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TRUST, HOPE AND EMPOWERMENT¹

Victoria McGeer

Philosophers and social scientists have focussed a great deal of attention on our human capacity to trust, but relatively little on the capacity to hope. This is a significant oversight, as hope and trust are importantly interconnected. This paper argues that, even though trust can and does feed our hopes, it is our empowering capacity to hope that significantly underwrites—and makes rational—our capacity to trust.

My aim in this paper is to explore the relationship between two capacities, the first of which has attracted a great deal of contemporary attention in philosophy and the social sciences and the second of which—surprisingly—has not; the first is our capacity to trust, the second the capacity to hope. Specifically, I want to argue that, even though trust can and does feed our hopes, it is our empowering capacity to hope that significantly underwrites our capacity to trust, that both provides its motivational energy and makes rational the extension of our trust in epistemically challenging circumstances. I use the term ‘capacity’ here in a generous way. I mean it to include for each of these phenomena both the capacity to cultivate an appropriate set of *attitudes* and a capacity to *act* in ways commensurate with those attitudes. Hence, when I speak of hope or trust, I mean the capacity to operate, both mentally and materially, in hopeful or trustful ways.

The paper will be divided into four parts. In the first, I begin by recounting a fictional though compellingly realistic situation of interpersonal trust, using this example to frame the argument for thinking that hope must play a critical role in both initiating and sustaining the acts and attitudes of what I will come to call ‘substantial trust’. In the second part, I will rebut the sceptical thought that hope is not really a distinctive state of mind apart from certain beliefs and desires that may compose it. I’ll say what I think is substantially distinctive about hope, making it particularly apt for playing a critical role in substantial trust. In the third part, I’ll give a more detailed analysis of how hope, now understood in its substantial sense, enables substantial trust. And, finally, in the fourth part, I’ll briefly address the question of why substantial trust, when it takes the form of hopeful trust, is not for this reason irrational. On the contrary, while other attempts

¹My thanks to Margaret Urban Walker for stimulating conversations; her own writing on hope and trust inspired me to work on this topic. Thanks also to Karen Jones, Adrienne Martin, Bojana Mladenovic, Philip Pettit, and Eric Schwitzgebel, and to two anonymous referees for *AJP* for helpful comments and discussion.

have been made to defend the distinctive rationality of substantial trust (e.g. Pettit [1995]), I will claim that it is the peculiar qualities of hopeful trust—in particular, the dynamic it engenders between trustor and trustee—that best explains why trusting beyond evidence can be a robustly rational thing to do.

I. Finding a Place for Hope in Trust

I begin as promised with a fictional example of what we might call a ‘trust dilemma’, taken from the end of George Eliot’s novel, *Middlemarch*. The dilemma involves a young doctor named Lydgate, who, in the course of the novel, goes from having ‘great plans’ for his life to falling progressively into debt and difficulty. A climax comes when he is suspected by the local townfolk of having taken a bribe from a recently disgraced banker in town named Nicholas Bulstrode with whom he has had many dealings. All evidence against Lydgate is circumstantial, but the gossiping townfolk are quick to condemn him as somehow mixed up in Bulstrode’s unsavoury business and proceed to shun them both. But what of Lydgate’s more important friends and acquaintances—what do they think and do?

Here we come to the scene I want to discuss. It involves an argument between three characters, at least two of whom are deeply concerned with Lydgate’s wellbeing. These two are: Dorothea Casaubon, young and generous in her impulses, though now quite experienced in human difficulties in consequence of a short and unhappy marriage; and the Reverend Camden Farebrother, also generous in his feelings—indeed, almost too generous when it comes to understanding and accepting human weakness. The third person in the argument is Sir James Chettam, Dorothea’s solid and conventional brother-in-law who considers it his duty to look after her now that her husband is dead. The scene, which I quote at length, begins with Dorothea taking up Lydgate’s cause, returning to an argument begun earlier that his friends should take a stand in his favour:

[Dorothea says:] ‘Mr Lydgate would understand that if his friends hear a calumny about him their first wish must be to justify. What do we live for, if it is not to make life less difficult to each other? I cannot be indifferent to the troubles of a man who advised me in *my* trouble, and attended me in my illness.’ . . .

‘But, Dorothea’, [Sir James] said, remonstrantly, ‘you can’t undertake to manage a man’s life for him in that way. Lydgate must know—at least he will soon come to know how he stands. If he can clear himself, he will. He must act for himself.’

‘I think his friends must wait till they find an opportunity’, added Mr Farebrother. ‘It is possible—I have often felt so much weakness in myself that I can conceive even a man of honourable disposition, such as I have always believed Lydgate to be, succumbing to such a temptation as that of accepting money which was offered more or less indirectly as a bribe to insure his silence

about scandalous facts long gone by. I say, I can conceive this, if he were under the pressure of hard circumstances—if he had been harassed as I feel sure Lydgate has been. I would not believe anything worse of him except under stringent proof. But there is the terrible Nemesis following on some errors, that it is always possible for those who like it to interpret them into a crime: there is no proof in favour of the man outside his own consciousness and assertion.’

‘Oh, how cruel!’ said Dorothea, clasping her hands. ‘And would you not like to be the one person who believed in that man’s innocence, if the rest of the world belied him? Besides, there is a man’s character beforehand to speak for him.’

‘But, my dear Mrs Casaubon,’ said Mr Farebrother, smiling gently at her ardour, ‘character is not cut in marble—it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do.’

