959, 120).

Like Montesquieu (1748) [1899], some thought that this sort of vigilance, this sustained manifestation of personal distrust, could be more or less routinized, that things could be organized so that without any tumult, without any hue and cry, those in power were systematically required to vindicate themselves under their reciprocal scrutiny and the scrutiny of ordinary citizens. But others sided with Adam Ferguson (1767) [1771] when he railed against this restriction of vigilance, arguing that there is no hope for virtue in public life unless ordinary people also remain actively alert to the worst that the powerful can do. The rule of law that Montesquieu found and praised in Britain was fine, for example, so Ferguson said, “But it requires a fabric no less than the whole political constitution of Great Britain, a spirit no less than the refractory and turbulent zeal of this fortunate people, to secure it” (167).

How is one to make sense of this emphasis on distrust of government, given our claim that republicanism takes personal, political trust to be both necessary and available? How can the tradition assume that it is essential and possible to establish personal trust in government and at the same time argue that citizens should never indulge the complacency associated with such trust—on the contrary, argue that it is essential for them to manifest an attitude of downright distrust? Is there an incoherence at the center of republican thinking, assuming that we are justified in speaking of a common republican tradition of thought? I argue that there is not.
The key to my argument is a distinction between having or feeling trust in someone—in particular, personal trust—and displaying or expressing trust in someone. To trust someone in the sense of having trust in him involves confidently assuming reliance upon him. But without feeling and having such trust, I may practice an expressive form of trust or, as we say, perform an act of trust. Without feeling an attitude of confidence in the reliance I have assumed, for example, I may choose to trust someone in the way that leads me to say, "I have decided to trust you in this, and I can only hope that you will not let me down." To trust someone in that expressive sense is not to rely with confidence upon him, or at least not necessarily, but to go through the expressive motions—that is, the behavioral motions—of relying with confidence upon him.

What goes for trust goes, naturally, for distrust—in particular, for personal distrust. I will distrust someone in the ordinary sense of feeling and instantiating distrust to the extent that I feel no confidence that she will prove reliable and do—does not build my plans around her proving reliable—or at least not for personal reasons. I will distrust her in the expressive sense—I will perform an act of distrust—just to the extent that I go through the behavioral motions of not relying with confidence upon her. If I have no choice but to rely upon her, for example, I will perform an act of personal distrust to the extent that I insist on external checks or constraints and try to ensure, on an independent basis, that she does not let me down.

There is no tension between the republican belief in a dispensation of trustworthiness and trust-responsiveness on the one hand and the emphasis on maintaining eternal vigilance on the other. For vigilance clearly involves expressive or behavioral distrust. The republican recommendation is that whatever personal and impersonal confidence people have in the authorities, they will have all the more reason to feel such confidence if they always insist that the authorities go through the required hoops in order to prove themselves reliable. To be vigilant in this sense is not to have an attitude of distrust towards the authorities—or at least not necessarily—but to maintain a demanding pattern of expectations in this regard—to insist, for example, that they should abide by certain procedures, for example, that they should accept challenges to their actions in Parliament or in the press, and that they should allow access to information on relevant aspects of their personal lives.

It should be clear why it might make sense to maintain expressive personal distrust—to behave as if one felt distrust—while actually feeling no such distrust. People may have an attitude of personal trust because they believe that the authorities are uncorrupt and that they will reliably behave in the proper manner. But there are good reasons, nonetheless, why they may behave as if they had an attitude of distrust, insisting on the necessity of various checks and constraints. First, it may be that however uncorrupt the authorities actually are, human corruptibility means that in the absence of the checks and constraints implemented in such distrustful behavior, they would begin to develop habits of corruption. And even if that were not so, imposing those checks and constraints should increase people's reasons for impersonal trust in the authorities and reduce the need for personal trust.

