

Participant Trust

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The dominant view in the trust literature holds trust is a three-place relation ("A trusts B to X"). This paper proposes that 'X' may encompass sets of rules or principles entailed by participation in social systems, introducing 'Participant Trust' to address issues that arise to three-place accounts of trust in light of broad forms of trust.

1. Introduction

- Standard view: Trust is a three-place relation ("A trusts B to X")
 - Challenge: Accommodating broad forms of trust (general trust or trust across a domain) within this framework
 - Proposal: 'X' may encompass sets of rules/principles entailed by participating in social systems
- “Participant Trust” - trust directed toward the rules and principles entailed by the trustor and trustee’s shared interpersonal/social systems

2. Broad Trust and Where Things Begin to Fall Apart

We trust in both broad and specific ways:

- General trust (e.g., trusting your partner)
- Domain-specific trust (e.g., financial advisor)
- Specific trust (e.g., watering plants)

Hawley's influential account exemplifies some key challenges:

- Requires prior trust in trustee's characteristics
- Tends toward reduction to action-specific trust
- Struggles with non-action elements of trust

General challenges for three-place accounts:

- How to preserve three-place structure in broad trust
- How to avoid reducing to lists of specific actions
- How to account for attitudes, character traits, feelings

3. Participant Trust

Core Thesis: Objects of trust can include sets of rules/principles that trustees commit to through participation in social systems.

Formal Definition: A trusts B to X | X = a set of rules and principles that B is committed to

Chess Example: When playing chess, I don't merely trust my opponent to make legal moves, but to act within the entire framework of chess participation—including following conventions, accepting appropriate behavior, and understanding playful banter as “part of the game”

This model maintains three-place relation, and is

- Preserves three-place model while accommodating extensive trust:
Defines X clearly as "a set of rules and principles that B is committed to." The precondition is B's participation in a system, not prior trust in trustee's characteristics
- Better captures the phenomenology of broad trust
Avoids reducing extensive trust to exhaustive lists of specific actions. When we trust broadly - like trusting a partner or chess player - we trust them within the entire framework of participation, better aligning with how we experience broad trust
Furthermore, participation trust is not limited to particular actions, encompassing non-pragmatic expectations such as particular attitudes, character traits, beliefs, feelings, etc.
- Explains trust violations as system-wide breaches
Violations like infidelity aren't merely breaches of specific commitments (sexual exclusivity) but violations of the entire relationship system. Similarly, making an illegal move in chess violates the whole game framework, not just a specific rule.
- Grounds trust in voluntary participation in shared frameworks
Trust is grounded in the trustee's participation in systems. This grounds normative expectations appropriately and explains why our expectations are limited to the systems in which others endorse