‘Then it may be rescued and healed’, said Dorothea. ‘I should not be afraid of asking Mr Lydgate to tell me the truth, that I might help him. Why should I be afraid?... [I could] ask for his confidence; and he would be able to tell me things that might make all the circumstances clear. Then we would all stand by him and bring him out of his trouble. People glorify all sorts of bravery except the bravery they might show on behalf of their nearest neighbours.’...

‘It is true that a woman may venture on some efforts of sympathy which would hardly succeed if we men undertook them’, said Mr Farebrother, almost converted by Dorothea’s ardour.

‘Surely, a woman is bound to be cautious and listen to those who know the world better than she does’, said Sir James, with his little frown. ‘Whatever you do in the end, Dorothea, you should really keep back at present, and not volunteer any meddling with this Bulstrode business. We don’t know yet what may turn up. You must agree with me?’ he ended, looking at Mr Farebrother.

‘I do think it would be better to wait’, said the latter.

[Eliot 1994: Ch. 72, 734–5]

What are we to make of this scene? Dorothea stands by Lydgate, evincing all those qualities of ‘friendship trust’ that Judith Baker claims appropriately characterizes the epistemic state of someone faced with a friend accused of wrongdoing. Assuming the persona of such a trustor, Baker writes:

I believe [my friend] is innocent. I do not, however, come to believe she is innocent, despite the evidence, by weighing or balancing present evidence against her past record.... [W]hat others regard as evidence against her isn’t considered by me as evidence at all. It is not that I close my ears to what people say, or refuse to look at, or repress, the facts. I believe there is an explanation for the alleged facts, for the accusation, which will clear it all up.

In advance of hearing the case, I am prepared to believe that there is such an explanation. I am biased in favour of my friend, in favour of her innocence. To put it another way, I am committed to her being innocent. . . . Although there may come a time when I cease to believe in my friend, there are no limits which can be set in advance, on epistemic grounds, which would determine the point at which it is irrational to continue to trust her.

[Baker 1987: 3]

Sir James Chettam and Mr Farebrother, however, are more cautious, wanting to see how the balance of evidence will pan out—even though, as Farebrother himself notes, in circumstances like these, it is often the case that ‘there is no proof in favour of the man outside his own consciousness and assertion’. Such caution is understandable on Chettam’s part, since he has no particular acquaintance with, or feelings for, Lydgate; but with Farebrother it is less so, since he sees himself, unhypocritically, as a friend of Lydgate’s—moreover, a friend who *believes*, so he says, that Lydgate has an ‘honourable disposition’. Why then does Farebrother fail in his trust? Is it because he is more rational in that trust, despite what Baker says? Or is there some other kind of cognitive or affective failure that would explain what Baker might call his weakness of will or commitment to the sort of epistemic stance that friendship trust rationally sanctions—and perhaps even demands?

Trust, of course, can be seen as a many splendoured thing, referring to a variety of attitudes, feelings, relationships, and activities [Pettit 1995; Walker 2006]. Use of the term is certainly broad enough to cover cases in which individuals make strategic judgements about others based on the weighing of evidence for and against their reliability. But theorists generally agree that there is an important phenomenon of *substantial trust*, as we might call it, that neglects or abjures such strategic judgements. Specifically, substantial trust may be characterized by two related features: (1) it involves making or maintaining judgements about others, or about what our behaviour should be towards them, that go beyond what the evidence supports; and (2) it renounces the very process of weighing whatever evidence there is in a cool, disengaged, and purportedly objective way. The problem, then, is to explain how trust of this sort can be rational.

One possible explanation derives from the hypothesis that trust—by which, I will henceforth mean ‘substantial trust’—fundamentally involves an *affective* state or attitude [Baier 1994a; Jones 1996]—an attitude, say, of optimism about the other’s goodwill and competence with regard to their dealings with us (or with other people).² According to Karen Jones, who at one time proposed and defended this view, the attitude lying at the core of trust is not a belief or set of beliefs, though it will have implications for the beliefs and expectations we form and maintain. It is rather ‘a distinctive and affectively loaded way of seeing the one trusted . . . with its constitutive

²This formulation comes from Jones [1996]. Specifically, she claims: ‘trust is an attitude of optimism that the goodwill and competence of another will extend to cover the domain of our interaction with her, together with the expectation that the one trusted will be directly and favourably moved by the thought that we are counting on her’ [1996: 4]. She adds, since ‘our expectation is, in the typical case, grounded in the attitude of optimism . . . the attitude of optimism is central’ [1].

patterns of attention and tendencies of interpretation' [Jones 1996: 4]. The question of whether our trust can be justified, then, becomes a question of whether certain feelings towards others can be justified, which is not to say they can't be, but rather that their justification conditions are different from, and perhaps not as stringent as, those on belief or on belief-based predictions of reliability. As Jones says, 'we can be justified in trusting even when we would not be justified in predicting a favourable action on the part of the one trusted. Our evidence for trusting need not be as great as the evidence required for a corresponding justified prediction. In this respect trusting is more like *hoping* than like predicting' [Jones 1996: 15, my emphasis].

