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Chapter 6

Politics as Coordination: Trust and Its Normative Dimensions

Understanding politics as a type of social coordination – as a system coordinated by the ‘language’ of legitimate power – allows us to see that the problem of validity (truth) that occupied Weber is replaced by the question of social validity. Furthermore, we have also analysed how legitimate power as a symbolic medium might overcome problems of social complexity and organisational rationality, but that it replaces these problems with problems of vulnerability. Part of this vulnerability might be politically absorbed but is replaced with problems of indeterminacy, ambiguity and contradiction. Consequently, the question of social validity must be explained by processes that both decrease social complexity, while simultaneously keeping social complexity open. This means, first, that especially political theorists cannot (normatively) regard the political system as some kind of well-oiled *machine*. Political processes must constantly deal with plural and conflicting expectations without ever finding a final solution. Instead, theory must open up to social complexity. Second, it means that many of these problems of vulnerability – to the extent that they are not externalised as *individual risks* – cannot so much be solved but must be constantly *processed* by the political system. As we already discussed, understanding the nature of legitimate politics as vulnerable coordination seems to replace the problem of validity (truth) foremost with *the problem of trust*, i.e. the constant ongoing production of political assurance that despite the vulnerable, ambiguous, contradictory and contingent nature of political coordination, legitimate power nevertheless remains socially valid.

Although the concept of trust has a long tradition – especially in political theory – the debate really started to blossom at the end of the last century. It was the ‘buzz-word’ and the ‘obsession’ of the 90s (Koehn 1996: 183; Cleary & Stokes 2009:308). Despite this intensive attention there is no general agreement on what trust is, let alone how to explain it (Netwon 2007:343; Misztal 2001:372). Nevertheless, most scholars would probably agree with the claim that trust has something to do with a commitment to uncertain social expectations, where this commitment involves a risk.¹ Trust, we might say, is to take-over uncertain social expectations for one’s own actions or understandings *as if* one is certain about them. Beyond this general idea the whole trust debate is unfortunately riddled with difficulties and contradictions. Before we discuss the role of trust in *politics as coordination* and, especially, its role in explaining the subjective normative validity of coordinative politics, we have to get some grip on the concept despite the current state of the literature. I will try

¹ Compare e.g. with Misztal 1996:18; 2001:372; Dasgupta 1988:51; Dunn 1988:73; Gambetta 1988:217; Warren 1999a:1; Sztompka 1999:25-6; Newton 1999:170; Mayer *et al.* 1995:712; Lewis & Weigert 1985a:968; Luhmann 1968:27-9.

to do so by dealing with ten of the most pressing issues and questions without claiming to develop a general theory of trust.

6.1. Ten Issues Facing a Theory of Trust

6.1.1 *Objective or Subjective?*

One of the most pressing questions, obviously, is how to define trust. However, it is equally important to define what trust is *not*, especially as the literature has a tendency to include so many other social or political phenomena as forms of trust.² One of the main issues regarding this question of boundary is whether trust is a subjective or an objective phenomenon.

Trust is often perceived as a subjective attitude. Trust is not a commitment to others, but especially to one's own expectations about others (Luhmann 1968:1). Furthermore, if people are not somehow subjectively aware of uncertainty and risk, their 'commitment' is hardly one of trust but rather of 'belief' or 'fate' (Offe 1999:78; Giddens 1990:111). At the same time, trust must also be 'warranted'. When trust is not founded upon some source of evidence, commitment no longer concerns trust but 'hope' or 'faith' (Misztal 1996:15; Hart 1988:186-7; Hardin 1999b:35; Sztompka 1999:24; Lewis & Weigert 1985a:972; Luhmann 1968:28). As such, it seems reasonable to assume that trust is a subjective attitude. This subjective understanding of trust implies that trust cannot be communicated. If trust is subjective, it is not inter-subjective, let alone objective. This means that I might try to convince you that you can trust me, but trust itself remains incommunicable. Although this seems right, defining trust purely in subjective terms makes a sociological *theory of trust* rather complicated.³ Many scholars struggle to define trust as something that lies somewhere between the extremes of faith and hope or belief and fate, without much success.

In contrast, others try to perceive trust from an *outsider's perspective* as an objective phenomenon. This kind of objectivism, in my view, should be discarded. Either we get stuck in futile economic-technical attempts that try to calculate when trust is objectively rational, or, more commonly and problematic in the trust-literature, *everything* seems to involve trust. As Luhmann writes: 'without trust one cannot get out of bed in the morning' (1968:1). Indeed, of what can we be really certain? In the former chapter we already argued that the whole social world is suspended in mid-air. There is no such thing as an immovable, non-contingent, transcendent foundation of truth. Furthermore, how can one ever be sure about the future? The future seems inherently contingent. Without certainty *every* social action seems to require trust. This outsider objectivity, then, is not the

² E.g. legitimacy, political support, habitus, solidarity, cooperation, toleration, reputation, or citizenship, to name but a few (Newton 2007; Misztal 1996; Seligman 1997; Tyler 1998; Dalton 2004; Hawdon 2008; Fennema & Tillie 1999:705; Grimes 2006:292).

³ Typically trust, in this perspective, is understood in terms of childhood, life experiences, optimism or general psychological make-up (Newton 2007:349; Uslaner 1999:138; Sztompka 1999:65; Giddens 1990:94; 1991:38).

way to go as it leads to everything and therefore to nothing. Also Luhmann eventually warns that “trust is not the only fundament of the world” (1968:126). The warning is right – but how to deal with it? The solution is a return either to the subjective or, I would argue, to perceive uncertainty and risk as social expectations in themselves.

Between the subjective and the objective perspectives we might try to conceive a third sociological perspective. The basic idea is not that trust is an objective social phenomenon but only the *problem* of trust (Luhmann 1993b:3; Misztal 1996:3; Sztompka 1999:11-2). What counts as certain or trustworthy or what counts as uncertain and risky is not a universal non-contingent phenomenon. We might follow Luhmann in this respect, who claims that the historical rise of modernity – understood as increasing societal differentiation – is accompanied by the rise of risk (1988:96ff.; 1993b:5). Subsequently, we might suspect that the rise of risk connotes the rise of the problem of trust. Of course, it would be ridiculous to say that pre-modern or early-modern societies can be characterised by certainty and safety. However, we can say that a pre-modern worldview is based upon the duality between the known and unknown or between the familiar and unfamiliar.⁴ Outside the unknown and unfamiliar world *danger* lures; dangers such as diseases, violence or natural disasters that one cannot understand, let alone control; dangers from which one can hardly protect oneself or to which one cannot commit *oneself* as they are unknown. If anything, religion is the social structure which can deal with unknown and unfamiliar dangers as religion explains the unexplainable (Luhmann 1975:79; Giddens 1991:195). Religion ‘controls’ the unknown by making it meaningful, not by making danger any less immanent or the unknown any more knowable.

The traditional familiar world, meanwhile, is relatively small and limited, on the one hand, and stable, on the other. Indeed, social complexity and contingency is ‘controlled’ by both spatial and temporal limits on social action. Social action in daily life concerns interaction with others who are personally known or at least familiar. Familiarity ‘absorbs risk’ because its structure is not based upon social uncertainty (actions) but concerns a ‘self-evident structure of existence’ (Luhmann 1968:22-4).⁵ Of course, just as in modernity, the actions of others are inherently contingent and uncertain. An outside observer might therefore say that familiar actors still have to trust each other. Yet, we might hypothesise that in such restricted and familiar communities trust is not a *social* problem as the inherent contingent, symbolic or inter-subjective nature of the social world remains imperceptible and unthematized (Luhmann 1968:26; 1993b:9). Trust is at most an individual problem. Finally, pre-modernity seems especially to be oriented towards the past as a means to

⁴ We should be careful with strong dichotomous thinking in sociology, neatly dividing history in pre-modern, modern, late-modern or postmodern eras. Human history, global human history especially, resists such universal reductionism. These schemes might be analytical useful, but never historically correct.

⁵ As such, familiarity and trust are two functionally complementary social mechanisms to absorb uncertainty or, in Luhmann’s terms, complexity (1968:24).

organise the present (Luhmann 1968:23; Giddens 1990:104-5; 1991:48). Where in modernity the meaning of the present is related to the contingent future one is trying to control or realise, in pre-modernity – somewhat exaggerated of course – the meaning of the present is inherently related to the past, which is (or at least seems) to be stable and non-contingent.⁶ In other words, the familiar/unfamiliar distinction coincides with the safety/danger and with the past/future distinctions.

In modernity trust does become a social problem. Modernity, in Luhmann's terms, is the increase in social complexity by the simultaneous decrease in social complexity or, as Giddens understands it, as the disembedding from time and space (Giddens 1990:16-7; 1991:16-7). The social structure of modernity is not self-evident but based upon social action – indeed upon action systems. These systems increase our degrees of freedom in space and time, but *not* security, certainty or stability per se. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, modern society is inherently *ambiguous* to the extent that it is both stable *and* vulnerable; both reducing *and* increasing contingency; both decreasing *and* increasing indeterminacy. We might say that these ambiguities are no longer about *danger* but about *risks* that are inherent of modern society itself. Risks are not unfamiliar dangers that lie outside society in an unknown world, but risks emerge in modern society by the awareness that its social structures are “contingent” and “can be changed” by “decision and action” (Luhmann 1988:100,102; 1993b:46). The opposite of risk is not safety but danger (Luhmann 1993a:135; Beck 1992:21). In other words, traditional safety is dangerous, modern safety is risky. To bridge these modern ambiguities, to commit oneself to the inherent riskiness of modernity – trust is needed (Seligman 1997:13; Offe 1999:66). In sum, not trust but the *problem of trust* is a social phenomenon.⁷ Trust itself remains a subjective phenomenon.

6.1.2 Risk-Taking or Risk-Coping?

Objective social risks are a consequence of modernity, but this does not mean that individual awareness of those risks must necessarily be presumed. Until the Great War, the ‘disorienting speed’ of modernity might have been ‘exhilarating and liberating’ (Scott 1998:93), today we seem to be more conscious of risks and possible disasters even if the social structure has not radically changed. The difference seems to be the rise of some kind of ‘societal awareness’ of risks. Does that mean that trust was not a problem before or that people did not trust? To put it differently, is late-modern

⁶ It is not so much about the ‘discovery’ of the future in early modernity, as about the discovery that there can be a “discrepancy between past and future states” (Luhmann 1993b:39; 1993a:158).

⁷ This does not mean that the problem of trust in modernity concerns a shift from ‘personal trust’ to ‘depersonalised trust’ (Miztal 1996:20) or from ‘emotional personal trust’ to ‘presentational system trust’ (Luhmann 1968:27). Rather, it concerns the shift from danger to risk. At most we can say that because trust becomes a *social* problem it might be useful to divide modern society into ‘abstract’ and ‘intimate’ society (Giddens 1990:113; Luhmann 1988:102).

politics more dependable upon conditional trust, where modern politics in Weber's time concerned unconditional duty? These are difficult questions.

It might be helpful to perceive risk and trust from an individual point of view. In the literature it is claimed that trust is only trust if one voluntarily and consciously chooses to commit oneself to uncertain expectations (Luhmann 1988:97; Sztompka 1999:30). According to this dominant voice in the trust-literature, risk is something that is therefore a *consequence* of trust. *Because* I commit myself to uncertain expectations I subsequently run a risk. The proto-typical relation for such conception of risk seems to be an exchange relation. In an exchange relation Ego commits himself to future expectations concerning the promised actions of Alter, or not. Ego voluntarily chooses to run a risk, i.e. the risk that Alter will disappoint him generating negative consequences for Ego. If Ego does not trust Alter – if there is 'insufficient' evidence – he will not commit himself and *avoid* the risk.

Socially objective risks present in modern social structures, however, are not risks we *choose* to run and often risks we cannot *avoid* to run. Risk is not a consequence of action, but action is a means of coping with risk (Wisner *et al.* 2004:113ff). From this perspective trust might be a specific type of *coping-mechanism* to deal with social risks (Giddens 1991:46). Ego is not choosing whether he commits himself to a risk or not, he is rather searching for evidence that allows him to absorb it, i.e. he is searching for 'evidence' that allows him to fool himself. This, importantly, also means that *trust is not the only way to cope with risk*. Faith, fate, optimism and hope are functionally equivalent *psychological* mechanisms, just as cynicism, scepticism, apathy or hedonism (see e.g. Giddens 1990:134ff; 1991:131).⁸ Trust, then, is foremost 'functional' (Luhmann 1988:95; Misztal 1996:96ff.). Furthermore, we are not constantly aware of the risks of modern society, but routinely 'commit' to them. We normally only become aware of risks if we are explicitly confronted with them – as in the case of disappointment, crisis or (political) conflict. It is especially in those instances of risk consciousness that we try to rationalise our fears or anxieties. More importantly, society itself, or rather the social systems, are trying to rationalise and control disappointment and crisis. This means that the becoming-aware-of-risks in late-modernity is foremost to be understood as the problematisation of the rationalisation of risks and not necessarily the rise of risks themselves (Hardin 2000:49).⁹ This also means it is not necessarily a *trust* problem, as trust is not the only

⁸ Hedonism understood as prioritising the meaning of the present over the meaning of the future.

⁹ This is not the same argument as mainstream cryptonormative arguments in political science which claim that what is 'troubling' established democracies is not the rise of risk and not even the rising awareness of risk, but the fact that citizens are more demanding and "become increasingly critical" and less tolerant of disappointments (Norris 1999:26; Dalton 2004:195,199; 2000:253; Pharr & Putnam 2000:xviii). The central tenet seems to be that there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the liberal democratic system and accompanying neo-liberal capitalism, only the people are becoming more and more irrational – or post-materialistic (Inglehart 1999a:243-4).

functional means to deal with risk. Again, the relevance of trust is more limited than many theorists want it to be.

In sum, the difference between understanding trust as 'risk-seeking' and as 'risk-coping', generates different theories of trust. The trust-literature – always dominated by pseudo-economic models of individual utility (Luhmann 1993a:131) – is predominantly trying to understand trust as risk-choosing. We need not deny this risk-choosing model, but rather limit its relevance to the analytical level of social interaction. We should strongly resist, however, the tendency to elevate the risk-choosing model as the basis of all theories on trust. I would say that the 'risk-coping' model provides us more room to understand trust as a sociological phenomenon.

A related discussion, in this context, is the idea that trust cannot be 'enforced', but has to be 'voluntary'. To be sure, as trust is subjective one cannot be forced to trust. Indeed, one cannot even consciously force oneself to trust (Blackburn 1998:40). Trust eludes *control*. Of course, the *need* to trust might be lessened through mechanism of control, but trust itself remains elusive. Trust, then, is *always* 'voluntary', if this concept makes any sense at all in this context. Relations, on the other hand, can be involuntarily imposed. But a relation or behaviour cannot be equated with trust. We obviously have to dismiss such rude behaviouralism. Trust is not behaviour that can be perceived in cooperation over conflict (as in Deutsch 1958:270; Newton 2001:202). As such, there is nothing contradictory to the claim that a relation can be 'enforced', but trust is 'voluntary' (Pettit 1998:299-300). For sure, this implies that risk is not a consequence of trust, but trust foremost a means to cope with (imposed) risk.