Not only is there no inconsistency in having personal trust in the authorities while behaving as if one felt distrust, it is even possible for people to make it clear to the authorities that they are espousing this dual posture. They can quite easily present the routines of distrust as constraints that are required in general and that help to keep the best of agents honest, while communicating the sense that they personally, or they as a group, are actually quite confident of the virtue and good will of the authorities in question. They can go through the established routines of expressive or behavioral distrust and show in other, less-established ways that actually they feel a lot of personal trust in the authorities. This dual posture will often make a lot of sense under our argument. By insisting on expressive distrust people can maximize the grounds for impersonal trust, forcing the authorities to jump a maximal number of hoops. By indicating that this expressive distrust is required only on an impersonal, routine basis, however, and by signaling the existence of personal trust, they can increase the chances of also triggering the trustworthiness and trust-responsive-ness mechanisms; they can maximize the grounds available for personal as well as impersonal trust.

The upshot, I hope, is clear. The republican emphasis on vigilance reflects a belief that those in authority must be subjected to quite demanding checks and constraints, that this may be the only way of guarding against corruptibility and of maximizing the grounds available for impersonal trust. But that emphasis is quite consistent with enjoying and generally acting on an attitude of personal trust in the authorities. There is no incoherence at the heart of republican tenets. On the contrary, the allegedly conflicting views fit quite naturally together.

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presentation at the Australian National University, February 1997, espe- cially to Geoff Brennan; he was the one who pressed me to account for the republican ambivalence. My thanks, finally, to Valerie Braithwaite and Margaret Levi for their extremely helpful editorial comments.

Notes
1. Or I assume that that is a good bet, or as good a bet as any other available to me (Holton 1994).
2. Why do I stipulate that the personnel should have a cooperative attitude toward me, should be more or less well disposed? I do so to guard against having to say that I trust the personnel in the personal mode when I realize that they have been promised a reward by some enemy to lure me toward the coast and that that is why my reliance is motivating. The notion of being well disposed, the notion of having a cooperative attitude, is to be understood in a deflationary manner—in a manner, for example, such that I can trust someone in a personal mode when I regard her, in the phrase I use later, as trust-responsive.
3. Richard Holton drew this point to my attention.
4. There is a difference, of course, between the sort of vulnerability to gov- ernment that everyone suffers, as a citizen—the sort I have in mind here—and the more specific kind that is triggered by a person’s looking for some government service that is due to him in virtue of his special circumstances—say, the sort of vulnerability assumed when I call in the police to help me cope with a threatening neighbor or when I make a claim on social security. A person may have a choice as to whether or not he should assume this special vulnerability.
5. The one possibility that would give control to individual people is a veto over every collective decision. I am assuming that such a “unanimitarian” arrangement would clearly be infeasible.
6. In his discussion of the analogy with the captain of a ship, Rawls sug- gests that the captain is fully constrained by his own wish to get to port, even if he is not controlled by the passengers: it is obvious, however, that such full constraints—such grounds for impersonal trust—are not generally going to be available.
7. My thanks to Simon Blackburn for a helpful conversation about this.

References

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Chapter 13

Trusting Disadvantaged Citizens

MARK PEEL

For some observers, there are few more pressing problems in late-twentieth-century political culture than the apparent decline of conscientious citizenship. Contemporary Australian discussions form part of a broader debate about national institutions and national identity, arising in part from the prospect of a republic and an Australian head of state in time for the anniversary of federation in 2001. They have focused to a significant extent on young people and have tended to assume that distrust of politicians and government stems from declining civic awareness or a lack of civic education. The problem, in other words, lies within the citizen.

While the best of these reports address real concerns about popular awareness of the institutions and possibilities of democratic governance, few pay much heed to the role governments play in citizen distrust and disengagement. Indeed, celebrations of "active" citizenship by Australian state and federal government sit oddly alongside their marginalization of public protest; their hit-and-run attacks on groups and individuals who dare to differ; their shielding of an increasing range of political decisions from the public gaze in the name of commercial confidence; and or their reliance on more or less facile surveys, quick-fire community consultations, and carefully monitored "independent" research as a substitute for democratic decision making (Irving 1995).

Whether or not there is a historical narrowing of active citizenship—and the evidence in Australia is not conclusive—there are certainly good reasons for investigating the ways in which governments