Still, whatever the merits of this analysis, it cannot be complete (as Jones [2004] herself now acknowledges). For while feelings of optimism or at least confidence are certainly involved in central cases of trust, this does not seem invariably the case. Consider the fact, acknowledged on all sides, that trustful feelings cannot be willed. But, in so far as such feelings are held to be a critical feature of substantial trust, this would imply that we could not decide to trust in any substantial way. Yet there do seem to be genuine cases of deciding to trust others, deciding to invest our trust in them, even if we remain uncertain, or even anxious, about the consequences of so trusting [Holton 1994]. Think here of the oft cited example of parents deciding to trust their teenagers with the house or family car, believing that their offspring may well abuse their trust, but *hoping* by such trust to elicit, in the fullness of time, more responsible and responsive trustworthy behaviour [Pettit 1995; Jones 2004]. Trust, in this case, does not depend on any comfortable feelings of optimism or confidence concerning those whom we trust but is characterized instead by explicitly imposing on them certain *normative* expectations—expectations that they *should*, even if they do not, live up to the trust we have invested in them [Jones 2004; Walker 2006]. There are feelings involved in these acts and attitudes of trust to be sure; but, characteristically, these are often more reactive than proactive. That is to say, our normative expectations are partly characterized in terms of dispositions to experience 'reactive attitudes', as Strawson called them, to others meeting or failing to meet our trust—feelings of gratitude or resentment, and corresponding tendencies to praise or blame [Strawson 1974; Holton 1994; Jones 2004; Walker 2006].

It may be objected that in such cases, we are not really deciding to trust, but merely deciding to act *as if* we trusted—*as if* we found the other genuinely worthy of our trust. But I think this objection does not hit the mark. If we decide to trust, such trusting is not pretence in the sense that we hold back from making ourselves vulnerable to the other, or continually monitor their behaviour to ensure that they are not betraying our trust. If we trust them, we voluntarily accept our vulnerability to them and forego searching for ways to reduce that vulnerability [Jones 2004]. It is our actions and reactions, and the intentions that guide them, more than our trustful feelings that distinguish genuine trust from mere 'as if' trust in these cases.

Still I don't mean to suggest that our affective state is completely beside the point, even in cases where we decide to trust. As Richard Holton argues,

such decisions require being in ‘a distinctive state of mind’ [Holton 1994: 63]. What state of mind is a little hard to define. As Holton himself argues, it’s not a state of *believing* that another is trustworthy, since arguably (as the case of parental trust shows) we can trust even in the absence of such beliefs.³ It is a state, rather, that encourages us to invest trust in them, that encourages us to see them as capable of being responsive to our trust. Hence, it is an attitude we take towards the character of their agency—in part, I will argue, by taking the same attitude towards our own. That is to say, it is an attitude that both empowers *us* in our trust—making it possible for us to think and act in trustful ways—and empowers *them* through our trust, by stimulating their agential capacities to think and act in trust-responsive ways. Since this state of mind is forward-looking, anticipating the transformative effects of extending our trust, I think it is most aptly characterized as an attitude or condition of hope.

Before elucidating what is cognitively and affectively distinctive about the attitude of hope, and how precisely it supports the rationality of our acts and attitudes of trust, I return briefly to the phenomenon of friendship trust. For here the question is not one of how we trust in the absence of beliefs about the other—specifically, beliefs about their trustworthiness; rather it’s a question of how or why we maintain our trusting beliefs about them despite what the evidence seems to show. How is hope involved in this? Here I think it’s important to distinguish between the particular trusting beliefs we may have about our friends—beliefs, say, that they wouldn’t lie under such and such conditions, or wouldn’t act dishonourably, or wouldn’t harm others intentionally, and so on—and our trusting belief *in them*, a kind of state of mind or attitude towards them that, coupled with knowledge about their specific characteristics, accounts for our maintaining the particular trusting beliefs we have about them. As Baker says, I ‘believe *in* my friend’. This locution has, to my ear anyway, a kind of hopeful forward-looking quality—a belief in what friends can do, or become, because of their agential capacities or dispositions. Hence, in believing in a trusted friend, it’s as if we say, first, that we see no reason to give up our trusting beliefs about them because we anticipate their capacity to answer any charges made against them. However, we also seem to be saying—and committing to—something more: namely, that we see no reason to give up our trust in them because we believe they have the capacity to maintain or regain our trust if some of our trusting beliefs turn out to be false. This doubly hopeful quality of belief *in* another is, I think, beautifully illustrated by the exchange between Dorothea Casaubon and Mr Farebrother quoted above:

‘And would you not like to be the one person who believed in that man’s innocence, if the rest of the world belied him?’ [said Dorothea] ‘Besides, there is a man’s character beforehand to speak for him.’

³Indeed, Holton argues that belief in another’s trustworthiness very often follows from the decision to trust [Holton 1994: 64 and *passim*].

‘But my dear Mrs Casaubon,’ said Mr Farebrother, . . . ‘character is not cut in marble—it is not something solid and unalterable. It is something living and changing, and may become diseased as our bodies do.’

‘Then it may be rescued and healed’, said Dorothea. ‘I should not be afraid of asking Mr Lydgate to tell me the truth, that I might help him.’

Dorothea’s first line of trust in Lydgate is clearly her hopeful expectation that he will be able to answer the charges against him. But her second line of trust, more interestingly, concerns her hopes for what he is capable of doing or being, partly as a consequence of her continuing show of genuine trust in him. In this sense, friendship trust has an aspirational quality that is not unlike the aspirational quality of our decisions to trust in the absence of prior belief. Thus, I would like to suggest that hope can take the place of belief in those cases where beliefs about another’s trustworthiness are absent; and it can shore up or underwrite our trusting beliefs in those cases where they already exist and may for one reason or another come under pressure. Substantial trust in others is critically dependent upon our capacity to feel hopeful about them, about their capacities and dispositions as agents, as well as hopeful about how these capacities and dispositions can be positively affected by our actively and explicitly putting our trust in them. Farebrother, preoccupied by his overwhelming sense of human weakness, is markedly lacking in such hope, and so fails in his trust of Lydgate, his feelings of friendship notwithstanding.