6.1.3 Rational or Irrational?

If this approach of 'risk-coping' seems to psychologise trust, the same can be said about 'risk-taking'. One cannot calculate trust. There is no rational rule when trust is warranted – although there maybe social rules of thumb. Trust is always a leap of faith (Mansbridge 1999:291; Sztompka 1999:69; Lagenspetz 1992:5; Lewis & Weigert 1985a:970; Giddens 1990:27; 1991:19). Trust *itself* is contingent (Newton 2007:345). The core of trust, we might say, is irrational as it rests upon 'self-deception' (Luhmann 1968:38). In a philosophical mood we could claim that trust is the last refuge of *magic* in our disenchanted world. However, Luhmann rightly points out that this does not mean that not-trusting is rational (1993b:21). Trust allows more degrees of freedom – and as such more room to deal with risk and disappointment – and trust allows gains that are not possible without trust (Luhmann 1968:8-9). When one did not trust a business proposal and later it turned out that one has missed out on a good deal, was it rational or irrational to distrust? Indeed, it is rational to trust actors that can be trusted and irrational to distrust trustworthy actors. The inherent problem of trust,

of course, is that one cannot know this in advance. As long as the future remains the contingent future notions of rationality and irrationality remain elusive.¹⁰

But even in hindsight things are complicated. When distrust or trust proved 'unfounded', this does not necessarily mean we would evaluate with hindsight our past decision as irrational. Vice versa, we can also recognise stupid luck when things turned out all right despite our trust. We might follow Luhmann, who differentiates between regret and bad-luck, i.e. we may internalise disappointment by regretting our earlier action or externalise disappointment as 'bad luck' (1988:97-8). However, there is nothing straightforward in such post-hoc judgements. Luhmann's claim that this distinction helps us to differentiate between risk and danger, or between trust and confidence, is therefore surprisingly unhelpful (1968:4; 1993b:21-2; see also Offe 1999:44).

It seems more reasonable to claim that judgements about when to trust, who is to blame in case of disappointment or which risk is reasonable or excessive is to a large extent determined by society or sub-groups. For example, we might recognise generational differences where the young are expected to be foolish (and learning), while the old are expected to be thoughtful. We might also recognise gender-based stereotypes where foolish-trust for girls is thought to be based upon naiveté and innocence and for boys to be based upon risk-seeking and recklessness. The same holds for social roles. A second-hand car salesman is socially recognised (stereo-typed) as untrustworthy. If one buys a car from him nevertheless – as many people do – then the judgement of fool or victim depends upon the pre-cautionary measures they have taken. Similarly, the roles of entrepreneur and bank-director are differently stereo-typed. The entrepreneur is expected to be manly, heroic, innovative and admirable as he takes risks in which he might take it all or lose it all. The bank-director also deals with risks but is expected to be cautious, thoughtful and, above all, to act according to expertise as he takes 'controllable' risks.¹¹ Finally, formal rules are normally expected to be rational and communicating reasonable risk. Although this normal expectation is problematised by the awareness of modern ambiguity and indeterminacy, formal rules are human decisions, which still implies that we expect that risks are evaluated, judged, controlled and managed. As such, when blind rule-following goes awry the person involved is often judged to be stupid but not as irrational or as an excessive risk-taker.

In sum, what counts as a 'normal' risk and warranted trust and what are excessive risks and 'irresponsible' behaviour is a social affair which can be quite pluralistic. As such, the 'rationality' of trust and risks is a complicated affair. In its essence trust is not rational because it is unfindable.

¹⁰ Luhmann ultimately perceives the rationality of trust in terms of its system functionality (1968:116).

¹¹ An argument could be made that this social foundation of the evaluation of risk and trust seeps through in the trust literature as similar words have different connotations in different languages and cultures or different languages have different words altogether.

However, how one evaluates – with hindsight – trusting actions really depends upon social norms and one's own reflexivity.

6.1.4 What is Risk?

Trust, we have said, concerns a commitment to risk. The obvious question to ask, then, is what risk is. This question, again, is not easy to answer. In the literature risks is often defined as 'vulnerability X hazard', or 'costs X probability' (Wisner *et al.* 2004:49; Sztompka 1999:29). This is true to the extent that the more uncertain or improbable a specific expectation is, the riskier the commitment to it. If this commitment, however, only involves marginal 'costs' when disappointed, the risk remains very low.¹² Vice versa, even if the expectation is very improbable but the costs of disappointment are severe or even unthinkable, the risk might still be very high. In other words, risk is not just about probability but also about vulnerability. Furthermore, if trust is a means to cope with or commit to risks, we can say that the higher the risk the more trust is needed. Vice versa, commitment to risk is easier if probabilities are increased and the vulnerability decreased. This does not mean, importantly, that trust is in any way 'easier' but rather that less trust is needed.

It seems that the formula 'risk = vulnerability X probability' provides us some analytical leverage on how risk and trust are related. But this formula should not be over-extended. First, it is quite obvious that this formula does not imply that we can somehow calculate the exact 'value' of risk. We might, of course, try to do that, but often such models are as much methods of enchantment to rationalise risk as methods of science to provide certainty about risk (Luhmann 1968:116). Second, and more important, this notion of risk clashes to a certain extent with the notion of risk as an inherent modern phenomenon. The risk-formula – especially when used in economic models – seems to imply that risks are an *individual* or context specific matter which one can choose to take on or not and that people are – or should be – *risk-averse*. The modernity approach, on the other hand, implies that risk is a *social condition* with which individuals have to deal with but cannot voluntarily select and that modernity is inherently *ambiguous*, i.e. risk is liberating and threatening at the same time. However, as stated before, this clash must not be overemphasised either. The former approach seems to emphasise risk *within* a social system, while the latter emphasises risk *of* a social system.

6.1.5 The Problem of Uncertainty and Contingency

When risk can be pragmatically defined in relation to probability and vulnerability, the real problem seems to be that not all commitment to risk involves trust (Mayer *et al.* 1995:725). It seems useful to

¹² Sztompka speaks of 'weak' and 'strong' commitments and understands vulnerability as including possible costs, duration and degree of irrevocability (1999:28)

differentiate between risks involving probability and risks involving uncertainty. Let us examine this claim for a moment.

When we throw dice – and put money on the number 6 – we run a risk as success or disappointment is inherently *contingent*. To put it differently, what number the die rolls is an inherent contingent and ontological condition. We can only change this condition by manipulating the game – e.g. by rigging the die. However, we might also want to gain knowledge of this contingent condition, i.e. we might want to understand contingency in terms of *probability*. So, we can calculate that success in the dice game is 1 out of 6. It is important for our argument to stress that probability is an *epistemological* claim, which does not alter the contingent ontological condition as such. Furthermore, it evokes the additional question of the *certainty* of this knowledge – which, we will disregard for the moment. Finally, if I commit myself to the certain probability that success is 1 out of 6, I take a risk which we normally understand as a *gamble*.¹³ It is a gamble not just because the ontological condition remains contingent, but because even our epistemological understanding of this condition in terms of probabilities forces us to co-expect disappointment (in 5 out of 6).

Social relations, however, are often not like a game of dice. What makes social relations different is that actors in a relation are also agents who have a will and can make *decisions*. The die, in contrast, is an object who cannot decide to role in a certain manner.¹⁴ This does not mean that we cannot gain knowledge about human behaviour *as if* they are objects, as in economic risk-calculation or behaviouralism in general. We can calculate, for example, what the probability is for loan-defection for a certain area, group or class. If we subsequently provide loans – commit ourselves to these epistemic probabilities – we take a gamble as we have to co-expect disappointment.

Most social relations – including market relations – are not about committing to humans as objects for which we calculate probable outcomes, but concern a commitment to humans as *agents*. The difference of committing to an agent instead of an object is that in principle there is no ontological condition of contingency. This must be qualified immediately as contingency does not disappear. Yet, if the die in the dice game would *decide* to turn up 6, the outcome is no longer inherently contingent. The qualification, of course, is that contingency can still intrude as there is a difference between *intention* and *outcome*. But if we ignore this for the moment – something that cannot be ignored in reality – then the core problem of *risk* is no longer about the *ontological* problem of contingency but rather about the *epistemological* problem of knowing what the die will

¹³ Probability, then, does not necessarily amount to 'a margin of uncertainty' as Sztompka claims (1999:18).

¹⁴ This does not deny that even a dice-game is often 'rationalised' in terms of 'Lady Luck', a 'good feeling' or even by personalising the dice (Deutsch 1958:266). The boundary between ontological probability and ontological uncertainty is in itself a social construct, i.e. it is not a natural given.

decide to do. To put it differently, there would be no *objective risk* if we knew the future outcome, while there would be no *agentic risk* if we knew the decisions, intentions or motivations of agents in the present – if we knew their subjective orientations.

The point, then, is that we can differentiate between objective risks and probabilities, on the one hand, and agentic risks and uncertainties, on the other. Trust *only* concerns these latter risks. Trust concerns a commitment to *freedom* – to agentic risks, not to objective risks (Seligman 1997:55; Luhmann 1988:100; 1968:48; Sztompka 1999:19). In other words, trust is not a gamble.¹⁵

6.1.6 Internally and Externally Sanctioned Assurances

Unfortunately, things are even more complicated as not all commitment to agentic risks involves trust. Let us consider this complication for the moment. The problem of agentic risks is in essence an epistemological problem. If only we could look inside the heads of the agents we commit ourselves to, there would be no agentic risk at all. We should notice the difference with objective risks where knowledge of probability does not solve the inherent problem of contingency. It is however our inherent social condition that the subjective realm of others always remains unknown to us. We can only understand each other in terms of intersubjective *communication*. To commit to an agent to make the right *decision* – and not simply to commit to probable outcomes – is therefore always uncertain. As such, we have replaced inherent ontological *contingency* for inherent ontological *uncertainty*.

However, communication can also help us to deal with this uncertainty, as discussed in the former chapter. Uncertainty about the intentions of others can be reduced by communication, precisely because it allows us to ascribe socially valid expectations of motivation. Communication provides us *assurance* about intentions. Importantly, there are two types of assurance – assurance that is *externally* and assurance that is *internally* sanctioned. In what follows, I try to carefully differentiate between these two types of assurance.

First, we might reduce our lack of knowledge of the subjective intentions of others through the communication of socially valid (i.e. objective) expectations that are *external* to the relation itself. These socially valid expectations increase our knowledge of probable motivations of others. Indeed, as discussed, symbolic media and social systems allow us to expect, for example, that an economic actor will act strategically rational. Whether we will commit ourselves to an exchange relation with him – whether we will take a risk – depends upon our knowledge of the social interest-configuration. Indeed, if based upon this knowledge we expect his interests to be aligned with ours, we might take the risk. Commitment and risk-taking, then, depends upon the assurance that our

¹⁵ Some scholars are particularly confusing in this regard. Offe, for example, defines trust as a ‘belief in probabilities’ or a “guess based upon the assessment of others” (1999:46; see also Giddens 1990:27).

interests are aligned. This assurance, it must be emphasised, concerns socially valid expectations about 'incentive structures' and 'rationality'. Even if we never know someone's 'real' intentions, uncertainty can be addressed by externally sanctioned assurances. External sanction, then, points to the mechanism that interests and motivations are communicatively structured and assured by the *social context* of a relationship, not by the relationship itself.

The first way of dealing with agentic risk, then, is through externally sanctioned assurance. External structures (symbolic media) reduce but not take away uncertainty. Whether the other is indeed 'rational', i.e. whether he understands his own structural interests or whether he understands the context in a similar way, remains uncertain. Although, this remaining uncertainty might be further assured through some Goffmanian symbolic communications of 'normality' – assured commitment always necessitates a leap of faith because of the *inherent vulnerability* of social communication. To put it more formally, such leap is necessary because the subjective and inter-subjective realms always remain separated. However, and importantly, such leap of faith no longer constitutes a *gamble* as we are assured of success, i.e. we do not co-expect disappointment, but we act *as if* we are certain even if we *cannot* be. This means that in case of disappointment assurance necessitates that blame must be attributed, which does not hold for a gamble (Luhmann 1968:104).

There is one particularly difficult issue with this kind of external assurance which we need to address. Assurance does not mean guarantee or outcome control. Especially where sanction, threat and force are involved we run the risk of over-emphasising the imperative mood of communication (see chapter 5). For sure, communicating a (credible) threat *changes* incentive structures. This means that we not only gain assurance but actually also change objective outcome probability. At point blank the probability of disappointment tends to be fairly low and uncertainty does not seem an issue at all.¹⁶ However, we already discussed that the effectiveness (probability) of symbolic media is not based upon force and violence, but upon assurance and communication. If we normally say that structures of accountability and sanction increase the probability of success, we could also say that they decrease uncertainty or increase assurance. The difficulty, of course, is that both statements are true at the same time depending on the object/agentic perspective. However, trust is not about increasing objective probabilities but about increasing 'indifference' to or the 'absorption' of uncertainty (Luhmann 1968:30). It is not about objective outcome success but about expectations of agentic intentions.

¹⁶ Although 'irrationality' – including heroism – always remains an inherent problem. Trust, in any case, needs the possibility of 'exit, betrayal or defection' (Gambetta 1988:219). It is unhelpful, in my opinion, to try to formulate some dimension from 'certainty to chance to helplessness' as it confuses probability and uncertainty (see Sztompka 1999:20-1).

Second, if agentic-risks or ontological uncertainty can be addressed by externally sanctioned assurances, it can also be addressed by *internally* sanctioned assurances. We can also ascribe motivations to others not because their interests are structured and sanctioned by the external context, but by their 'interests' in the relationship itself. To paraphrase Hume, the difference between external and internal sanctions concerns the difference between 'I love you because it is my interest' and 'because I love you, you are my interest'. Indeed, we normally do not expect our friends or loved-ones to do something for us because of their externally-sanctioned strategic interest or conditionally structured incentive to do so, rather we expect them to do so out of an internally-sanctioned obligation to our relationship. In such relations we normally do not expect strategic rational motivations but value-rational motivations such as honour, benevolence, honesty, duty or responsibility (Dasgupta 1988:53; Seligman 1997:6; Offe 1999:50; Mansbridge 1999:292-3; Sztompka 1999:5; Blackburn 1998:36; Pettit 1998:307; J. Braithwaite 1998:344; Mayer et al. 1995:718; Lagenspetz 1992:16).¹⁷ For sure, such expectations of friendship, love or honour are also *social* expectations, but they arise only from a mutual *intersubjective* commitment to the (socially prescribed) *normative order* of the relationship. We mutually ascribe expectations of a shared duty and responsibility towards the relationship itself. As such, motivations are not sanctioned and structured by the external social context, but by this mutual commitment itself. The assurance does not consist of the perception that interests are strategically *aligned*, but rather that the other *feels a duty* to take care of our interests, quite independent from other interests or incentives he might have. "Trust obliges the trusted" (Offe 1999:50; Gambetta 1988:234; Pettit 1998:308). But just like external assurances, internally sanctioned assurances increase our knowledge about ascribed intentions and motivations.