II. Substantial Hope⁴

So far I’ve argued that hope as a distinctive state of mind plays a critical role in our trusting attitudes and activities. It explains how we can decide to trust in the absence of certain trusting feelings about, or beliefs in, the trustworthiness of others; and it explains how our trusting feelings and particular trusting beliefs about others can persist in the face of events that might otherwise challenge them. If we take the attitude of hope to be an enabling feature of substantial trust, we can make better sense of Baker’s claim that trust should be regarded as ‘a kind of commitment, a state of conviction that is also an inclination of the will’ [Baker 1987: 10]. For hope has both cognitive and conative (or will-involving) elements, as well as a distinctive affective profile.⁵ Further, by appeal to hope, I think we can also account for the distinctive rationality of our attitudes and activities of trust. But this project faces two separate challenges: First, it requires giving an account of hope, *substantial* hope as we might call it, that explains how it is a distinctive state of mind, and not just a matter of having certain beliefs and

⁴This section draws on ideas developed in McGeer [2004].

⁵Cf. Baier who writes: ‘Trust is one of those mental phenomena attention to which shows us the inadequacy of attempting to classify mental phenomena into the “cognitive”, the “affective”, and the “conative”. Trust, if it is any of these, is all three’ [Baier 1994a: 132]. The difficulty of classifying trust is not unrelated to the difficulty of classifying hope, which, in my view, is essential to substantial trust.

desires. Secondly, it requires explaining how it is that our hopes about others, as distinct from our beliefs or even trustful feelings about them, both enable our trust and do so in a way that contributes to the rationality of that trust. In this section, I respond to the first of these challenges, saving my response to the second for the final sections of my paper.

Amongst the relatively few theorists who discuss hope today, there is no clear or agreed upon use of the concept. For instance, hope has been identified as a special kind of cognitive attitude akin to, though perhaps also partly composed of, beliefs and desires [Bovens 1999; Pettit 2004]. It has also been called an emotion [Elster 1989; Drahos 2004], a disposition or capacity [Gravlee 2000], a process or activity [Snyder 1995; Braithwaite 2004]—or, finally, some combination of all these things [Shade 2000; Walker 2006]. I think this last view is on the right track: hope does involve a complex dynamic of all these things, and this is because of the central and empowering role it plays in human agency [Cartwright 2004].

Most writers on hope acknowledge an important and positive connection between hope and agency. For instance, according to ‘hope theory’ as articulated by psychologists, hope is a cognitive and conative activity that involves setting concrete goals, finding pathways to achieve those goals and tapping one’s will-power or agency in order to move along pathways to the specified goals [Snyder 1995; 2000; Braithwaite 2004]. In short, through hoping, we are energized to do what we can, cognitively and materially, to secure the hoped-for end.

But is this connection between hope and agency over-played? After all, we seemingly hope in situations where our own agency is irrelevant to the occurrence of the hoped for end. We hope for something that could not be in any way affected by our efforts to bring it about, e.g., we hope that the weather will improve, we hope that our friend’s test results will be good, we hope that no one was injured in yesterday’s fire, and so on. This may tempt us to give a deflationary analysis of hope, according to which hope is not to be regarded as a distinctive psychological force in its own right, activating and organizing our agential powers; instead, it is to be regarded as consisting simply in a particular configuration of belief and desire—specifically, a belief that the end for which we hope is still, in some sense, an open possibility and a desire that this possibility be realized.⁶

I want to resist this deflationary move on two counts. First, it delineates a sense of hope that is uninterestingly broad and superficial, possibly tracking a certain freedom in linguistic practice, but failing to mark important psychological characteristics that are useful for distinguishing among various closely related cognitive-affective states—e.g., hopes, wishes, fantasies, and the like. Secondly, by insisting on marking these distinctive psychological characteristics, theorists will be better poised to understand

⁶Of course, it may not be an open possibility in fact. The fire occurred yesterday, and people were injured or they were not. We are able to hope that they were not, only because of our own ignorance. Once we are apprised of the facts one way or the other, the space for hope disappears, although wishes may still blossom in this epistemically unyielding terrain – e.g., I may wish that the fire had never started, or at least that it had not taken its terrible toll.

just how these various states operate, for better or worse, in an agent's psychic economy.

So let us return to the notion that hoping—now understood in a substantial sense—is agency-engaging in a way that other closely related states (e.g., wishing or fantasizing) are not. The most straightforward sense in which hope engages our agential powers has already been noted above: in hoping, we are motivationally charged to organize our efforts around achieving the ends for which we hope. Of course, hoping also involves registering that there are limits to our agential powers. If we could easily and directly bring about some desired end, and no internal or external bar stands in the way of our so acting, then hoping for that end would be out of place; we would simply act so as to achieve it. Thus, hoping must involve organizing and sustaining our efforts towards achieving some hoped-for end that we recognize may not be realized despite our best efforts. This suggests that hoping must also play a *regulative* role in our psychic life, keeping us on track through myriad difficulties and uncertainties, whether they be psychological or material [McGeer and Pettit 2002; Pettit 2004].

But, now, what about those situations in which there is apparently nothing we can do to bring about some hoped-for end? Is hoping simply misplaced or irrational in such circumstances? The philosopher Luc Bovens suggests it is: we may not be able to help ourselves, but when we hope in these situations, our hoping carries with it 'an illusion of agency' [Bovens 1999: 679]. He writes: 'My conjecture is that we attend to a feature of hope in circumstances in which hoping does affect our performance and does raise the probability of the occurrence of the projected state of the world and we mistakenly generalize this feature to hoping at large. What we overlook is that there are strict constraints on the domain in which hoping is instrumentally rational' [Bovens 1999: 679–80]. Worse, according to Bovens, hoping in such circumstances can further compromise our epistemic rationality by leading us to 'overestimate the subjective probability that the [hoped for] state of the world will come about' [Bovens 1999: 680].

I agree with Bovens that these are some of the liabilities of hope: hoping may sometimes lead us to overestimate the likelihood of the hoped for end; it may even encourage superstitious ideas of our own agential powers, so that somehow we think that by hoping alone we are affecting the probability of what will occur. Hoping has myriad other liabilities as well. But cataloguing these would only serve to emphasize the point that hoping is like reasoning, so far as it can be done well or badly. Of course, this means we should attend to the sort of conditions (psychological or material) that make for hoping badly. And obviously this project will be aided by gaining a clearer understanding of what hoping is good for when we are hoping well.⁷ For instance, we might agree with Bovens that hoping is misplaced—or even dangerous—in circumstances where we cannot affect the relevant ends, just in case the primary value of hope is in directing our agential powers towards achieving the particular ends for which we hope. But I think such pessimism

⁷In [McGeer 2004], I attempt a more systematic analysis of the ways in which we fail to hope well, as well as a more systematic analysis of what hoping well consists in.

rests on an overly narrow conception of the instrumental value of hope. In my view, since hoping plays a regulative role in helping us deal with the world in light of our agential limitations, then one of its deepest benefits must be in enabling us to take an agential stance towards our own limitations as such. That is to say, hoping can empower us to acknowledge, explore, and sometimes patiently bide our limitations as agents—riding out feelings of anxiety, fear, or anticipated disappointment that might otherwise cause us to give up on our projects, our plans, or our interests because of external contingencies over which we have little control. Thus, even in cases of extreme limitation, our persisting capacity to hope signifies that we are still taking an agential interest in the world, and in the opportunities it may afford, come what may. Our interests, our concerns, our desires, our passions—all of these continue to be engaged in exploring the contours of what might be; hence we lean into the future ready to do what we can when action can do some good. In sum, there is always what Bovens calls an ‘aura of agency’ around hope, because hope is essentially a way of positively and expansively inhabiting our agency, whether in thought or in deed.

The crucial thought articulated in this section is that our agency is infused with the energy of hope so far as we’re imaginatively exploring our own powers, as much as we are using them; we’re imaginatively exploring what we can and cannot do in the world. To be effective agents, we must of course learn to negotiate this world within certain constraints. But equally, it seems, we must learn to experience our own limitations, not just as limitations that ultimately constrain us, but as boundary conditions that we can act constructively in the face of, often pushing beyond those conditions in surprising ways and thereby enhancing our capacities even as we act out of them. It is often remarked that those who hope well become even more determined when obstacles are put in their way: they adapt more easily to real world constraints without sacrificing their creative energy; they explore more pathways towards reaching their goals; they are more flexible in resetting their goals in the face of disappointment; and they often discover reserves of untapped power in the process [Snyder 1995]. In explaining this, I claim that hope is the energy and direction we’re able to give, not just towards making the world as we want it to be, but also towards the regulation and development of our own powers of agency. In hoping, we create a kind of affectively charged ‘scaffolding’ for ourselves, providing the motivational energy to explore how we might exercise our capacities in new and creative ways, and so enabling their development. To hope well is thus to do more than focus on hoped-for ends: it is crucially to take an imaginatively reflective and developmental stance towards our own capacities as agents. In a word, it is to experience ourselves in a self-empowering way, as being agents of potential and not just agents in fact.⁸

⁸On the importance of hope for self-development, see also Gravlee’s discussion of Aristotle’s views: ‘[Hopefulness] underlies the deliberation and self-confidence necessary both to improve one’s circumstances and to cultivate the excellences of character’ [Gravlee 2000: 477].

III. How Substantial Hope Enables Substantial Trust

If hoping is a way of tapping into our own powers for being imaginatively and constructively engaged with the world even in the face of our own limitations, it is well suited to play an enabling role in substantial trust. For notice that, in trusting others, we must come to terms once again with the limitations of our own agency—in these cases, with respect to protecting something of value to us, whether this involves (separately or in some combination) our material or our psychological wellbeing. The fact that in trust we usually assume these limitations as a matter of choice is important, and something I will come back to in a moment. But for now I want to focus on the manner in which we handle these limitations if we are trusting well: not *passively*, in the way of those who see no place for their own agential involvement in their fate, but *actively*, in the way of those who take a hopeful stance towards shaping their fate.

Consider the following: In trusting others, we are actively investing in them. I call this investment ‘active’ because it is not a one-off thing. It is an on-going activity, at times demanding not very much of us (that is one advantage of trust), but at times demanding quite a bit. For instance, if our confidence is low or our anxieties are high, we may have to exercise agential powers of self-regulation in checking our impulse to monitor trusted others in ways that are not compatible with putting our trust in them. Or, again, supposing we decide to trust in a limited way, we are willy-nilly inviting others into some kind of trusting relationship with us that will eventually call on us, in all likelihood, to make sensitive judgements about when and how far to extend our trust. Then, too, if we are disappointed in trusted others, we will have to show a comparable sensitivity in our ways of holding them to account, or else we contribute to damaging a relationship of trust that might otherwise be saved. Being able to forgive is yet another functional virtue that trustors require in order to sustain workable relationships of trust. And, finally, if questions are raised about trusted others, we will have to show a capacity to respond with creativity and considerable self-trust in the judgements we make about what to think and do with regard to these trusted others in the light of our trust (Baier 1994a, 1994b; see too Jones 2004).