In sum, both externally and internally sanctioned assurances *communicate* expectations about the intentions or motivations of the other. The former communicates intentions in terms of strategic incentives, the latter in terms of value-rational commitments.

6.1.7 Trust or Confidence?

As we have seen, agentic risks or the social condition of ontological uncertainty can be dealt with by gaining internal or external sanctioned assurances. In both cases there is no absolute guarantee about the intentions of others. For *both types* of assurance, then, risky commitments necessitate some kind of leap of faith. Commitment in both cases of assurance differs from a *gamble*, as we do

¹⁷ Some scholars argue that this concerns an 'affective' or 'emotional base' as opposed to cognitive foundations (Lewis & Weigert 1985a:971). Although emotions might very well be involved, the opposite of cognitive is normative. As such, *ascriptions* of strategic versus value-rational *motivations* seems more appropriate.

not co-expect disappointment, but act *as if* we are certain. Nevertheless, only commitment based upon internally-sanctioned assurance, it seems to me, should be considered as an act of *trust*. It is only in this form that we trust the freedom of others to do what is right. Indeed, in case of externally sanctioned assurance we might even *distrust* the 'real' intentions of the actor but nevertheless be assured that his structured strategic interests will prevent him from defecting.¹⁸ It seems analytically – and empirically – most satisfying to label a commitment based upon externally sanctioned assurances an act of 'confidence', and a commitment based upon internally sanctioned assurances an act of 'trust' (compare Seligman 1997:24-5; Offe 1999:53; Pettit 1998:297; Tonkiss & Passey 1999:258; Tyler 1998:269).¹⁹

Unfortunately, this is not always how it is perceived in the trust literature. Externally assured commitment is often regarded as an act of *trust* because it entails a leap of faith. I will not trace the origin of this confusion in any detailed way but it seems to me that the trust literature is especially problematic on three accounts. First, a strong current of rational choice oriented literature perceives every action as strategic rational – implying that others must *always* be distrusted – and, as such, cannot differentiate between internal and external sanctioned assurances (Hardin 1998:12; 1999:26; Levi 1998:78). Second, if such strategic approach seems to empty internal sanctions from being much of an assurance at all, many scholars try to solve this by differentiating between affective personal trust and strategic impersonal trust (Hardin 2000:34; Luhmann 1968). Although there is a difference between personal and impersonal *relations*, this should not mean that *trust* is a different substance altogether. This approach is particularly unhelpful if we want to understand trust in (quasi-) impersonal political systems. Finally, despite strong denials, many scholars implicitly equal trust to cooperative behaviour (Levi 1998:78).²⁰ Because cooperation can be explained both by confidence and by trust the difference is blurred.²¹

If this strand of literature lumps together confidence and trust, many more understand the concept of confidence differently. Confidence, often based upon the work of Simmel, is understood as 'inductive knowledge' or 'habitual expectations' (Miztal 1996:16; Luhmann 1988:97; Giddens; Hardin 1998:11; 1999b:30; 2000:33; Offe 1999:45; Farrell 2009:130; Giddens 1990:29).²² This means

¹⁸ This does *not* mean, of course, that confidence or externally sanctioned assurances are necessarily grounded in distrust, as some scholars seem to argue (see e.g. Miztal 1996:26-7).

¹⁹ Some of these scholars make a similar distinction but unfortunately label it as a difference between 'impersonal' and 'personal' trust (Pettit 1998:297) or between 'instrumental' and 'social' trust (Tyler 1998:269).

²⁰ See e.g. Walker & Ostrom 2009:91 or V. Braithwaite 1998:47.

²¹ There is, of course, no empirical rule that states that trust and confidence cannot be present in one and the same relationship. Empirical reality is more complex than such dichotomy allows. Even if I am *confident* that our deal is in the interest of us both, it does not mean that I do not also *trust* you to be committed our relation or to be honest about your interests.

²² Luhmann's concept of confidence might be most confusing as confidence concerns those commitments in which disappointment is externalized as bad luck – hence, confidence concerns probability – and trust can only

that based upon one's prior experiences one expects the future to be the continuation of the past and present. Such inductive knowledge, then, is nothing else but gaining *certainty about probability*, reliability or predictability, i.e. it is probable that tomorrow will be the same as yesterday and today. It concerns objective, not agentic risks. It seems, however, more useful to use confidence in relation to agentic-risks and use the terms like chance or probability for objective risks.²³

In short, whether or not we agree with the different labels, we should agree that we can differentiate between at least three different, but not necessarily separate, phenomena in which we commit ourselves: 1) to objective probability (chance); 2) to agentic uncertainty assured by external sanctions (confidence); and/or 3) to agentic uncertainty assured through internal sanctions (trust).

6.1.8 Sources and Objects of Trust

Trust must be warranted. As such, the literature tries to categorise different sources that warrant trust (Sztompka 1999:70ff.). However, there is something paradoxical about the concept of 'sources of trust'. It seems to connote that such sources increase trust while in reality they rather decrease the need for trust. The more such sources are able to reduce uncertainty the *less* trust is needed as the leap of faith becomes smaller. To this extent, it would be more accurate to talk about sources of assurance. But, as we have seen, there are different kinds of assurance that *all* reduce the need for trust, while for trust to be trust a commitment to risk must be based upon internally sanctioned assurances. As such, it seems appropriate to pragmatically label these specific kinds of assurance as sources of trust.

In general, these sources concern actions or codes that are *symbolic* of a commitment to the normative order of the relationship itself. Trustworthiness concerns a form of self-presentation in terms of 'symbol complexes of trustworthiness' that must be socially learned (Luhmann 1968:48,36). Such communication of trustworthiness, however, can concern the communication of *norm conformity* or *ethical personality*. When we go to our doctor he normally presents himself in terms of socially valid expectations – he conforms to role expectations by wearing a white coat and by hanging a stethoscope around his neck and his diploma's on the wall. Depending on this role- or office-expectations we might commit ourselves to the doctor in *confidence*. For trust, on the other hand, his actions "must appear and proof itself as the expression of personality" (Luhmann 1968:51). His actions must not communicate that he is strategically 'enforced' by the structural circumstances (role, rules and interests) but must communicate his 'true personality' *independent* of the structural

concern relations in which risk can be avoided – hence, according to Luhmann, all enforced social structures concern confidence (Luhmann 1988:97-99ff.) This, it seems to me, is an unfortunate and unfruitful analysis.

²³ Others have tried to differentiate between confidence and trust in terms of 'established' and 'spontaneous' trust (Patterson 1999:154), 'passive' and 'active' involvement (Sztompka 1999:24); or 'low' and 'high' risks (Levi 1998:79).

context. The doctor, for example, might present himself as thoughtful, caring, and attentive. He communicates that he feels a genuine responsibility for us and commits himself to the normative order of the doctor-patient relationship.

In other words, sources of confidence concern the presentation of self in terms of norm conformity, while sources of trust concern the presentation of self in terms of personality. The former communicates the lack of choice or agency, while the latter communicates free or autonomous agency. However, there is nothing straightforward about this differentiation. As Luhmann points out, it depends in turn upon socially valid expectations whether an action is “institutionalised as ‘free’” or not (Luhmann 1968:51-2). As such, the boundary between action as a symbolic expression of personality and conformity is also *role* dependent. Politicians, for example, are expected to have greater autonomy than mid-level bureaucrats. Also Goffmanian ‘highly standardised tests of normality’ in daily life in which strangers communicate through ‘norms of tact’ and ‘rituals of politeness’ that everything is *normal* are most of the time symbolic of confidence but sometimes of trust (Luhmann 1968:59; Giddens 1990:82). There is a difference between communicating norm conformity in a busy café and in an elevator where two persons are temporarily isolated from social control.²⁴

Modern society cannot function on internally sanctioned assurances alone. ‘Pure’ trust relations are vulnerable and take time to grow and mature. Instead, as Luhmann claims, society has developed many social mechanisms that are *functional equivalents* of trust of which symbolic media are the most prominent ones (1968:65-6). These sources decrease or even replace the need for trust. To complicate things, however, functional equivalents of trust can function as external assurance, as insurance or as postponement (see also chapter 5). Let us consider these mechanisms for a moment.

Externally sanctioned assurances are, as already explained above, functional equivalents of trust to the extent that they allow us to ascribe motivations and interests on others. So, for example, even if I do not trust this salesman, I know it is in his interest to protect his reputation and, as such, have confidence in our exchange relation (Sztompka 1999:71; Pettit 1998:306). Social reputation or social sanctions in general are functional equivalents of trust. Of course these are precisely less effective in anonymous market relations, creating a ‘trust’ problem. A different solution, then, is law backed-up with legitimate power or any other organised structure of control and accountability. If we seal our exchange in a legal contract, it communicates *assurance* about our interests. In addition, it also gives us an *insurance* that, if need be, we can force the other to comply or to compensate our losses. In both the case of assurance and insurance we do not necessarily have to trust our exchange partner. Insurances decrease the risk we commit ourselves to (Luhmann 1968:44) – not so much in

²⁴ Luhmann ignores this problem by perceiving both as instances of ‘system trust’ as opposed to ‘personal trust’ (1965:59ff.).

terms of increased objective probability or agentic certainty, but especially in terms of lessened vulnerability. As such, other sources of insurance are personal resources such as money, power, reputation, social networks, as well as self-confidence which allow us to compensate, absorb or isolate the consequential costs of disappointments (Offe 1999:53; Luhmann 1968:33).²⁵ Finally, symbolic media also allow us to 'conquer time', i.e. media allow us to postpone our commitment until we gained more assurance or certainty (Luhmann 1968:19). As long as we do not have to commit ourselves, we do not have to trust others.

The fact that functional equivalents of trust make trust less necessary does not mean that trust does not play a role at all in modern society. Many scholars rightly perceive trust as a *social lubricant* saving the costs of monitoring or searching information (Offe 1999:48; Sztompka 1999:62). Yet this does not mean that trust is a *collective* characteristic. Instead we might say that the *problem of trust* is more or less prominent in certain groups, organisations, communities or even societies based upon their objective structures. It seems plausible that groups possessing more functional equivalents of trust have less problems of trust because the need for trust is substituted by other social mechanisms and resources. In contrast, groups that are ravaged by informal power and corruption actually need *more* trust (J. Braithwaite 1998:349; della Porta 2000:227; Manzetti & Wilson 2007:953). However, whether trust is actually present in either type of group is an empirical question. Finally, the extent to which formal organisation necessitate forms of *informalisation*, i.e. informal trust relations, to function efficiently especially in contemporary complex 'society' is not only an empirical question but a question that is normatively double-edged.

If the difference between sources of trust and sources that are functional equivalents of trust is relatively clear a subsequent difficult problem concerns the *object of trust*. The crucial question concerns whether one can trust social mechanisms that function as equivalents of trust itself. So, for example, if I do not so much trust the official but am confident that because he is monitored in organised structures of accountability he will do what he is supposed to, does this mean that the need for trust is merely transposed from person to organisation or even its symbolic medium of legitimate power? Or can one only trust people and only have confidence in institutions, as many scholars claim (Hardin 1998:10, 2000:31; Newton 2007:344; Cleary & Stokes 2009:314)?

Trust, it seems to me, is not so much about committing to a specific person as committing to specific expectations. Indeed, one can trust a person for one thing but not for another. Most importantly, both trust and confidence concern uncertainty arising from the fact that an actor can make autonomous *decisions*. The question, then, is whether an organisation can make agentic

²⁵ Self-confidence reduces vulnerability to the extent that one is internally assured that even in the case of disappointment one will find a way out (Luhmann 1968:105).

decisions. I am inclined to say it can. We usually perceive organisations as if they are proper actors (Harré 1999:259). Organisations act, communicate and understand the world in their own specific ways – indeed, we can even speak of organisational self-understanding, ‘personality’ or brand. In principle, then, organisations can be objects of trust. Beyond the level of organisation things get more complicated. It seems to me that differentiated social systems cannot be perceived as actors or as an expression of decisions (Luhmann 1993b:161).²⁶ As such, if we blame ‘politics’ for not making the right decision we are usually thinking in abstract terms about political *organisation* not about politics as a value system. Finally, symbolic media neither take nor are decisions. As such, value systems or symbolic media cannot be an object of trust.²⁷ This does not mean, however, that trust does not play a role at these analytical levels. We will discuss this issue in the second part of this chapter.

A different but related question is whether one can trust material objects. The over-used example is that one does not and cannot trust the sun to rise in the morning (Hardin 1998:22; 1999b:25; 2000:33 Sztompka 1999:19). This seems true enough as the expectation that the sun will rise tomorrow is normally considered to be highly probable. More importantly, being uncertain about whether the sun will rise is socially considered to be abnormal – it is not something one is expected to worry about. The sun, in our age at least, is not expected to be an agent but an object subject not to social but to natural law which nobody can decide to change as even God is rational these days. However, it could be that the core of the sun is growing critically instable or that a giant meteor is heading its way. I have no clue whether this is true and as a consequence I might have to trust scientists to monitor such things. The example of the sun is not so self-evident after all. And even if material objects do not have agency – and neither do these objects have ‘an obligation to their material reliability’ (Harré 1999:258) – things are different for manufactured material objects. We do not so much trust the object itself, but we often trust its manufactures to have made the right decisions.²⁸ Manufactured objects, then, are like formal rules or rule-based organisations – they are *consequences* of a decision-making process. They are embodied decisions. While these material or immaterial objects are not direct objects of trust, they can be *indirect* objects of trust to the extent that we trust or are confident of the decision-making processes that have produced them.

²⁶ I therefore disagree with the claim that social action systems are “reducible to human actions” and therefore possible objects of trust (Sztompka 1999:46). A market system might have certain logic but hardly agency.

²⁷ Giddens in particular seems to claim that one can trust the ‘abstract capacities’ of money (1990:26). But what does it mean to trust the “authenticity of expert knowledge” (ibid:28)?

²⁸ As a mountaineer I am often aware that I ‘trust’ manufactured objects. For example, when I use some belaying device in a slightly stressing context I often control my fears by saying to myself that this device will hold because otherwise its designers would have felt the duty to warn me upfront or to design it differently.