In all these ways and more, our own agential powers are actively exercised and developed in shaping the trust we extend, often sustained by our hopeful vision of what both of us—trustor and trustee—can achieve in the context of our trust. This means that, despite the limits or constraints we experience in our own agency in consequence of our trust, our ways of actively engaging with these limitations are shaped and sustained in part by the ways our hopes are likewise engaged with the agency of others. Our hopes must therefore encompass their powers and limitations as well as our own. This makes hope, in the context of trust, a doubly dynamic attitude: an attitude that actively engages, in complementary ways, the powers and limitations of both self and other. So let us turn now to a consideration of how hope-through-trust actively engages with the agency of others.

I begin with the fact, noted by many, that in trusting others, as opposed to merely relying on them, we accept certain limitations on our own agency

based on our attitudes towards them as *persons*—specifically as persons capable of recognizing and being responsive to our deliberately assumed vulnerability to their discretionary powers.⁹ Therefore, our hopefulness is no longer simply directed to what we can yet do in the situation, but to what they can do too, specifically with regard to acting with care and competence in the domain in which we trust them. This is not to say that we blind ourselves to their liabilities and limitations—at least if we’re trusting well. But we do take a hopeful view of what they are able to be or accomplish—hopeful enough to put ourselves into their discretionary care. And this fact is made manifest to them by our very acts and expressions of trust. Hence, by these acts and expressions, we make ourselves vulnerable to them, yes, but in a way that actively holds out a vision to them of what they can be or do. This vision creates for them a kind of affectively charged scaffolding, empowering their own sense of potential agency with the energy of our hope, and thus encouraging them to act in ways commensurate with the vision we maintain. In this way, our hopeful trust can elicit from them an important and powerful kind of trust-responsiveness.

Why should this dynamic of hopeful scaffolding prove so effective? Why should others be encouraged and so motivated by the kinds of hopes we have for them, particularly when these hopes concern their capacities for care and competence with regard to us? The answer to this must be complicated, since there are at least two different senses in which these questions may be posed: (1) what are the means by which this dynamic works? And (2) why, motivationally, are human beings so responsive to a scaffolding dynamic in the first place?

To begin with the means by which the dynamic works, we should note immediately that it will only prove effective so far as the hopes we have for others connect in some way with what others value in and for themselves. The reason they might find this helpful can be found through reflecting on the everyday experience of our own and others’ psychology. Human beings are generally complex individuals, pushed and pulled about by a variety of cross-cutting motives, interests, feelings and liabilities. Amidst this psychological throng, it’s easy to lose sight of what we value most in ourselves—or, indeed, of what traits and capacities we have that could be encouraged and developed, so that we come to enact a self we are happier to stand behind or own. For help in this regard, we are sometimes encouraged to look outside ourselves for role models, finding in others’ thoughts and actions laudable patterns on which to fashion our own. And this may serve us pretty well. However, something similar can occur, often more effectively, through the dynamic of hopeful scaffolding. Here we look outside ourselves once again; but instead of looking for laudable patterns in others’ behaviour, what we find instead are laudable patterns that others see—or prospectively see—in our own. We see ourselves as we *might* be, and thereby become something like a role model for ourselves. The advantage in this is clear: Instead of thinking, ‘I want to be like *her*,’—i.e., like someone else

⁹For a particularly clear statement of this distinction between (‘interactive dynamic’) trust and reliance, see Pettit [1995; 2004]. See also Holton [1994]; Jones [1996; 2004].

altogether—the galvanizing thought that drives us forward is seemingly more immediate and reachable: ‘I want to be as she already sees *me* to be’.¹⁰ Hopeful scaffolding can therefore serve as a very powerful mechanism for self-regulation and development.

We have now seen the means by which this dynamic works. But it’s still worth asking why human beings are *so* responsive to the hopeful scaffolding of others; what is it about the structure of this kind of *external* scaffolding that makes it so motivationally potent? To find a satisfying answer to this question, I think we must dig more deeply into the developmental roots of normal human psychology, reflecting on the way in which we initially develop any coherent agential capacities at all.

All human beings are relatively helpless in their newborn state, depending on others not just for their current wellbeing, but for their *developmental* wellbeing in the following sense: Caregivers provide the kind of meaning and structure that makes sense of infants’ early attempts at intentional behaviour, bootstrapping such behaviour into coherent routines that infants come to understand and own as part and parcel of their agential competence. This bootstrapping process, known as ‘parental scaffolding’ [Bruner 1983], continues throughout early development, with caretakers enabling their children to attempt and master progressively more complicated and creatively elaborated activities in part by motivating them through communicating, in both words and deeds, a hopeful vision of what their children can be or do. Thus, we human beings come into our own as agents, initially through depending on the hopeful scaffolding of others. So it should be no surprise that, despite the ways in which good external scaffolding must change over developmental time, we—who carry our developmental heritage within us—continue to derive motivational energy for pursuing and developing our own powers of agency in consequence of others’ hopes for us. Investments of trust are just one way of communicating such hopes.

This transfer of motivational energy via the mechanism of hopeful scaffolding accounts for the rather curious way in which substantial trust seems to function simultaneously as both a demand and a gift. Obviously, in trusting others and so hoping for their trust-responsive care and competence, we ask something substantial of them. Hence, as many theorists point out, if we’re not in a position to make such demands of them, such trust may be unwelcome [Jones 1996: 9] or morally inappropriate [Holton 1994: 72]. However, by way of such hopeful scaffolding, we also give trusted others something substantial in return—namely, a motivationally energizing vision of what they can do or be. Hence, as theorists also point out, trusted others are very often gratified by, even grateful for, the trust we invest in them [Pettit 1995: 218].

¹⁰Admittedly, the traits that others see may initially seem to us unrepresentative of our ‘true’ characters; but, interestingly, there is good evidence from social psychology that the more we enact traits that others publicly recognize as part of our ‘true’ selves, the more those traits seem to us to be part of who we really are [Tice 1992].

IV. The Rationality of Hopeful Trust

I have now described a mechanism by which our hopeful investment of trust in others can often elicit—or, better, *empower*—trust-responsive behaviour of the sort we seek: namely, acts and attitudes on the part of trustees that live up to our hopeful vision of what they can do and be, particularly with regard to showing competence and care in the domain in which we trust them. I have claimed this mechanism relies on a robust feature of human psychology—namely, the fact that others draw motivational energy for enacting and elaborating their own powers of agency from our hopeful vision of them. Again, this dynamic is nicely illustrated by the unfolding events in *Middlemarch* where Dorothea, unpersuaded by others to give up her hopeful trust in Lydgate, finds the opportunity to reiterate to his face her continuing belief in him: ‘I know the unhappy mistakes about you. I knew them from the first moments to be mistakes. You have never done anything vile. You would not do anything dishonourable’ [Eliot 1994: Ch. 76, 762]. Lydgate’s reception of this manifestation of trust, so beautifully characterized in Eliot’s description, makes perfect sense to us, psychologically speaking. She writes:

The presence of a noble nature, generous in its wishes, ardent in its charity, changes the lights for us: we begin to see things again in their larger quieter masses, and to believe that we too can be seen and judged in the wholeness of our character. That influence was beginning to act on Lydgate, who had for many days been seeing all life as one who is dragged and struggling amid the throng. He sat down again, and felt that he was recovering his old self in the consciousness that he was with one who believed in it.

[Eliot 1994: *loc. cit*]

Lydgate’s path, as the novel unfolds, is still not an easy one, but with the support of Dorothea’s hopeful trust, he begins once again to hope for himself, seeing his own future, including his potential interactions with others, as something to be shaped, in some measure, by his own powers of agency. As Lydgate says to her at the end of their conversation, ‘you have made a great difference to my courage by believing in me. Everything seems more bearable since I have talked to you’ [Eliot 1994: Ch. 76, 768].

Let us grant, therefore, that this is a deep psychological fact about human beings: that individuals are very often empowered by interacting with others who believe in them, especially others who are willing to act in trustful reliance on what they can do or be, fuelled by the energy of what others hope for them. What does this imply about the rationality of hopeful trust? At least this: there is nothing rationally inappropriate about extending our trust to others beyond, or sometimes in defiance of, evidence of their prior trustworthiness, so long as our hopes for what they are capable of in light of our trust are rationally based. So now the question is: what is it that makes our hopes rationally based? Naturally, this will depend on knowing something about others’ values and putative capacities

relevant to the domain of our trustful interaction. But this may frequently consist in fairly basic things – standard values and minimal abilities—that assure us that others are at least trust-capable—i.e., capable of understanding and responding to the trust invested in them. Beyond that, our hopeful trust may rationally depend on fairly slender evidence, trading lack of particular knowledge about the persons we trust for general knowledge, based on long experience with our own and others' psychology, of the ways in which hopeful trust can reliably elicit trust-responsiveness in others.

Now, the argument I've just sketched for the rationality of substantial trust—trusting ahead of any particular evidence of trustees' trustworthiness—is indebted to an argument made originally by Philip Pettit [1995], and now widely cited in the literature. It too depends on identifying a psychological mechanism that can be reliably counted on to elicit trust-responsiveness in those whom we trust. But there are important differences, and I want to close by briefly discussing them.

According to Pettit, the robust feature of human psychology on which trustors can rationally depend is an esteem-seeking desire for the good opinion of others; and it plays into trust-responsiveness as follows. In trusting someone, in the sense of actively and explicitly placing my reliance on them, I express my opinion, both to her and to any witnesses of my act, that I judge her to be the kind of person who can be trusted, who is, in a word, trustworthy. Since we generally associate trustworthiness with laudable traits such as 'loyalty, virtue, and prudence', my act of trust says to the person trusted, and to any witnesses of my trust, that I take her to have such laudable traits (whether or not I actually do). Now here is what's crucial: even if my worst suspicions are right and the trustee doesn't have these traits, or at least not reliably, what she does have—or seems to have—is my good opinion, and the good opinion of others who take my endorsement seriously. And good opinion is something she likely desires—whether intrinsically or instrumentally. Therefore, wanting to keep the good opinion manifested by my trust, she will be motivated to act in a trust-responsive way. Thus, Pettit concludes, 'I can rationally invest . . . trust in advance of a relationship being formed, and without knowing whether the other is trustworthy, given that the act of trust can prove inherently motivating: can provide an incentive in the economy of regard for the trustee not to let me down' [Pettit 1995: 220].

I have no doubt that this mechanism can do some work in accounting for trustees' trust-responsiveness; nor do I doubt that reasoning about such a mechanism can do some work in accounting for the willingness of trustors to trust, especially under conditions of uncertainty or ignorance about the trustee's character. However, I do not think it can play an exclusive or even primary role in a fully satisfying account of substantial trust on two related grounds.