The fact that one can in principle trust an organisation does not mean such trust comes easy. As such, it is helpful to 'reembed' abstract systems in interpersonal relations in so-called 'access points' (the front-stage) or in quasi-interpersonal mediated relations (Giddens 1990:87). In other words, it helps when an organisation has a 'face'. However, it is often objected that even in this case one cannot trust an organisation if this organisation or its face does not know me (Hardin 1998:16; 2000:34). Trust, we have already seen, concerns the expectation that the other feels a duty of responsibility towards our relationship. Trust does not concern something that the other would have done anyway (reliance) or because he is externally sanctioned to (confidence) but because he feels a responsibility and obligation to do so for *our* sake. How can we expect that if the other does not even know us? In an impersonal or quasi-personal relation this is indeed difficult except when we let go of the all too individualistic economic conception of trust. An organisation might be trusted based upon its expressed responsibility to its relation with consumers, the poor, patients, the elderly, to citizens, party members, the people, etc. In other words, the relation itself might be more abstract and depersonalised (Farell 2009:132). Indeed, even in personal relations the *normative order* is non-personal, i.e. socially valid. What counts in trust is the communication of the commitment to the socially valid normative order of a relation, not to each other as individual persons.

6.1.9 Dimensions of Social Relations: Value, Time and Uncertainty

We have already drawn quite some contours of trust. Though we have seen that the problem of trust is a modern phenomenon and that trust is related to agentic risk, we have not yet thematised one of its fundamental dimensions: time. To trust is "to act as if is the future is certain" (Luhmann 1968:9). Indeed, we might say that what differentiates Luhmann's media theory from Weber's sociology is its clear incorporation of time; not just any time, but future-time. Indeed, where Weber analyses unconditional duties, absolute beliefs and the problem of truth, the incorporation of future-time evokes an analysis of conditional commitment, uncertainty and the problem of trust.²⁹ It is not surprising, then, that time occupies a central place in the trust-literature. Notwithstanding the importance of the time dimension, it is often fairly poorly analysed. The underlying analytical problems can be clarified with the help of Luhmann's account of two perspectives of time.

Luhmann differentiates between time as 'continuity' (*Bestand*) and time as 'event' (*Ereignis*) (1968:11). In the former, the future is the continuity of the present or, we might say, the present is the continuity of the past. In the latter, the future is a specific event that will happen tomorrow and

²⁹ It is not true, of course, that Weber ignored the importance of future-time in the modernisation process. However, Weber did not feel the need to incorporate the time-dimensions as a sociological problem. Furthermore, it does not disqualify Weber's analysis at all. As such, we should resist attempts to show that Weber's work is actually about trust (see e.g. Sztompka 1999:45).

not yet today and we might understand the past in terms of specific events that have happened before but not today. Continuities are always experienced in the present and events only in the past and future. In other words, events need the *change of time* to realise themselves, while continuities are 'independent' of time (Luhmann 1968:11). If time is therefore a defining dimension for trust, we have to assume that expectations of specific future events to become present – the *future-present* – are central. Indeed, trust as inherently oriented to future events seems to be the dominant position in the literature. In contrast, expectations of the continuity of the present into the future – the *present-future* – is perceived as a *source* of trust in terms of experience-based probabilities and expectations of normality.³⁰ Such analysis, however, is unhelpful on two accounts.

First, it underestimates the radical notion of modern risks. Modern risks surface not just because modernity is inherently future-oriented, but because of possible discontinuity between past and future. As such, what makes modernity so risky is that the future in the present is radically open and the past of little help. Committing in the present to expectations of continuity (present-future) might just as well be understood as expecting certain future events *not* to become the present. In other words, commitments to future-present and present-future are both risky and might both involve trust or confidence.

Second, trust relations are not inherently future-oriented. Indeed, trust can only be given and sustained in the present, not in the past or future (Luhmann 1968:13). It seems better to say that trust (and confidence) concern a *present* commitment to uncertain expectations which proof lies in the *future*.³¹ The idea that trust is inherently future-oriented must therefore be strongly qualified. Trust is not so much future-oriented, but rather proof of present trust is only possible in the future.³² Trust allows us to act in the *present* despite an uncertain future; it is not about instrumental orientation towards the *future* (Luhmann 1968:15). It seems to me that the trust literature misses this basic point because it is too preoccupied with future-oriented instrumental exchange relations. In this relation Ego is uncertain whether Alter will act in the future as promised in the present. Because this instrumental relation is sanctified as the essence of social action and social science, it seems as if trust (or confidence) is always future-oriented. However, if we take a different type of *uncertainty relation* as our starting point, e.g. the truth-act or the communicative-act things are different. In the truth-act, Ego is uncertain whether to take over the information Alter provides in the present, which validity can only proof itself in the future. The fundamental question is whether Alter is telling or capable of knowing the truth *in the present*. Similarly, in case of (de-

³⁰ I use the concepts present-future and future-present slightly different than Luhmann (see 1993b:73).

³¹ Luhmann rightly points out that not only sources but also proof of trust tend to be *symbolic* (1968:36-7).

³² Again, trust and confidence differ from probability and ontological contingency as for the latter it is not proof that lies in the future but rather its realisation, i.e. the 'becoming present of possible future', as Luhmann calls it.

institutionalised) communication Ego is uncertain whether he rightly understands the communicated meaning of the present context, relation, or intentions of Alter, which can only prove itself in the future (Seligman 1997:28ff). The fundamental question is whether Ego understands Alter as intended *in the present*. In short, trust is not inherently future-oriented, but its proof is. In different words, risks are inherently future-oriented (Luhmann 1993a:140).

Although time is an important dimension to understand trust, it is not the main organising principle to analyse social trust relations. Instead, it might be analytically more lucid to first differentiate between the expressive and instrumental dimension, not only of trust but of all social relations (see also chapter 4). Both instrumental and expressive values are experienced in the present, but both have a different relation with time. A social relation, we can say, is instrumental when its inherent meaning or value is related to an external goal. So, I only 'value' our relation as a means for satisfying my exogenous preferences. On the other hand, a social relation is expressive to the extent that the relation is not valued as a means to a goal, but as a goal in itself – indeed, especially in relation to how I understand my 'meaningful being-in-the-world'. We can see that not just the exchange relation, but also the truth-act or the communicative-act can be instrumental. If true, it holds for all types of uncertainty-relations that the 'real' meaning or value of the relation is exogenous to this relation. However, we can also perceive all these relations in terms of an expressive dimension. Indeed, all kinds of *symbolic actions* can be expressive of the relation in question: the promise in an exchange relation, the pledge in a truth-act or other-regardingness in communication. These acts are expressive of expectations concerning the relationship itself – of endogenous expectations.

When we subsequently introduce time, we can see that both dimensions have a different time-perspective. The instrumental dimension is inherently future-oriented and, as a consequence, is emptying the present of 'meaning', i.e. of expressive meaning (Luhmann 1968:16). This, of course, is part of Weber's critique of modernity in which death itself becomes meaningless (2004a:13). Modernity, with its symbolic media, is precisely what makes such future orientations possible but also *necessary*.³³ 'Real' meaning or value lies as a promise in the future, not in the present. When one longs for a specific future event in the instrumental dimension (future-present), this is different for the expressive dimension in which one longs for a future that is a continuation of today's meaning and Self-understanding (present-future).

³³ The inherent paradox, however, is that this does not mean that modernity produces things that *last* in the future. Modernity might be future-oriented but also aware of the contingency of the future – tomorrow everything we know today might already be outdated. As such, the present is not only instrumentalised but is also the only thing 'tangible'.

The point is that a social relation might possibly contain instrumental and expressive dimensions *simultaneously* and that both these instrumental and expressive dimensions have a different relationship with time. The instrumental dimension concerns the future-present and the expressive dimension the present-future. The next step, then, is not just to introduce the dimension of time, but also of *uncertainty* or agentic-risk. We have already discussed how we can commit to such risk 'as if' we are certain. Indeed, the differentiation between trust and confidence or between internally sanctioned and externally sanctioned assurance seems to parallel the differentiation between the instrumental and expressive dimension. This is true to the extent that trust is based upon the expressive dimension of a social relation – trust expresses the expressive dimension.³⁴ In other words, a relation that is *purely* instrumental can never be a trust relation. Similarly, confidence is expressive of the instrumental dimension. However, and importantly, it does not hold the other way around. An instrumental relation is not necessarily a relation of confidence nor is an expressive relation necessarily a relation of trust.

6.1.10 Dimensions of Social Relations: Normative/Cognitive

The final and most crucial step is to introduce the normative/cognitive dimension. This dimension becomes most visible if we study how actors deal with disappointment. In trust and confidence we commit ourselves to agentic risks *as if* we are certain, which means that in case of disappointment *blame* has to be appointed. The way in which this is done might or might not lead to an adjusting learning process. In other words, in light of some disappointments we cognitively adjust expectations, while in other cases we counter factually hold on to them. The way we process disappointments, then, discloses possible normative dimensions of trust.

For both trust and confidence it holds that the blame for disappointment might be internalised, i.e. we blame our own judgement. We should not have trusted him or should not have been so confident. Disappointed expectations might be due to the fact that we had the 'wrong' expectations and now we feel like a 'fool'. This, as discussed before, is partly dependent on social expectations of rationality. For sure, self-blame eats away at one's self-confidence and seems to warrant a more cautious approach the next time, i.e. one needs more assurance.

In case of *confidence* a specific interesting way to deal with disappointment is to blame Alter for being *irrational*. Although Ego might be astonished by the irrational action of Alter it does not lead him to perceive the world or himself any differently. He might try to convince Alter to act rationally or he might avoid Alter altogether, but it does not necessitate Ego to change his

³⁴ As such, we should refuse the tendency in the literature to use the instrumental/expressive dimension to differentiate between 'exchange' and 'communal' trust or between 'instrumental' and 'social' trust (V. Braithwaite 1998:53; Tyler 1998:269).

understanding of Self or world as the disappointment was an irrational act. Alter does not harm Ego's understanding as he is clearly insane or stupid. In other words, Ego only has to cognitively adjust his expectations of Alter. For sure, insanity or irrationality itself might be threatening as it threatens rational expectations and all forms of communication. Precisely because irrationality lies outside the rational world – because insanity is situated in the unknown – it is more of a danger than a risk. We might hypothesise that with the rise of modernity and risk we should expect a change in the social perception of the insane and the irrational. We would expect the removal of the insane from public life (Giddens 1991:160).

In case of trust we deal differently with disappointment. Just as in the case of confidence, Ego might blame Alter for the disappointment. However, in the case of trust Alter is not irrational, but he is *immoral*. This kind of blame shows the *subjective* normative dimension of trust. We can explain this subjective normativity because trust is based upon internally-sanctioned assurances. This means that Ego trusts Alter because they both feel a duty of responsibility to the normative order of their relationship – e.g. to friendship. If Ego trusts Alter to do something and he deflects, the disappointment is not so much about the consequential costs, but how it affects the meaning of their relationship. Disappointment forces Ego not simply to adjust his understanding of Alter (as a friend), but also of the meaning of their relationship (of friendship) and, indeed, of his self-understanding (of being a friend). Different from the irrational act, this is a more profound and encompassing necessity, because the immoral act is not an irrational act, but a rational and depraved act that takes advantage of the vulnerability of the relation, i.e. of the fact that trust is only internally-sanctioned (Lagenspetz 1992:10). Alter is *responsible* for hurting Ego, which cannot be blamed on insanity. The fact that someone can hurt our interests in a situation in which we show our vulnerability and dependence because we committed ourselves to the responsibility of the other is the core foundation of the subjective normativity of trust. In other words, to paraphrase Wolfe, we are not social because we are moral, but we are moral because we are social (Misztal 1996:19; Wolfe 1989).

An immoral act, then, deeply hurts our understanding of the other, the relation and our being-in-the-world (Luhmann 1968:33). We feel betrayed. Without a doubt, then, most disappointments are counter factually absorbed. This means, on the one hand, that Ego holds on to his expectations of friendship with Alter, despite disappointments. This might be achieved by some form of 'cognitive dissonance' or by externalising blame to outsiders. In the latter case, Alter was not so much immoral as that he showed weakness in his conflict with external immoral forces. It resonates with the old traditions of the 'weakness of the flesh' or 'akrasia'. In a society of trust we would expect less emphasis on insanity but on 'delinquency', i.e. on explaining immorality not in

terms of nature but nurture. On the other hand, when the friendship cannot be sustained or rationalised in face of too traumatic disappointments, we tend not to adjust our expectations of what it means for us to be a friend or of our own judgements but counterfactually hold on to them: Alter *ought to* have acted differently.

However, we need to differentiate such subjective normativity from the objective kind. Indeed, when Alter commits himself by means of a promise to the normative order of an economic or political relation and subsequently breaks this promise, he is breaking the *socially valid* normative expectations (Offe: 1999:52; Kaina 2008:514). However, if Ego *did not trust* Alter anyway, his subsequent normative indignation is of a rather superficial kind.³⁵ Ego does not have to adjust his understanding of Alter, of the relation or of himself to this disappointment. Alter is at most impolite, 'offending' or 'inappropriate' (Misztal 1996:21), but he proves what Ego already expected. In other words, an act of promise might signal objective normative expectations, it does not necessarily signal trust or subjective normativity. As such, in contrast to Luhmann, we must look beyond the mere external appearances of symbolic acts of trust – *the subjective world does matter*.

When we return to confidence, we might also perceive a different form of coping with disappointment. Instead of blaming the irrationality of Alter, Ego might blame the *external sanctions* that provided him with assurance in the first place. Indeed, Ego expected Alter to act in a certain way because he was 'forced' to by structures of accountability and control. It is not irrational for Alter, then, to try to circumvent these structures if rationally possible – if he can get away with it. If Ego cannot blame Alter, he can be disappointed in the external assurances. Ego might deal with this external disappointment in two ways.

First, the defection of Alter tells Ego something about apparent *effectiveness* (probability) of the external structures of assurance. In this guise of probability, then, the single disappointment, then, might just be *bad luck*. It does not necessarily change Ego's course of action for the next time. In other words, just as irrationality, bad luck does neither force Ego to cognitively adjust his expectations nor to counter factually hold on to them. Continued disappointment, however, must lead to a *cognitive* adjustment of the effectiveness of socially valid expectations. In other words, Ego must adjust his *knowledge* about objective probability. Decreasing probability leads to increased *contingency*. In the literature, this increased contingency is foremost translated to the rising awareness of the 'individualisation of risk'. Instead of emphasising irrationality or insanity, such

³⁵ A broken promise is often strategically used by veining normative outrage. However, complex psychological mechanisms often seem at work as this artificial outrage might transform in genuine (subjective) normative outrage. It might turn in to 'real' indignation when one's initial faked reaction is not taken seriously. The argument, then, goes something like this: although I was not really hurt, you could not have known that and the fact that you subsequently ignored my fake-feelings was indeed hurtful. In other words, it seems to fall into that category where offenders transfigure into victims.

awareness will lead to an emphasis on anxiety, *Angst* or alienation (Luhmann 1988:99, 1968:77; Sztompka 1999:116; Giddens 1990:50). In a non-confident society we would not expect the social exclusion of the insane, but the rise of 'therapy' in order 'to keep going' (Giddens 1991:179).