In the first place, though its aim is to save the rationality of substantial trust, it does so only by casting off a central aspect of that phenomenon. As discussed in Section I, trust of this sort is notable in two particular respects. The first is that it involves trusting beyond available evidence specific to the

other's trustworthiness; and the second—equally important—is that it involves abjuring strategic reasoning, where this means engaging in a kind of coolly calculative process of assessing the balance of evidence for and against the other's trustworthiness. The esteem-conferring and esteem-seeking dynamic here described honours this first characteristic of substantial trust, but only by replacing the strategic calculation on specific evidence of trustworthiness with a different kind of strategic calculation: namely, one that estimates the likely effectiveness of tapping into another's desire to maintain a trustor's 'esteem' expressed, if not proactively felt, in the act of trust. Hence, the apt title of Pettit's original paper: 'The Cunning of Trust'. Perhaps this phenomenon is still worth identifying with substantial trust, but I do not think it does justice to paradigmatic cases of trusting beyond evidence.

This brings me to my second and more pressing concern with making an esteem-seeking mechanism central to the account of substantial trust. It is not clear that such a mechanism will be as reliable as it needs to be to make trusting on that basis a robustly rational thing to do. For, as proponents of this view explicitly acknowledge, the mechanism itself is inherently unstable. This is because trustees cannot know or suspect that they are *only* being trusted because the trustor is relying on the likelihood of their having a desire for good opinion; for then trustees will know or suspect that trustors do not really hold them in high regard (as actually possessing trust-attracting virtues), but only imagine them to be manipulable because they possess the less admirable trait of seeking others' good opinions. Hence, trustees will lose the incentive provided by a trustor's trust to act in a trust-responsive way. Worse, potential trustees may even act in trust-repelling ways, refusing to have any further dealings with the putative trustor, since there is nothing more destructive to cooperative interactions than the feeling that one side is trying to manipulate the other. Hence, relying on such a mechanism in any general or extensive way, so that trustees and trustors become pretty savvy to, and hence wary of, its strategic appeal, may have the effect of undermining its operation and, worse, poisoning the generate climate of interpersonal interactions in which relationships of trust must find their home. It is with good reason then that Baier proposes her 'expressibility test' on morally decent relations of trust [Baier 1986], rendered most pithily by Karen Jones: 'Trust relations are morally decent'—and, I would add, rationally dependable—'only if they could survive reflective awareness of the qualities on which the reliance is based' [Jones 2004: 5].

Here, then, is a major advantage of the mechanism I describe: It survives the expressibility test. The investment of hope that trustors make in trustees under the regimen of hopeful trust need not operate in any hidden or backhanded way. Quite the opposite: Knowing that trustors are willing to go beyond belief based on evidence, perhaps even quelling feelings of anxiety or doubt about how trustees will perform in the domain of trust, because of their hope for what trustees might yet achieve in the context of such trust, can have a galvanizing effect on how trustees see themselves, as trustors avowedly do, in the fullness of their potential. Hence, it is because

such trust is hopeful, rather than merely comfortably confident or, worse, strategically manipulative that trustees respond with the purpose and energy that they do. The satisfaction they feel in such trust is no mere gratification at gaining and maintaining reputation in others' eyes, but some deeper pleasure that comes from being empowered by them—of connecting or reconnecting with a sense of their own agential abilities and possibilities through having such abilities and possibilities recognized—indeed, counted on—by trusting others.

The point here can be made vivid by a final reference to the exchange between Dorothea and Lydgate. It is hard to imagine how to rewrite this scene exploiting the esteem-based dynamics of a cunning trust. Could Dorothea really have expected to influence Lydgate's behaviour simply by exploiting a hypothesized desire on his part to be thought well of by her? In particular, could she have expected this in the event of its becoming salient to him that this was what she was doing? I think not. Recall that, by this point in the novel, Lydgate is already suffering profound alienation and resentment as a consequence of being manipulated by others. So it is hard to see how a strategic offering of trust could have much positive effect on him at all. Quite the opposite. In any case, the point is moot. The dynamic between them is of a different character altogether. While Dorothea's good opinion is manifested through her expression of trust, Lydgate's primary concern does not seem to be to keep that good opinion, since it now motivates him to confess to her (as he has to no one else) his own misjudgements and follies. Indeed, Lydgate is re-energized with a sense of purpose and self-worth in part because he feels free, through her expression of trust, to so unburden to her. And how is this sense of freedom enabled except by Dorothea's holding out to him a hopeful vision of what he is in her eyes, however folly and circumstance have dragged him down—namely, a person of good character and strong potential? In others words, Lydgate understands that Dorothea's good opinion is already *secured* in the hopes she has for him, as these hopes are expressed through her continuing trust. And it is through basking in this new found security of another's good opinion that Lydgate finds his own powers of agency reinvigorated and transformed. Thus, despite Dorothea's failure to think in strategically rational terms, it is actually her hopeful brand of substantial trust that delivers the best pragmatic returns.

Dramatic as this example is, I think the workings of hopeful trust can be found in myriad human exchanges—from the mundane to the most important, and between friends or relative strangers. It accounts, therefore, in significant ways for the extent and quality of our trust relations. If this claim is right, then the rationality of many such relations can be traced to the cognitive and affective role hope plays in our lives rather than to the role played by strategic reasoning. Of course, this is not to say that hopeful trust is invariably a good thing: it depends, for one thing, on our capacity to hope well, and hoping well is no easy thing [McGeer 2004]. But this observation only serves to emphasize the fact, paraphrasing Annette Baier [1986], that if we are to do an adequate job of theorizing about attitudes, acts, and relationships of trust 'in all their sad and splendid

variety', an investigation of hope must move from the periphery to the centre of our discussions.

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