Second, the disappointment of rational Alter might not signify a decrease in probability, but Ego might *blame* others for the apparent ineffectiveness of the external assurances. It is not Alter that is to blame as he acted rational, but others for not controlling Alter, holding him accountable or, indeed, for not making the right rules. In short, not Alter is to blame, but the 'controllers'. By confidently committing to Alter, Ego has to depend upon these controllers to do what he expects them to do. As such, confidence often implies a second relation not between Ego and Alter, but between Ego and a 'third-party'. How this relation is perceived, whether in terms of confidence, probability or, indeed, *trust* really depends on the circumstances. However, it does mean that in this secondary relation confidence might be related after all to trust and normativity.

Finally, if Ego can cope with disappointment by blaming himself, Alter or Third-parties, this process is additionally complicated by the fact that Alter or Third-parties can also *react* to Ego's disappointment. If anything, the social processes and mechanisms open for processing disappointments are especially important for trust. The literature seems more occupied with the search for sources of trust – i.e. the answer to the question of *why* we trust – instead of searching for sources that can process disappointment, i.e. the answer to the question of *how* we continue to trust despite disappointments (Luhmann 1988:95). Trust might be continued despite disappointment if the other *communicates* self-reflexivity (learning) and new assurances; if he shows guilt, shame or repentance; or if he shows resipiscence or rebirth through (self-)punishment. Such *symbolic actions*, it seems to me, are especially important to understand the continuity of trust in political organisations or systems. The most prominent one being abdication of the leader or replacement of government by opposition.

6.1.11 Conclusion on Trust

I have tried to get some grip on the concept of trust, not so much to provide a general theory of trust, but foremost to understand its normative dimension and to provide some boundaries of trust – trust is not everything. However, if trust plays a role in politics this might explain its *subjective normative validity* even when political legitimacy is inherently *symbolic*. We might explain subjective normativity without a need to ground political legitimacy in unconditional truth or self-discipline. As such, I will end this chapter by analysing the possible role of trust at the four analytical levels of the coordinative political system. If there is one thing, however that we should learn from our exploration of trust and confidence, it is that all these dimensions and perceptions can be

simultaneously present in one and the same social relation (see figure 6.1). To study trust-relations empirically means that one has to be open and sensitive to its multi-dimensional, complex, shifting and plural character. There are no easy answers.

	Value	Time	Uncertainty	Cognitive/Normative
Social Relation	Instrumental	Future-present	Confidence	Bad Luck Irrational Ineffective <i>Self-blame</i>
	Expressive	Present-future	Trust	Akrasia Impolite Immoral

Fig. 6.1 – Different analytical dimensions of a social relation

6.2. Trust and Politics as Coordination

We have seen that trust can be a possible explanation of subjective normative validity. Analysing the possible role of trust in politics as coordination is no easy matter. Luhmann, for one, argues that he finds it difficult to perceive if and where trust might play a role in politics (1968:70). In what follows, I emphasise the *possible* role of trust in politics by analysing specific *risks* that surface at each of the four analytical levels we have distinguished before: politics as legitimate power or symbolic value (value sphere), as social system (social organisation), as social interaction (social relations) and politics in relation to personal system (individuals). These risks concern the risks of contingency, ineffectiveness, indeterminacy, dependency and the risk of self-disappointment.

6.2.1 Symbolic Media and the Risk of Contingency

All symbolic media entail a truth-claim which makes it possible to understand the world in a specific sense and, as a consequence, makes it possible to act and to understand oneself in that world. In the former chapter we have argued that validity (truth) is self-referential and symbolic only. The problem of this symbolic nature of media, as we have seen, is that there is no way to validate the validity of symbolic media by the sheer fact that a medium cannot validate its own validity. One cannot proof reason with reason, truth with truth, law with law, money with money or legitimate power with legitimate power. Weber problematises this symbolic foundation of social systems primarily in terms of the difficulty it presents for the 'meaning of life'. His 'solution' is that one has to face this modern fate, to face the inherent symbolic nature of validity, and to choose one's 'demon' and obey it (2004a:31). Meaning is a choice. One can find meaning in choosing to be a dutiful politician, scientist, economic entrepreneur, lawyer or bureaucrat despite the lack of transcendent truth. If there is any risk involved in this choice, it is the always looming threat of meaninglessness.

However, we might also say that the inherent problem of symbolic media is not so much the problem of meaning as the *problem of contingency* – a problem that seems to be central in the strand of literature organised around the concept of ‘risk-society’ (Beck 1992; Giddens 1990:36ff.; Sztompka 1999:38ff; Luhmann 1993b). The problem of contingency points to the risk that what is valid today might be invalid tomorrow (Luhmann 1968:79; Giddens 1990:39). It is not about validity (truth) per se, but about the shifting boundaries between validity and invalidity in *time*. This literature is foremost concerned with the symbolic medium of truth or expertise and defines the risk-society not in opposition to a security-society but in terms of ‘high intensity risks’ (Giddens 1990:125). High-risks are related to ‘high technologies’ (Luhmann 1993b:89) and connote the situation that *if* things go wrong because truth turned out to be untruth – however improbable – the disaster is so inconceivable it threatens the very existence of society (Beck 1992:22). Society itself is the ‘laboratory’ of a science that creates risks that are ‘de-bounded’ from time, space and social responsibility by the sheer scale and ‘irreversibility’ of possible disasters foreclosing any scientific *learning* process or social mechanism of *insurance* (Luhmann 1993b:89, 95; Beck 1992:22-3,69; 2002:41). In other words, high risks threaten to destroy the very social system that produces them. In contrast, normal ‘low-risks’ are ‘individualised’ risks that can be absorbed by the social system – although not necessarily by the individual (Luhmann 1968:76; Giddens 1990:114-5). However, and importantly, *both* types of risk are inherent to truth or expertise itself because contingency cannot be controlled by truth or expertise. “Truth is ... no criterion for truth” (Luhmann 1993b:78). Indeed, Popper’s concept of *post hoc* falsification is an affirmation of this condition in the positivist sciences (Luhmann 1968:25; 1993b:81; Beck 1992:166).

The world, then, is not only disenchanted but also inherently contingent and risky (Giddens 1991:28). As such, it is not just the discovery of the symbolic nature of validity and the problem of meaning, as in the work of Weber, but also the discovery of the inherent contingency of validity (truth) that makes modern life problematic. The problem of truth is taken to its extreme in the literature that emphasises the ‘postmodern condition’ (Eliot 2002:309; Lyotard 1984; Bauman 1994), while literature dealing with the latter problem of risk emphasises reflexive or late modernity (Luhmann 1993b:12; Giddens: 1990:48; 1991:3; Beck 1992:9ff.). It concerns the difference between the irrationality of rationality and the limitations of rationality. Despite the polemics the root cause is the same: the symbolic nature of truth.

Late-modernity, then, concerns the inherent awareness of the contingency of symbolic media in the time-dimension. Yet, this risk of contingency must especially be understood in terms of *incommunicability* or *uncontrollability* (Beck 2002:40). This becomes apparent if we look at the medium of law or legitimate power. Both are counter factual media, which means that in principle

they are non-contingent in time. That the boundary between legal/illegal or political/non-political are contingent nevertheless is due to the fact that they can be changed by decision-making processes. The risk of contingency in politics and law, then, has more to do with the *risk of the tyrannous sovereign* (Luhmann 1975:81). Indeed, the whole history of liberal political thought can be understood as an attempt to rationally control and domesticate the sovereign in terms of law and the *institutionalisation of distrust* (Warren 1999a:1; Sztompka 1999:140; 2001:374; Ruscio 1999:640; Oskarsson 2010:423).³⁶ Although the boundaries between truth and un-truth of power and law might still shift, these shifts can be more or less controlled at the level of political *organisation*, i.e. they might be system internally absorbed (Luhmann 1968:71-2).

The problem of contingency at the level of symbolic media, however, does not concern risks that can be system internally be absorbed and controlled – i.e. individualised – but risks that are left for the environment or other systems to absorb.³⁷ It concerns what is known in economics as *externalities*. When we look at the economic value sphere, it is quite obvious that even if money, like expert truth, is a factual medium, the shifting boundary of value/valueless is part and parcel of the economic self-understanding. There is nothing exceptionally risky in the fact that what may be valuable today might be worthless tomorrow. These are normal and individualised economic risks. Externalities, however, are costs that are exported to the environment because they cannot be expressed in terms of symbolic money. Externalities are economically *uncontrollable* costs because money ‘cannot see what it cannot see’ (Luhmann 1993b:76). As such, to the extent that such uncontrolled costs constitute high-risks that threaten the economic system or ‘society’ in general – e.g. through environmental depletion, social deprivation or by mortgaging future generations – they always come as a surprise. In the same vain, the risk of scientific truth can also be understood in terms of uncontrollable contingent truth *externalised* by means of technology to its environment where costs have to be absorbed.³⁸

This should enable us to understand the risk of uncontrollable contingency at the level of legitimate power and law. These risks concern the uncontrolled ‘costs’ of legal and political coordination left for the environment to absorb. Most literature perceives these kind of legal-political externalities in terms of the relation between the national state and the international

³⁶ Pettit argues convincingly that what makes republican thought distinctive is that it acknowledges that only control is not enough and that ‘virtue’ and ‘trustworthiness’ are as important (1998:302). In this line it might also be argued that because the domesticated sovereign is a decision-making agent, individuals can cope with these *agentic*-risks through confidence or even trust. Claims that a sovereign can never be trusted are ill-founded, although it is a different matter whether one *should* trust a sovereign.

³⁷ As discussed in the former chapter, in Luhmann’s account individuals are analytically outside social systems and, as such, individualisation of risks should also be considered as a form of externalisation. The point, then, is that this kind of externalisation does not threaten the social system as such.

³⁸ With respect to expertise we might argue that social systems at the organisational level can be grasped as expert *technologies* themselves.

community or global society.³⁹ However interesting and important, these kinds of externalities are not inherent to the symbolic medium of law or legitimate power, but concern *spatial* boundaries of legal-political organisation, which, in principle, can be solved, i.e. controlled.⁴⁰

The risk of contingency of law at the level of symbolic medium seems to concern two mechanisms. First, precisely because law is counterfactual and therefore non-contingent in time, it can hardly deal with externalities and contingencies that are inherently caught up in time. Law has great difficulty to appoint responsibility in relation to externalities (Beck 1992:63) or liability in relation to contingency (Luhmann 1993b:61). In face of these kinds of risk, the risk of law concerns 'organised irresponsibility' (Beck 1992:33 footnote 3). Organised irresponsibility should, in contrast to Beck, not only be understood as the difficulty for law to locate responsibility for contingency, but also as the risk that law ascribes responsibility for contingency where none can be taken. When this risk is paradoxically due to the *non-contingent* nature of law, a second risk of law concerns its own validity claim. Law coordinates social action in terms of generalised formal rules. The externalised 'cost' of regulation concerns its 'parasitic' relation to informal, particular and diverse practices. Many examples can be provided of how law changes social practices but not in the way desired, necessitating more rules and rules about rules or more controllers and controllers of controllers. Once law has touched a social practice, it seems as if there is no way back to the old 'unregulated' situation. As such, "an 'inflationary spiral' of increasingly formal relations" (Sitkin & Roth 1993:367) externalises costs to informal social practices which might destroy social meaning and practical wisdom (Scott 1998:309ff.). In short, the survival of the legal system "rests on social processes that it cannot reproduce" (Scott 1999:274).

Although this latter risk of law cannot be denied, precisely because its function is to reduce social complexity, when it comes to the associated debate about the relation between trust and organised distrust we must not draw overhasty conclusions. It is often claimed that the more we rely upon organised distrust – control and accountability – the less trust there will be (Peel 1998:316; Misztal 2001:375). However, it seems as if trust and organised distrust or trust and confidence are not conflictive so much as *asymmetrical*. This means that problems with confidence can be compensated by trust, but not vice versa. Indeed, trust is vulnerable to suspicion of strategic action. But at the same time, trust is also dependent upon a shared normative order which might just as well be formalised in rules or law (Sitkin & Roth 1993:374). Sanctions might not communicate

³⁹ At this level we might analyse how nation states externalise diverse social, political and economic risks to the international environment, but also vice-versa, how globalised markets or transnational governance externalise risks to national states.

⁴⁰ As a general critique of Beck's analysis of risk society (1992; 2002) we might say that he is analytically sloppy in differentiating between the level of symbolic media (from modernity to reflexive modernity) and the level of social organisation (from industrial society to risk-society) (see also Eliot 2002:309).

motivation or strategic interests but might rather symbolise the normative order. Furthermore, trust is also 'easier' in an institutionalised context that reduces risks (Ruscio 1999:652). As such, the relation between confidence and trust or between organised distrust and trust is complicated and context dependent.

Where it comes to externalities of legitimate power its specific problem is not so much its second coding in law, but rather its relation to decision-making. Decision-making, as we have seen, is inherently risky; or, vice versa, risks are inherently related to decision-making. As such, we might say that political decision-making concerns taking risks which either have to be internally or externally absorbed. Although legitimate power coordinates this decision-making process this does not mean that the *final* binding decision by the sovereign is the sole decision in which risks are taken. Legitimate power coordinates a whole chain of decision-making in which every single decision is a risky one. Although the final decision receives the 'seal of legitimacy' this hardly reflects the process of 'selectivity' present in the decision-making process (Luhmann 1968:70). The risk consciously committed to in the final legitimate decision, then, can never include the sum of all these risks taken. In other words, the risk of political power concerns *uncontrolled risk-taking* or 'organised irresponsibility'. The political system comes close to Giddens' description of modernity as "a runaway engine of enormous power" (1990:139) as legitimate power cannot control the risks taken in the decision-making processes it makes possible, let alone in society at large (Luhmann 1993b:81).

In conclusion, at the level of symbolic value or value sphere we should analyse trust in relation to the specific risks at this level: the risk of contingency or uncontrollable externalities. Each medium – including legitimate power – seems to include such uncontrolled risks that have to be dealt with by other systems allowing the possibility of high-risks threatening society itself. Systemic risks threaten the *security* – the reduction of complexity and contingency – the different systems provide. In other words, systemic risks concern the threat that the contingency and complexity of the 'environment' invades the systems. Another word for disaster, then, is *meaninglessness*. These risks, however, are not consequences of agentic-decisions, they are an inherent part of symbolic media – they are uncontrollable *systemic risks* perceived in terms of contingency and (im)probability. This means that at this analytical level trust does not play a role.

It does not mean that these risks are not politically relevant. The awareness of uncontrollable systemic risk at the core of modern social systems might be very unsettling as these risks seem to dislodge modern society from notions of 'security'. The problem is not so much that modern society is heading towards meaningless disaster as it might well find ways to avoid it. The problem is not even that expert knowledge is necessary irrational – truth remains more probable than untruth as long as science can learn. The political problem of the 'risk society', rather, is that if

we are aware that systemic-risks are a *normal* part of modern society – that they are normal abnormal risks – we cannot go back to a belief in security (Beck 1992:79). Even if disaster is improbable “it can nevertheless happen tomorrow, and tomorrow it can happen once again tomorrow” (Luhmann 1993b:49). We are dispelled from a world in which things can be genuinely true or reliable. The point of the risk society is not so much, as Beck seems to argue, that it connotes a ‘speculative age’ in which every possible disaster *could* become true – almost taking a postmodern turn – as that the possibility of disasters cannot be denied (Beck 1992:73). This must have political consequences.

It is especially unclear how the political system should present itself when it cannot claim to rationally control high risks, but neither can it “present its decisions for what they are – risky” (Luhmann 1993b:155-6). If there is one potent source of politicisation, it must be safety issues. Furthermore, politics can no longer present itself as the sole locus of collective ‘risk-taking’ (Beck 1992:24). Such presentation problems likely lead to legitimation problems (Luhmann 1993a:165). Whether these problems will constitute the fragmentation of truth and the loss of the legitimating force of expertise in politics (Giddens 1991:141; Beck 1992:173), let alone whether it will lead to a decentralisation of politics and the politicisation of the unpolitical (Beck 1992:186) remains to be seen (Elliot 2002:304).⁴¹ For now, it seems more likely that instead of looking our late-modern fate straight in the eye, to paraphrase Weber, we try to find psychological comfort in all kinds of social and psychological coping mechanisms, including political trust at lower levels of analysis (Giddens 1991:19).⁴² As such, it might be hypothesised that the risk of contingency *and* its awareness might explain the paradoxical phenomenon that people are disillusioned by politics but nevertheless expect much from it; or, vice versa, that politics, science or the market try to capitalise on ‘safety-issues’ and risk-anxieties they themselves create (Beck 1992:156, 23; Luhman 1993b:145-6).

⁴¹ Any genuine agenda for the solution or prevention of the risk society must be correctly understood. The risk society-literature seems to be the culmination of a much longer tradition – triggered by Weber – that tries to grapple with the ‘instrumental rationality’ of the systems of modernity (see e.g. Beck 1992:22). However, the inherent risk of expert knowledge has nothing to do with instrumental rationality per se. That would imply that we can actually have knowledge – based upon a different rationality – that is not risky but provides ‘security’. This seems to deny the radical character of risk or the radical claims of media theory. At most, one might try to replace high systemic risks with individualised risk – the goal of collective ‘self-limitation’ – in order to preserve the *possibility to learn* (Beck 1992:49, 177).

⁴² The analytical danger lurking here is that such a psychological turn allows a plethora of possible ‘coping mechanisms’ ranging from denial, apathy to radical engagement or, as already discussed, from trust, hope, and fatalism, to distrust, *Angst*, anxiety and alienation (Giddens 1990, 1991; Beck 1992). Although the basic idea of psychological coping mechanisms for ineradicable high risks seems to make analytical and empirical sense, theoretically there are so many possible functional equivalents, it seems to lose all analytical power. We should proceed with caution.

6.2.2 The Political System and the Risk of Ineffectiveness and Indeterminacy

We can also analyse trust at the level of political organisation – at the level of politics as a social action systems coordinated by legitimate power. The question whether trust has any analytical clout at the level of the political system is either denied in the trust-literature (Warren 1999a:19; Hardin 1999b:23) or remains hidden in nebulous concepts like ‘systemic trust’ (Sztompka 1999:45). This is not surprising when we consider the difficulties of perceiving what politics is in the first place. Instead, I will analyse political trust in relation to two of the most important risks at this level: the *risk of ineffectiveness* and the *risk of indeterminacy*.⁴³

Legitimate Power and the Risk of Ineffectiveness

We have analysed the risk of contingency or uncontrollable externalities inherent to the validity (truth) of symbolic media, a risk that is more commonly analysed is related to the social validity of these media, i.e. the risk of ineffectiveness. In the former chapter we analysed the problem of ineffectiveness at the level of social interaction and concluded that this risk is something that must be countered by trust organised at the level of social organisation. It is this latter claim that I further analyse in this section. The risk of ineffectiveness at the level of social organisation can also be perceived as a high-risk as it threatens to destroy the social validity of social systems upon which our understanding of world and Self, of past and future depends. Different from the high-risks of contingency, however, these risks are not consequences of uncontrollable externalities and the inability of the environment to absorb them, but they are *internal* to the social systems themselves. In the former, high-risks concern the intrusion of the environment into the social system, in the latter, high-risks concern the collapse of the system into its environment. The high-risk of political and legal ineffectiveness, then, concerns anarchy and lawlessness.

In the previous chapter, we already discussed that the effectiveness of symbolic media depends upon the successful communication of normal, probable and valid expectations. Self-referential or symbolic media are not about validity (truth) but about social validity which explains its inherent vulnerability. The common claim, then, is that effectiveness despite this vulnerability necessitates trust or confidence (Parsons 1963b:237, 1963a:47). However, a more careful analysis is called for. For one thing, in day-to-day life we normally do not trust money to be effective. Rather, we expect that the ineffectiveness of money is highly improbable and, hence, we routinely gamble and take a risk. Indeed, as symbolic media do not have agency, the risk of their ineffectiveness concerns probability and contingency and therefore there is no role for trust or confidence. However,

⁴³ At least one other important risk can be recognised and labelled as the ‘risk of sovereignty’ or the ‘risk of tyranny’. Because I have shortly discussed this risk above (and more historical-theoretical in chapter 2) and because the risk of indeterminacy encompasses this risk of sovereignty, I will not discuss it separately here.

this is only one side of the story as the problem of effectiveness is ultimately a problem of communication, of the *mutual acceptance* of social validity. As such, we have to commit ourselves to expectations about actions and decisions of other *agents*. In short, the effectiveness of symbolic media, including legitimate power, is a public good constituting a 'collective action dilemma' (Olson 1971:10; Ostrom 1998:1). In what follows, I analyse the role of trust and confidence in relation to the social validity of legitimate power perceived as a collective action problem.⁴⁴

From a rational action theoretical perspective (RAT), we know we ought to cooperate, not because we feel an inner-sanctioned duty to obey – as in Weber – but because we cognitively know it is in the collective interest if everybody obeyed this norm and it is against our individual interest if nobody does. The basic tenet RAT concerning collective action problems, however, is that strategically rational actors will *unconditionally* ensure a less than optimal outcome, as for example in the famous Prisoner's Dilemma.⁴⁵ The outcome is not only non-optimal for the collective but also for the individual 'players'. Man, it seems, is a 'rational fool' (Sen 1977:336). Because of this unconditionality the only solution for collective action problems seems to be an external third-party authority that sanctions free-riding and organises "incentives for internalising group gains or losses" (Walker & Ostrom 2009:92). Sanctions must motivate or force rational actors to cooperate. The free-riding deviant, then, is not irrational man but rational man capable of finding a loop-hole.

In contrast, if we assume that actors are purely 'other-regarding' – e.g. in terms of Hume's sympathy – the result will *unconditionally* be a social optimal outcome (Sen 1996:60; 1977:326).⁴⁶ Even if such other-regarding 'preference-function' is theoretically not contradicting strategic rational action, it does seem to contradict the self-understanding of economic man. This self-understanding, then, says nothing about rationality but rather about his understanding of human nature.⁴⁷ But we might agree that most people are no saints beyond their social sphere of intimacy.

⁴⁴ The obvious question is when the risk of ineffectiveness is perceived in terms of objective risks and when in terms of agentic-risk. There is no reason why they cannot be analytically valid simultaneously. However, we might say that the less these risks worry us the more we can *take* them on as objective-risks and gamble. Vice versa, the more these risks worry us, the more we need to *cope* with them as agentic-risks allowing trust and confidence. The answer, then, seems to lie in (social or personal) feelings of crisis and degrees of salience.

⁴⁵ This is not so much a consequence of actors being irrational or short-sighted, but because there remains a contradiction between 'cognitive rationality' and 'instrumental rationality' (Walliser 1989:9), between 'epistemic' and 'instrumental' rationality (Kelly 2003:612) or between 'independent choices' and 'interdependent situations' (Ostrom 1998:3).

⁴⁶ These are sometimes called 'Kantian-actors' (Walker & Ostrom 2009:101).

⁴⁷ This is of course a fairly problematic claim as preferences are per definition exogenous to all economic theory as economics – at least in its mainstream orientation – is a behaviouralistic science for which the subject is a black box. Many have already commented on its problematic and tautological assumptions of 'revealed preferences' (Sen 1973:241,258; 1977:322; 1992:495-8; Hubin 2001:451). This problematic foundation, however, does not deny the heuristic analytical quality of RAT but rather denies its claims of causal social explanation.

In any case, if political power is a solution to collective action problems at all, the difficulty is the fact that legitimate power and law are in itself problematic public goods. Traditional RAT cannot provide a solution for this problem. Between the self-regarding egoist and the other-regarding saint we might, however, conceive of a different type of preference, something Sen has analysed in the 'assurance-game function' (Sen 1996:59). This means that actors are aware of the social dilemma and are willing to cooperate *if* they are *assured* others will do so as well. Cooperation or, in the political case, obedience becomes a *conditional* act. It means that we are willing to cooperate, but that we are neither saint nor fool: others must cooperate as well.

If actors have conditional other-regarding preferences, the only thing needed for collective cooperation is assurance. They do not have to be *motivated*, but their motivations must be *communicated*. In that sense, sanctions might still be particularly helpful as symbolically communicating socially valid motivations or interests (Walker & Ostrom 2009:104ff.). Sanctions communicate that all actors are objectively expected to have an *interest* in cooperation (Ruscio:1999:642; Ostrom 1999:8-10). This, of course, is no actual guarantee, but if everybody would have conditional other-regarding preferences these externally sanctioned assurance might be enough for collective action – enough to take a 'leap of faith'. As such, cooperation might be explained in terms of *confidence*. Sanctions, then, are no longer perceived as a source of motivation but only as a means to punish the *irrational* deviant in order to communicatively restore assurance.

There is, unfortunately, one fundamental problem with this account. Sanctions communicate objective expectations of strategic-rational *self-regarding* motives, which conflict with the presumption that all actors have conditional *other-regarding* preferences. This is no problem at the analytical level of social inter-action – whether the other is conditionally other-regarding, external sanctions might provide enough assurance to commit to him – but is a problem at the level of collective action systems. We cannot communicate strategic self-regarding motives and expect all others to be conditionally other-regarding at the same time. The core problem, then, is not explaining why externally-sanctioned assurances might be enough for conditionally other-regarding actors to cooperate in confidence; the core problem is *why we expect others to be conditionally other-regarding* in the first place

The crucial question, then, is how we can explain *expectations* that others are conditional other-regarding and not self-regarding interest maximisers (Ruscio 1996:464). Some scholars explain this motivation as an innate consequence of human social evolution (Ostrom 1997: 2,10; Walker & Ostrom 2009:91; Scholz 1998:159; Scholz & Lubell 1998a:905). In other words, conditional other-regarding and not unconditional egoism is our *genuine* human nature. Sen, on the other hand, explains this conditional social orientation in terms of a *moral* commitment autonomously from

types of utility-functions (Sen 1985:188; 1973:256; 1996:56).⁴⁸ However, both arguments miss the crucial point. We do not only have to explain why we *feel* a conditional duty towards others, but also why we *expect* others to feel this conditional duty as well. This is the core problem and the core problem is communication. The answer, it seems to me, is that we *expect* others to be conditionally other-regarding because we *trust* them to be committed to the vulnerable normative collective order. Indeed, precisely because we expect that others also trust us, we feel committed to the normative order and the conditional prohibition of free-riding. In other words, we do not trust or commit ourselves to others *because* our human nature is inherently conditional other-regarding or because we are inherently moral beings; rather, *because* we trust each other, we feel and expect others to feel an obligation to the collective normative order. Indeed, we often *have* to trust each other. Trust as risk-taking is as much an explanation of collective action as collective action is an explanation for trust as risk-coping. In any case, conditional-other-regarding motivations are not a precondition for trust (Ruscio 1999:650) but its consequence. In other words, preferences are not exogenously given but depend on the social context.⁴⁹

If trust explains why we expect conditional other-regardingness, we might perceive that sanctions are neither sources of motivation nor sources of confidence communicating objective interests, but sources that objectively express the collective normative order. The deviant is no longer rational or irrational man, but he is immoral man. The sanctions do not guarantee or assure cooperation, but express socially valid *normative* order (Walker & Ostrom 2009:107). They are the 'presentational base' that everything is 'in proper order' (Lewis & Weigert 1985a:973). Collective action crumbles if *trust* fails, not necessarily when sanctions fail. This trust, furthermore, is not geared towards the third-party enforcer but to the collectivity itself. It is not *vertical trust* that explains the effectiveness of legitimate power or law but *horizontal trust* (Offe 1999:81).⁵⁰ Horizontal trust, then, is internally-sanctioned mutual commitment of the group to its collective normative order (Lagenspetz 1992:13).

To cooperate or to obey counterfactual legitimate power or law in a modern state or in a bureaucratic organisation, then, means to commit to the risk of ineffectiveness – the risk of being a fool – and is expressive of trust in one's fellow citizens or colleagues. Of course, we do not know our

⁴⁸ Sen cannot explain, however, how we are to compromise between these two incommensurable values.

⁴⁹ That economic theories have too little 'structure' has been claimed many times before (Sen 1977:335; Granovetter 1985; Beckert 1996; 2003; Krippner 2001).

⁵⁰ Some scholars use this separation between vertical and horizontal trust to distinguish between 'political' and 'social' trust (Newton 1999:170ff.; 2007:344; Newton & Norris 2000; Pharr 2000:199; Zmerli & Newton 2008:707). Social trust, in its turn, is often perceived as 'generalised' trust distinguished from 'specific' trust (Sztompka 1999:63; Oskarsson 2010:424). The latter distinction often implies a link with Easton's two-typed political support. I will not analyse this confusion in detail, but do want to make a clear statement: the relation between political trust and political output is complex. To perceive it as a simple causal model is to misunderstand the essence of trust (Cleary & Stokes 2009:316; Levi 1998:88).

fellow citizens personally. Yet, we can nevertheless trust our fellow citizens to feel responsible for the collective counterfactual order of law and power because we share a commitment to a shared and vulnerable fate, whether we like it or not (Offe 1999:46). Often such horizontal trust is linked to 'solidarity' (Sztompka 1999:5; Segall 2005:362). Horizontal trust, then, is expressive of a shared normative space and is not an instrumental kind of trust-relation. This trust, of course, does not come easy. The communication of internal-sanctioned assurances is based upon symbols (including sanctions) that communicate some shared collective normative order, fate or worldview, especially in terms of boundaries of *distrust*, i.e. boundaries between insiders and outsiders (Sennett 1977:265-6; Luhmann 1968:121). Horizontal trust – or 'categorical trust' (Offe 1999:63) – is therefore often based upon national, ethnic, occupational, sub-/counter-cultural *membership* or, in short, upon symbols of shared (political) identity, history or ideology that communicate socially valid *expectations* of a shared normative worldview.⁵¹

The importance of this analysis is not to claim that the social validity of legitimate power or law can solely be explained in terms of horizontal trust.⁵² Rather, the importance is that if the risk of ineffectiveness inherent in counterfactual expectations of legitimate power is coped with through horizontal trust, it allows a radically different explanation of both obedience to legitimate power and of its subjective normativity than in the work of Weber.⁵³ Obedience to law or legitimate power is no longer an unconditional duty based upon the belief in an absolute truth or based upon some form of ascetic self-discipline, rather obedience or cooperation can be explained in terms of a *conditional* duty based upon horizontal *trust*, i.e. based upon a mutual commitment to a vulnerable normative order (see also Offe 1999:69). This means that to explain subjective normative validity we no longer have to explain a belief in some ultimate truth or value, but we have to explain horizontal trust at the level of social system. Subjective valid political legitimacy is still possible even if the political system is symbolically 'suspended in mid-air'.

Trust at the level of social systems, then, gives us a radically different outlook on subjective normativity. There are, however, three disclaimers that should be stressed. First, this analysis only

⁵¹ Solidarity should therefore *not* be understood in terms of some form of value consensus, as in Durkheim or Parsons, or in terms of some emotional 'instinctive embeddedness' (Luhmann 1968:107). It concerns horizontal trust based upon *symbolically* communicated *expectations* of a shared commitment or 'group membership'; a crucial difference (Foddy and Yamagishi 2009:18). It seems likely that this kind of horizontal trust also plays a role in relation to the *risk of the tyrannous sovereign*, i.e. in relation to the vulnerability of democracy and the risk of the tyranny of the majority (Inglehart 1999b:101; Misztal 2001:374).

⁵² Indeed, we discussed in the previous chapter the importance of the social distribution of legitimate power (rights) for explaining the social validity of legitimate power – something we can now understand in terms of *confidence*. The effectiveness of legitimate power is not solely dependent – if at all – on horizontal trust but also on vertically assured confidence.

⁵³ Indeed, this coping perspective is important. Much of the literature is too preoccupied with explaining cooperation in a de-socialised context. Trust is considered to be an explanation of cooperation. But in reality – and not just in strategic games – we often do not cooperate because we trust, but trust because we cooperate.

holds for the symbolic media of legitimate power and law and not for money or truth, precisely because the former two are counterfactual media. Trust does not play a role or explain the social validity (effectiveness) of money.⁵⁴ For sure, the effectiveness of money is often understood in terms of a collective action problem. This problem looms large, for example, in times of crises when the fear of money losing its value (inflation) becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. However, in the economic system we normally do not *trust* others to hold on to their money in order to prevent a collective economic collapse.⁵⁵ Here we are talking about the social validity of money as a *factual* means of exchange. We are not talking about the social validity of money as a symbolic value that expresses the *counterfactual* economic order, i.e. the normative order of private property. Where it concerns the social validity of property, for sure, horizontal trust does play an important role (see also Lewis & Weigert 1985a:979, 1985b:466).⁵⁶

Second, this kind of subjective normativity is vulnerable. Indeed, vulnerability explains part of this normativity (Luhmann 1968:55). But it does create a paradox in modern society. Its vulnerable character poses a problem for modern society with its abstract, anonymous and 'disembedding' character. As horizontal trust cannot be enforced, collective failure – e.g. tax evasion, corruption or just slacking at one's job – always seems to forward the single response available for law and political power: more hierarchical structures of control and accountability. It concerns a shift of responsibility from horizontal relations to vertical relations. Vertical control is not expressive of trust but of distrust. As such, if control cannot enforce horizontal trust it can undermine the normativity associated with horizontal responsibility.⁵⁷ The paradoxical conclusion, then, must be that over-extensive use of law and power *undermines their own legitimacy*. It is inherently related to what we called the uncontrolled externality of law and politics, but, as it turns out, it is also an uncontrolled internal risk.

Third, this paradox has led many scholars to idealise pre-modern small-scale market-based reciprocal communities, especially in the 'social capital' debate (Warren 1999b:318ff.; Sztompka 1999:123; Ostrom 1998). However, we must be aware of at least the following problems. First, the

⁵⁴ If Luhmann claims the opposite, this is because he perceives such 'trust' as experience based probability (1968:64, 73).

⁵⁵ It seems to me that we neither trust money nor our fellow economic actors, but we normally expect that the economic system is *rational* and can, in principle, be *comprehended*. We normally expect that the economic system structures incentives in such a way that it does not contradict its own existence. An economic crisis, then, is always perceived as *irrational* – something that could (and should) have been prevented. This is possible precisely because of the system's self-understanding and self-knowledge (expertise), which is not only describing or explaining the economic system – as in the (natural) sciences – but also prescribing it.

⁵⁶ See also Beckert for a critique on Parsons' neglect of the role of normative integration in his analysis of money and economic systems (2006:175).

⁵⁷ In a field study of day-care centres Gneezy & Rustichini (2000) showed, for example, that introducing a fine for parents picking up their children too late only increased the number of parents breaking the rule while non-compliance remained at the increased level after the fine was removed.

fact that we can explain normativity in relation to collective action problems does not mean that collective optimality – e.g. Pareto-efficiency – is an *objective standard* for justice as utilitarian or economic welfare-theories want us to believe (see chapter 3). Second, especially regarding RAT's emphasis on human nature and evolutionary explanations we should be careful not to succumb to some Rousseauian idea that our true human nature is somehow corrupted by modern social systems, especially by political power. Evolutionary functional theories are always tricky, but if we want to talk evolution we can counter with Luhmann's claim that social functional differentiation was in itself a social evolutionary necessity, apparently despite our good human nature (see also Cohen 1999). Third, grounding legitimacy in terms of horizontal trust should not automatically lead to easy conclusions that the 'nation' is a prerequisite for political legitimacy as horizontal trust can be based upon different kinds of solidarity or shared normative orders.⁵⁸ In my opinion, the paradox of control has definite explanatory force, but should not lead us to long automatically for simpler times or as a justification of market over politics and the nation state over trans-national governance – to the contrary.

The Decision-Making Process and the Risk of Indeterminacy

Legitimate power at the level of political system is not only about organising the effectiveness of counterfactual expectations of power, but also 'spending power', i.e. making binding decisions. We have discussed how the decision-making process is not only coordinated by the symbolic medium of power, but additionally by a legitimation process expressive of a secondary normative order. Additional legitimations – expertise, vote and party – make the decision-making process more *indeterminate* which, as we also discussed, reduces and absorbs the specific political *risk of conflict* as it detaches, to a certain extent, binding decisions from power. Indeed, decisions are not just legitimate in terms of power, they are the *right* decisions to make. Power remains hidden in the dark, defusing possible conflict between superior and subordinate or conflict between subordinates. However, this reduction of risk comes at the cost of possible contradictions. These contradictions can concern the conflict between two normative orders, e.g. between legitimate power and expert legitimation, on the one hand, and between different legitimations on the other, e.g. between expertise and public support. The *risk of indeterminacy* – which might also be related to the presentational problems of a risk-society – concerns the risk of normative contradictions and disappointment at the level of decision-making, which must be constantly managed and countered

⁵⁸ This seems relevant especially for the problematic discussion of the legitimacy-deficits of the EU and the 'no-demos' problematic in specific (e.g. Weiler 1996, 1997; Scharpf 1997, 2006; Offe 1998; Horeth 1999; Moravcsik 2002; Follesdal & Hix 2006; Bader 2007a; Habermas 2012).

by *symbolic actions*. To analyse the role of trust in the political system, it seems to me, we must analyse the structural presence of indeterminacy in the political process of decision-making.

The decision-making process in a public administration or bureaucracy, we have argued, is coordinated by hierarchical structures of legitimate power and by the self-understanding of a bureaucracy coordinated by expertise. As such, a binding decision is not just expressive of legitimate power, it is also legitimated – is the ‘right’ decision – in terms of expert knowledge. In bureaucratic chains of decision-making actors have to take over decisions of others *as if* it were their own decision, which means that they have to commit themselves to actions of others (Murphy 1997:115). The risks involved, obviously, is the uncertainty about whether these others made the *right* decisions. This uncertainty or *agentic-risk* is non-hierarchical in a bureaucracy as it holds for both superiors and subordinates. The difficulty is that legitimate power and expertise are both socially valid in the bureaucracy and, at the same time, might conflict. The risk of a ‘wrong’ decision is therefore a structural and real probability. This difficulty expresses itself in two different ways. First, power and expertise are expected to be *normatively* separated, i.e. power ought not to dictate expert-truth (and vice versa). When it does, the two different orders or media are no longer socially differentiated. Second, in a chain of decision-making legitimate power and expertise do not necessarily share the same kind of hierarchy, i.e. the superior does not necessarily have more or similar expertise as his subordinate.

To take over the decision of someone else as if it is your own, then, is inherently risky. There are two ways of coping with this risk. First, structures of control and accountability – coordinated by legitimate power – function as externally sanctioned assurances which allow us to have *confidence* that the interests of the other are parallel to our own. This does not mean that power coordinates expertise, but power increases assurance that actors have a strategic incentive to make the right decisions. Second, instead of such strategic *organisation of distrust* bureaucrats might *trust* the decisions of others to be right based upon their mutual dependability and responsibility for their shared normative institutional space, i.e. the bureaucratic order *legitimated* by expertise (Offe 1999:70). Indeed, too much organised distrust may undermine the subjective feelings of duty and responsibility enabled by trust (O’Neil 2002:19; Sztompka 1999:145). In other words, we also have to trust trust (Lewis & Weigert 1985a:970; Gambetta 1988:213; Peel 1998:316).

In sum, in a bureaucracy coordinated by legitimate power and expertise, the risk of a wrong decision is normally coped with through confidence – based upon organised legitimate power – and trust – based upon legitimating expertise. But we should be wary of a too idealised picture of bureaucracy. For sure, most bureaucrats know – or ought to know – that many decisions are an expression of power play (the political game) and other legitimations (vote and party) and not

necessarily the 'right' decision in terms of expertise. Indeed, it would also be wrong to claim that expertise always leads to consensus. We need only to think about the constantly reoccurring conflicts between management and professionals (Realin 1986; Barley & Tolbert 1991; Abernethy & Stoelwinder 1995). *Organisational trust* understood as a mutual commitment to the normative order of decision-making, in other words, seems a very difficult accomplishment and bound to be disappointed. Does this mean that trust and the accompanying normative feelings of duty do not play a role? Does this mean that bureaucrats are acting strategically only? It seems more likely that at the level of the political organisation of decision-making processes the risk of normative disappointment of trust is a constant threat that must be continuously managed, not just by rules but by symbolic actions.

At the level of the political decision-making process in general, we might generalise, *the risk of indeterminacy* threatens *political trust* based upon mutual commitment to the normative order expressed by additional legitimations. When a governmental agency decides, for example, that a certain drug is safe, we normally expect this claim to be *true* in terms of expertise. The problem here is not the fact that expert or scientific truth is objectively risky, but that at the level of political organisation decisions are also coordinated by legitimate power and other rationales such as the common good or public support. To put it more generally, it is difficult to know whether a binding political decision is the 'right' decision as it is coordinated by different and sometimes conflicting symbolic media and legitimations. We all feel uneasy when our doctor also owns a funeral company or, less dramatic, when he is also paid by a commercial pharmaceutical company (Stepanikova et al. 2009:164ff.). Such 'role conflicts' can also be present at the level of political decision-making and will formation in terms of conflicting rationales between legitimate power and additional legitimations as well as between these legitimations themselves (Seligman 1997:29ff.).⁵⁹ Is the binding decision expressive of legitimate (or illegitimate) power, of expert rationality, of an attempt to mobilise support or of a particular common good? In other words, the inherent *paradox* seems to be that indeterminacy increases the need for trust, but the awareness of indeterminacy makes such trust more problematic.

This paradox of indeterminacy might be solved partly by substituting political trust for confidence based upon structures of accountability – upon the organisation of institutional distrust. Majone, as already discussed (see chapter 4) tries to solve the problem of political trust by placing functional bureaucratic agencies outside structures of 'democratic legitimation' (2000:289;

⁵⁹ Misztal points out that confidence is not only problematised by role conflicts but by a more cultural phenomenon that "individuals become more autonomous" from their roles (2001:376).

1997:153).⁶⁰ Such ‘horizontalisation’ of government can be understood as an attempt to raise institutional boundaries between different kinds of legitimations or different kinds of normative orders in order to reduce the risk of indeterminacy. Another contemporary proposal to solve political trust problems is to increase the *transparency* of decision-making processes (see e.g. Fung 2007; Sztompka 1999:123). However, both proposals, it seems to me, fall short of acknowledging and addressing the inherent problem of indeterminacy. In both cases the implicit assumption remains that all the different legitimations are in principle coherent and aligned. In Majone’s case, they can be separated precisely because they are coherent and in the case for transparency the idea is that more information reveals (or enforces) coherency.⁶¹ Not only would a reduction of indeterminacy reintroduce the risk of social and political conflict, these models remain inherently modernistic by denying the radical notion of complexity, indeterminacy and incoherency: there is no reason to suspect that coherency is the ‘true’ nature of politics. Structures of accountability, we must acknowledge, cannot solve inherent political trust problems created by the problem of indeterminacy. That does not, of course, mean that the organisation of accountability and confidence is not important. If anything we should not ignore or deny complexity and conflict but rather embrace it by designing decision-making process and accountability structures that are open to constant learning and adjustment as for example in ‘experimentalist’ or ‘iterative’ designs (Sabel & Zeitlin 2008; Zeitlin 2011; Bader 2001b; Engelen 2001; Bader & Engelen 2003).⁶²

Instead political risks of indeterminacy might be managed by *symbolic actions*. Symbolic actions that are negotiating and expressing shared normative orders even in the face of factual disappointments. We must think in particular of *discourses* and *dramaturgies* that express shared counterfactual frameworks while simultaneously absorbing factual disappointments, discrepancies between legitimate power and legitimations, and possible conflicts between legitimations.⁶³ Most common, it seems to me, is to present disappointments as a ‘necessary evil’ imposed by the outside world perceived as some natural force or to present disappointments as a ‘temporary aberration’

⁶⁰ For sure, Majone perceives the political trust problem to be somewhat different than the risk of indeterminacy. For Majone, as discussed, this risk is foremost one of unreliability (1997:153; 1999:4; 2000:288). However, this unreliability is in Majone’s account due to inherent conflicts between democratic and expert rationalities.

⁶¹ The idea that more transparency can remedy the problem of political trust seems to argue wrongly that all trust problems can basically be solved with more information. Transparency might help, however, to the extent that *accountability of transparency* – i.e. proving that one is transparent – might be a source of assurance, decreasing the trust-problem. It is not about transparency as such, but about being perceived as transparent. See for an empirical analysis of the political virtues of transparency Naurin 2007 and for a review of this work Netelenbos 2009.

⁶² Bader argues that such complexity-embracing designs (should) allow us to go beyond the traditional trade-off between design-by-blueprint and ‘practical learning-by-doing’ – a trade-off that is inherently related to that other unfruitful opposition between positivism and relativist scepticism (2013:3-4). They are able to do so, precisely because they are designed as processes of ‘meta-learning’ between different practices.

⁶³ This seems to parallel what Warren calls the ‘deliberative approach’ to trust (1999b:337ff.)

which can be and will be solved in the future. However framed, such discourses allow both the continuity of the mutual commitment to a normative order into the *future* and the acceptance of disappointment in the *present*. In other words, discourses allow *trust* in the decision-making process despite its indeterminacy. For sure, the (communicated) *self-perception* of the political system is that making a right decision is possible, if only as an ideal – the belief that, in principle, expertise, democratic support and the common good should all point to the same decision. If anything, all social systems understand and portray themselves as *coherent* and *rational*.⁶⁴ It seems, then, that the political system must constantly manage the risk of disappointment *and* conflict by upholding determinacy and indeterminacy, coherency and incoherency, simultaneously.

It seems, then, that for the problem of political trust an 'authentic' or trustworthy actor seems particularly effective for mobilising the necessary discourses and to manage the risk of indeterminacy at the level of political organisation (Offe 1999:61; Luhmann 1968:68). Indeterminacy and role conflicts make expectations of agency socially relevant in the first place and seem to point to the importance of political leadership. The relation between political leadership and trust, however, is complicated on two accounts. First, to what extent is it possible to trust a political leader at all? Second, the emphasis on leadership seems to blur the distinctions between charismatic domination, dramaturgical political theatre and political trust.

First, many scholars argue that one cannot trust 'anonymous' politics and therefore confine trust to face-to-face inter-personal relations. Others, however, argue that it is possible to trust politics, precisely because we have quasi-personal relations with visible political leaders that function as the symbolic 'face' of politics (Harré 1999:259; Pettit 1998:304; Luhmann 1968:71). It seems that if one perceives political representation purely in terms of an individual and instrumental relationship, political trust will indeed be difficult. First of all, you cannot trust the political representatives to take care of your individual interest as the representative does not know you or your interests. Second, if anything, the tension between campaign promises and actual political decisions looms large although not necessarily due to bad intentions. At most we might be confident about future actions or rely upon experienced-based probabilities of output-satisfaction. However, as we already discussed, the political relation might not only be instrumental but also *expressive* of interests and values. This part of the relation is not about future results (political output) but about expressing one's support for a specific normative worldview in the present independent of the consequences. These symbolic expressions of a shared normative worldview might be the internally

⁶⁴ We might say that this problem of political coherency is similar to the problem of theodicy in religion as analysed by Weber. Although the historical solutions are different, both explain much of the dynamics of religion and politics.

sanctioned basis of political trust.⁶⁵ Even if the political leader does not know my personal interests, or precisely because I do not know my personal interests in every political issue, this shared normative space allows me to trust the leader to make the 'right' decision despite indeterminacy.

Importantly, a leader cannot only express, through his mediatised actions, a shared normative commitment – something rituals and material symbols can also do – but he can also communicate *trustworthiness*. It is this specific possibility in particular that makes political leadership an effective means to manage the risk of indeterminacy *at the level of the political system*. A trustworthy leader, we might follow Weber, should not be confused with the convinced ideologist or narcissist populist. The trustworthy leader is thought to be responsible *and* dutiful, i.e. he combines the ethics of responsibility and conviction in one person (Weber 2004b). Although he might be reliable, one cannot really trust the zealous 'saint' as he does not take responsibility for the consequences of his actions – his actions are always right. Neither can one really trust a populist, who will always shift his will depending on the mood of the day.⁶⁶ A trustworthy leader must be able to oppose the will of the (party) majority if they are 'wrong' – indeed, this often seems a proof of trustworthiness. Obviously, a trustworthy leader is less difficult to trust – even for his political opponents, who might not share his political convictions but do trust his *ethical personality*.

We might recognise that such ethical leadership is inherently indeterminate itself – posited between two conflicting ethics. Communicating trustworthiness, as such, cannot be understood in simple terms and seems culturally dependent, i.e. there may be many different styles to communicate trustworthiness (Kim 2005:621ff.). But in general we might say that leadership trustworthiness seems to be caught between showing that one is 'normal' – i.e. not alienated from the concerns of daily life of ordinary citizens – and that one is 'abnormal', i.e. that one has an extraordinary sense of ethics or great 'wisdom'. Even more important, a trustworthy personality must be 'authentic', i.e. it is not a mask one can put on and off, but one's 'true' personality. Precisely at this point, trustworthiness is wedged between communicating 'conviction' and 'responsibility'.⁶⁷

Political decisions are not made by political leaders only or even primarily. As such, we should not over-emphasise the importance of political leadership in relation to the process of decision-making. However, leadership seems important to the extent that the problem of

⁶⁵ Bader rightly points out that such shared normative worldview is not some kind of consensus 'out there' or 'natural a priori', hierarchically ordering 'issues and problems' (Bader 2104). A shared normative worldview is, at least partly, the result of political articulation.

⁶⁶ This means the too simple relations between populism and contemporary 'problems of trust' must be avoided (see e.g. Offe 1999:77). It also means, vice versa, that Weber's idealised responsible leader *necessitates* trust. Without trust a responsible ethical leadership style is hardly possible as one cannot control which decision he will take. Without trust one can only hope.

⁶⁷ The difference between the external assurance of masks and the internal assurance of authenticity seems also socially and historically dependent and related to the difference between cultures of shame and guilt, which we have discussed in chapter 3.

indeterminacy becomes more apparent and political trust, as a consequence, more problematic. Symbolic political leadership, it seems, is a particular solution to the risk of risk-management of social-political conflict. However, the importance of symbolic actions and discourses should indicate that this structural 'trust-management' is anything but a well organised, controlled, flawless and coherent practice. It is not, despite the growing importance of 'loyalty marketing', 'strategic communication' or 'corporate branding' consultancies. If anything, all too visible attempts to express mutual values do not activate trust as the underlying strategic interests are too obvious.

At the level of the political decision-making processes trust can play a role and explain subjective normativity. But it is also clear that because of political indeterminacy, this trust is a complex, plural, shifting and precarious phenomenon, in need of constant attention. Reductive and simplified accounts of trust at this level, as in much of the trust literature and empirical studies, seem to miss its complicated nature. In conclusion we might wonder how this emphasis on leadership and the importance of symbolic actions allows us to distinguish between charisma, dramaturgy and trust at all. In *table 6.1*, I have tried to summarise the main analytical differences. Charisma, in Weber's account, concerns submission to extraordinary truth, whereas for trust not the notion of validity (truth) but of social validity is central. Just as any symbolic medium, the additional legitimations are also not 'true' in any inherent sense. The subjective normativity arises from trust, from the symbolic expression of a shared normative commitment and vulnerability *independent* of whether the additional legitimations are 'true'. Dramaturgy, despite its symbolic character, also remains connected to (expressive) truth but, in contrast to charisma, normative support is inherently conditional. This conditionality is explained by the introduction of time which enables us to separate the political relation between an instrumental and expressive dimension. However, and here dramaturgy really differs from trust, its conditionality rests purely upon the future-oriented quality of an instrumental relation, while the expressive relation in the present is characterised by certainty and truth. The conditionality of trust is, in contrast, based upon inherent uncertainty *in the present*. Finally, trust entails the notion of action and risk-taking, while dramaturgy emphasises passivity. The political theatre constitutes an entirely symbolic realm 'disconnected' from daily life.

	Truth	Time	Conditional	Action
Charisma	x			x
Dramaturgy	x	x	(instrumental)	
Trust		x	(uncertainty)	x

Table 6.1 – Difference between charisma, dramaturgy and trust

6.2.3 Social Interaction and the Risk of Dependency

The trust literature is much more elaborate when we consider horizontal social interactions. But we are not interested in these horizontal social relations so much as in vertical political relations. If anything, the political and legal systems are forms of externally sanctioned *assurances* that allow us to have confidence in day-to-day social relations. They allow us to commit ourselves to others without the need for trust. They are functional equivalents of trust. Although vertically organised external assurances deproblematise interactional trust-relations, it seems that in modern life we become increasingly dependent upon these organisations, structures or systems of accountability and control, precisely because they *substitute* the need for trust. These *sources* of confidence, then, might become *objects* of trust themselves (Sztompka 1999:46); especially as we cannot 'opt out' from these systems (Giddens 1991:22). The question at this level of analysis, then, is not how we cope with inter-relational risks in day-to-day life, but how we deal with the *risk of dependency* – our dependence and vulnerability to abstract, anonymous, risk-taking and difficult to control social systems under the 'perception of compulsion' (Offe 1999:57; Luhmann 1968:64).⁶⁸ In short, can we trust organised distrust?⁶⁹

We might buy, for example, industrially processed food at the local supermarket with the expectation that its safety is controlled by some opaque agency. The question, then, is not whether we trust the supermarket, but how we relate to these anonymous controllers. We might expect them to be politically controlled as well, constituting an infinite system of controls disappearing in abstractness and simultaneously allowing us to be confident in normal life (Luhmann 1968:67, 77). Similarly, in our day-to-day dependence on legal, political, market or expert systems we expect these systems to be coordinated by their respective symbolic medium. For these systems to be functional equivalents of trust in normal life, it is important that different symbolic media are normatively differentiated (Luhmann 1975:103). Based upon organised systems of control we might be *confident* that truth, expertise or legal justice is not bought with money or enforced with power.⁷⁰

It seems to me, however, that we might also trust these anonymous controllers and controllers of controllers precisely because they must know that we depend upon them – precisely because they *ought to* know our vulnerability. We can cope with the risk of dependency in normal life not just through confidence but also through trust, *even if we do not know these organisations of*

⁶⁸ For sure, at this level we can also analyse political inter-relations, for example between officials and citizens in so-called 'front-stages' or practices of 're-embedding' (Giddens 1990:83ff.). Although these relations are interesting – especially in 'de-institutionalised' settings – I feel that such analysis would be a repetition of much of what we already discussed in this chapter.

⁶⁹ Associative democracy with its experimental designs might be an institutional answer in its attempt to combine (but not unite) goals of rational learning, effectiveness and social inclusion (Bader 2013).

⁷⁰ If Luhmann seems to agree when he states that "participation in functional systems ... requires confidence, but not trust" we must be weary because Luhmann has a probabilistic understanding of confidence (1988:102).

control. The trust-literature seems to argue that this cannot be the case as it would be irrational. But not only is trust irrational in its core anyway, the literature seems once again too preoccupied with risk-taking instead of risk-coping. It is not about *knowing* but about *coping*. We often cope with the inescapable risk of dependency by trusting that the 'powers that be' take care of our interests because they are aware of our structural vulnerability and dependency and ought to feel responsible. Whether this kind of trust is rational or not, it does count as political trust and explains much of the normative outrage in case of disappointment.⁷¹ Furthermore, also for confidence it holds that we often have no real information or genuine knowledge about how systems of control actually function. We often have no clue of whether or not our confidence is warranted except for very basic assumptions. Both trust and confidence seems to be grounded upon counterfactual self-descriptions of the political-legal system, upon heuristic 'rules of thumb', 'proxies' or mimesis – not upon factual knowledge (Warren 1999c:349; Montinola 2009:286; Scholz 1998:157; Scholz & Lubell 1998b:411; Grimes 2008:530; Ostrom 1997:9; Beckert 2006:173; Keynes 2003:12.V).

In sum, the risk of dependency on abstract systems that are functional equivalents of trust in our day-to-day interactions, our enforced dependency upon pluralistic and abstract structures of control, is often *coped* with by confidence or trust. As before, this trust might constitute the foundation of the subjective validity of legitimate political power.

6.2.4 Personal System and the Risk of Self-Disappointment

Self-confidence can be a functional equivalent of trust to the extent that it lowers expectations of vulnerability. It is a form of internal assurance that absorbs uncertainty. However, we might also perceive that *self-presentation* in social relations can be a source of trust in and of itself. This means that I do not so much trust others, as I trust that others will trust me. I do not trust others, but I trust in the normative or obligatory force of trust by presenting myself 'as I am' in all its vulnerability. Hence, trust in trust – or reflexive trust (Luhmann 1968:80ff.) – is not an instrumental use of the gullibility of others so much as a possibility of instigating trust relations in a social world that is inherently contingent or indeterminate. Trust, in this case, is not based upon internal or external sanctioned *social* expectations but rather upon our individual commitment to our *own* presentations of self; to our own biographical project of 'self-realisation' that does not communicate *social* expectations, but who we 'truly' are or *want to be* (Giddens 1990:122, 1991:6; Luhmann 1968:80).

On the one hand, reflexive trust comes relatively easy as it is not based upon others or upon social relations, but it is based upon self-presentation and trust as a 'means of obligation' (Luhmann

⁷¹ Hardin claims that citizens cannot trust politics because they "cannot know enough" (1998:22). However, not only does trust always connote a lack of knowledge, 'cannot' is not the same thing as 'should not'. Hardin's work is specifically cryptonormative.

1968:84). On the other hand, reflexive trust 'chains' us to social relations by our own identity. Social relations that are based upon trust in trust or upon communicative "mutual processes of self-disclosure" are stable, precisely because one can only disappoint expectations by leaving behind a part of one's self-identity (Luhmann 1968:82; Giddens 1990:121; 1991:6). Reflexive trust, then, is a process of self-isolation and self-binding.

Whether reflexive trust relations become more frequent in a risk-society and whether this means that people are more and more obsessed with authenticity – not of others but of their own – which might lead to a culture of narcissism, is an empirical question (Giddens 1991:78; Sennett 1977:324ff.). The political relevance, it seems, is that we do not so much commit ourselves to the normative order of a social or political relation, as to the normative project of an authentic Self. In fact, the social no longer has to be meaningful or stable. It is merely the lake in which Narcissus rejoices his reflection. As we do not so much commit ourselves to others, but rather to self-presentation and self-disclosure reflexive trust does entail the inherent risk of self-disappointment. The risk of self-disappointment might be understood, on the one hand, as the risk of getting socially stuck in an 'inauthentic' presentation of self and, on the other hand, as the risk of being disappointed by our 'true' disclosed self. Especially the former risk can have political consequences as social structures might be blamed. The latter risk must be absorbed by the individual himself.

6.3 Conclusion: Trust and Legitimacy

In this chapter I have analysed, first, the complicated dimensions of trust that are often confused in the trust-literature. Second, I have tried to situate the possibilities of political trust by analysing the different risks that are possible at the different levels of *politics as coordination*. The general conclusion must be that political trust at the middle levels of analysis – i.e. organisation and interaction – could explain *subjective normative validity*. However, what must be clear is that political trust as a possible source of subjective political legitimacy is not a simple matter. Not only is trust ultimately a *subjective* leap of faith, it is also plural, fragmented and contextually dependent. The benefit of including political trust, however, is that it provides us with means to explain political legitimacy independently from an (unconditional) belief in truth. This is the radical and important conclusion we must draw: we can explain political legitimacy without the notion of truth.